

[00:00:00]<Music>

**Annie:** Hi friends, welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. Happy Friday. 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. But before we get started, I want to let you know something fun and meaningful going on with one of our amazing partners, CAP.

So you may or may not be aware of this, but September is Hunger Awareness Month. And we are excited to join with our friends at Christian Appalachian Project, whom you always hear me call CAP for their annual hunger walk. For just \$2.40 a day, CAP can provide three meals for a hungry child or a senior living in isolation, that is just 80 cents per meal y'all. In CAP's service area, one in four children experiences food insecurity, but we can help. So visit [christianapp.org/hungerwalk21](http://christianapp.org/hungerwalk21) to create your own online fundraiser that you can share with family and friends. Every dollar makes a difference.

Thousands of children in Appalachia go without nutritious meals regularly. Living in constant hunger hurts their ability to grow and diminishes their capacity to learn, and leaves them afraid and ashamed. This suffering has a life-long effect on far too many boys and girls, which is why I'm so proud that we get to play a role in helping our neighbors.

You're invited to lace up your tennis shoes and have your own CAP hunger walk wherever you live. Join me in fighting hunger and feeding hope. Be sure to snap a picture and post it on Facebook or Instagram with the hashtag Hunger Walk '21. I know I will be doing that and this year's Hunger Walk is sponsored by Texas Roadhouse. So please join us and visit [christianapp.org/hungerwalk21](http://christianapp.org/hungerwalk21). Again, that's [christianapp.org/hungerwalk21](http://christianapp.org/hungerwalk21).

Today on the show is my good buddy, Steve Carter. Steve is a pastor, a speaker, an author, a podcaster. He's the host of the "Crafting Character" Podcast and co-host of the "Home Team" Podcast one of my favorite sports podcast. He's an itinerant preacher and teacher for churches, conferences, events, camps, and retreats all over the country. And his new book, *The Thing Beneath the Thing*, is going to mess you up in all the best ways.

It helps us discern those things in our lives that keep us from living out the joy, peace, and purpose God created us for. And he's helping us in the process of healing lies in our own lives. Oh, I just love him. And in true Steve fashion, he showed up not only with all his amazing wisdom but as a man of his word, because he lost a bet with me over a year ago. He showed up in full Vanderbilt

baseball uniform and made us laugh harder than we have in a long time. I cannot wait for y'all to get to know this guy, so here's my conversation with Steve Carter.

[00:02:46] <Music>

**Annie:** Okay, Steve Carter, how is this your first time on the pod? We're going. How is this your first time?

**Steve:** That doesn't make any sense.

**Annie:** Is that true?

**Steve:** It is true. It's true. Yeah. First time and this place is unbelievable. You've done, your team has done an amazing job. I mean, you guys are just-

**Annie:** Thank you for correcting, it was not me. You're like, "Yeah, your team."

**Steve:** No, no it's amazing, it looks fantastic.

**Annie:** You're kind, and let's tell everybody you showed up in a full Vanderbilt baseball uniform.

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Even though you're not a Vanderbilt baseball fan at all.

**Steve:** No, not even close. And I appreciate the team, they're really good, but 2019 you and I made a friendly wager. And that wager was, both of us, our teams were playing each other in the College World Series.

**Annie:** Yes, and your team was Michigan.

**Steve:** Michigan. And I was confident, I was very confident we won the first game and you came back and won in the last two.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** And so two years later I'm paying up on my debt. And I just felt like I couldn't come in with just a Vandy shirt.

**Annie:** No.

**Steve:** I felt like two years later-

**Annie:** Because I said shirt. I think the bet was I would have to wear a Michigan shirt, you'd have to wear a Vandy shirt, and you came in a full baseball outfit.

**Steve:** Full baseball.

**Annie:** Full costume?

**Steve:** Yeah, yeah.

**Annie:** Fully costumed for today.

**Steve:** My Uber driver did not know what to do with me. He was like, "Who are you?" And I'm like, "I'm a Vanderbilt..."

**Annie:** I'm sorry. Why are you in town?

**Steve:** So I came in and just had a couple of meetings, and then obviously, put this together with you. And I was like "To do this live with you." I was like, "It's going to be amazing."

**Annie:** Tell me why it matters to you to invest in church staffs?

**Steve:** Yeah. I think they're so much pouring out for these leaders. And especially in this season of right now. I mean, there's so much ache, so much pain, and we need these church leaders to do well. We need them to just feel inspired and reminded that what they do matters, and just the invitation that Pastor Kevin invited me out. I was just like, "For sure."

We've been in a couple of cohorts together. And I'll tell you what, that guy, he has a way to take a passage of Scripture that he's prayed about, and then give it to you. And you're like, "How did you know?" And so, he's spoken in my life, and the opportunity to go speak into the staff was an easy no-brainer.

**Annie:** Yeah. Talk to me about serving a place that you considered being your place. I just think there's something really interesting about being like, "This isn't mine to hold, but it's mine to help."

**Steve:** Right. Here was a church that leaned in, that just said, "All right, we're going to till the soil, and we're going to see what God does." And there's just the beauty of new life that is coming out at Cross Point. And it's an important church and with incredible Kingdom-minded, Spirit-led leaders. And it's been fun to kind of be able to speak that prophetic word back into them years ago, and now come years later to spend some time with them.

**Annie:** Man, I hope you'll tell that story at staff retreat.

**Steve:** Yeah, that's actually good. I didn't think about that but I'll definitely will.

**Annie:** I mean, I think, God and I talk a lot about gardens, particularly right now, for things I'll tell you when we're not on microphones. But we're talking a lot about gardens and about, you can't move a garden. If you move a garden it dies.

**Steve:** That's right.

**Annie:** A garden has to stay and plant and have time to turn over, and do some things. And so anytime the Lord brings a garden analogy to me, I mark it in my head. So that is really good for me and that is what our church has done. You and I have both, I will not say been wounded by the church, because it hasn't been the church, it has been people.

**Steve:** Right. Right.

**Annie:** We've both been hurt by people through, and I mean, I had a really bad experience with a pastor about a decade ago before I was at Cross Point here in Nashville. And you've had a bad experience with pastors, you write about it in *The Thing Beneath the Thing*, and I'd lived it with you.

**Steve:** Yes. You were the day.

**Annie:** I literally lived it with you.

**Steve:** ...with Ira Glass, but still-

**Annie:** Yes, with Ira Glass. We have to talk about this, yes thank God.

**Steve:** Oh, my goodness! There's moments that some days I wake up and I was like, "I'm just waiting when I open up my podcast, that it's going to be This American Life; The Story of Willow Creek, Annie F. Downs.

**Annie:** Put money on it. I bet he would, I always think it, because he was watching.

**Steve:** He was watching-

**Annie:** He was watching. And we texted, we still randomly will say hi to each other, I think you speak to him still too.

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** And I've always like, I'm one text away from him going, "Will, you hop on your microphone and tell me about that day?" Only because I was at Willow Creek with you, the day that articles came out about the former pastor. And so I said to my team, they were like, "Have you and Steve been friends for a long time?" I was like "We have like a trauma bond," for that day.

**Steve:** Yes. Yes.

**Annie:** So we're very committed to each other, in friendship over a trauma bond. But you haven't quit on the church. And so many of us when I thought about it, I mean, when I had a bad experience a decade ago. I thought about going like "These dudes who lead these places suck."

**Steve:** Yeah, yeah.

**Annie:** Sorry. I just said that.

**Steve:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Annie:** Why do you still love the church? Why you've experienced leaders who suck?

**Steve:** Yeah, well, I mean, I think you nailed it. It wasn't the church who did this to me, it was five people. So my work is to learn because forgiveness is a solo sport.

**Annie:** Say that again, forgiveness is"

**Steve:** A solo sport.

**Annie:** A solo sport.

**Steve:** So I have to work on forgiving the five people. But that doesn't constitute the entire idea that God had when He dreamed up the church.

**Annie:** That's so healthy, Steve.

**Steve:** So for me, it's like, I have to work on forgiveness. I pray for the day of reconciliation, I don't know if that day will ever come. But my work is this and sometimes what's hard is, both you and I, in our teaching roles and capacities as pastors and leaders, we represent the church.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** But like, I will hurt somebody, you know what I mean?

**Annie:** Oh, someone told me very recently how my leadership had hurt them.

**Steve:** Right.

**Annie:** And so I'm the person. I didn't know, I'm the leader who sucks.

**Steve:** Yep.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** And so that's kind of, even at the heartbeat of the book is just kind of go, "How do I become more aware of why I do what I do? So that I cannot hurt as many people." And the more influence you get or the more opportunities you get or the more people you get the privilege to pastor and shepherd, the more potential you have to hurt someone. Let someone down. And so I think for me, I've been hurt by the church, but I've just tried to reframe it saying, "No, I've been hurt by a few people. And the church has been really, really good to me." I didn't grow up in a Christian home and it was-

**Annie:** Oh, I didn't know that?

**Steve:** ...yes it was the church who kind of brought me in. It was leaders within the church who saw something in me that I couldn't even see in me. But I trusted those people's perspectives and views of me more than I trusted my own view of me. So I go, "There's a pain in privilege." And I feel like I got hurt and I'm doing my work, but I also got a lot of blessing and opportunity, and thanks be to God for that too.

**Annie:** Yeah, The Thing Beneath the Thing. Let me tell you the thing that happened yesterday. We found a coffee mug in the microwave.

**Steve:** Okay.

**Annie:** And we pulled it out because we thought it was someone else's, one of our staff girls. So I said to her, "Is that your coffee?" And someone else on staff went and put it away. And he said, "The question behind the question?" And I was like, "Oh, no, we weren't doing that! Like we weren't being manipulated." But it's the same thing, right? He thought my question behind the question was, "Why didn't you put away your coffee mug?"

**Steve:** Right.

**Annie:** We generally thought it was her coffee. So, anyway, that was it. But the question behind the question. What do you really mean, The Thing Beneath the Thing?

**Steve:** Yep.

**Annie:** Steve, I mean, you have this book, it messed me up. Because there's always a thing beneath the thing.

**Steve:** That's right.

**Annie:** How do we find it? How do we find it?

**Steve:** Yeah. Well, it's interesting, because Paul says in Romans 7:15, two sentences, the first one is "I do not understand what I do." Which I love to quote Scripture, but if I use that with my wife, "Hey, I don't understand what I did."

**Annie:** I don't know why I do what I do.

**Steve:** It doesn't work.

**Annie:** Right.

**Steve:** The second sentence is very human, "The good I want to do I just don't do, the thing I hate I do."

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** I think every one of your listeners can relate to that. A moment where they're like, "Why did I say that? Why did I think that? Why did I allow that anger fantasy to take over?" And what I came to realize was every day we were getting triggered. And that negativity, that energy, those moments from the past that start just to rise up, they have to go somewhere.

But what if we could have courageous curiosity and go, "Why am I getting triggered in the first place by this?" And realizing that God in His infinite kindness actually wants to heal every part of us. And those triggers are just pictures and places, and wounds and trauma, and stories that we just either have not made the time or have just not been aware. And I'm just trying to help people to go what triggers you, and then what's underneath that? Because if you can allow grace into that, it will prevent a world of pain, not just for yourself, but for also for others.

**Annie:** Yeah, I think a lot of people read that verse. And they think of the sin in their life, they don't think of the healing that they need.

**Steve:** Right.

**Annie:** Right?

**Steve:** Right.

**Annie:** Because that's what I think of more. I don't think, "Oh, why I'm not as compassionate towards myself when something happens like that." But you're saying that really the thing beneath the thing is an invitation to be a good friend to yourself.

**Steve:** It's 100 that. And for me, I remember coming home, I was a pastor in California. There was a person who in a meeting, just minimized, and just their tone and I was frustrated. And I came back to Sarah, my wife, and I was trying to get a little spousal backup and support, and she had none of it. She just looked at me and she said, "Isn't God so kind?"

**Annie:** I read that I died when she said that. "Isn't God kind?" You're like, "Sis, that's not what I'm here for."

**Steve:** I need you to like partake in a little spousal gossip about this person, like, help me out a little bit. And she just was like, I'm like, "Why is God so kind?" And she



just said, "Because this person reminds you of someone who deeply wounded you. And until you have that courageous curiosity to honor that truth. This part of your story is going to hold your life in check."

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** "And you're going to continue to find ways to escape or villainize or think less thoughts of yourself. Until you can actually be a good friend to yourself and go, 'What's underneath that? What's beneath that? Oh, that that person reminded me of this person who deeply wounded me.'" And until I honor that truth, God's just going to keep just bringing opportunities and invitations to get well.

**Annie:** Yeah. I want to know why you love the Bible so much? You didn't grow up in a Christian home. So you didn't grow up singing songs, like a lot of us did growing up. And like just having Bible drills in middle school.

**Steve:** Right.

**Annie:** So throughout *The Thing Beneath the Thing*, you tell really beautiful Bible stories. Like you re-tell them so beautifully, which is why you're so gifted in teaching as well. But why do you love the Bible so much?

**Steve:** Well, I think there's this huge debate over is the Bible inerrant? Is the Bible inspired? And I do, I agree with that, I see it as it is. But I don't think we think enough about how it continues to inspire today. And so I find myself loving the privilege I have to preach. And any time I study the text, I love the opportunity to ask questions of the text. Because there's so much you can mine, so much you can discover. But in our quiet time or in the time that I have alone with God in the text, I allow it to ask questions in my life.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** And the ways in which I feel like God has just broken parts of my story open, and just provided healing, provided opportunities for grace, provided moments of just like, I couldn't force that to happen. I just know that there's so much depth, and so much richness, and so much goodness, in this book, and I just need it. It grounds me. It reminds me. It compels me. It convicts me. It rebukes me. It teaches me and it really trains me to be the fullest version of myself. And so I love the text. I think it just helps illuminate what Jesus wants to do in us.

**Annie:** What is your prayer life look like?

**Steve:** Yeah, so I have a kind of a prayer pilgrimage I do most mornings.

**Annie:** I love this. Keep going.

**Steve:** Okay, so there's an old; I start with a thing called the welcome prayer. And it was by Father Thomas Keating and Mary Mrozowski, I totally butcher her last name. But it basically is helping me get aware of my feelings. And so I welcome everything that comes my way because I know it's-

**Annie:** Do you sit in the same chair?

**Steve:** Typically, or I hike. Right now, because it's so hot in Phoenix, I'm sitting in the same chair. But typically, if I'm at home, and it's winter, sometimes I walk and I hike. I do better when I'm moving.

**Annie:** Me too.

**Steve:** Yeah, it's just I feel like there's something that unlocks in me. So this prayer is about just becoming aware of what you're feeling, letting go of like trying to find security or achieve, and opening up to God's presence, and power, and love. And then from there, I just kind of free write or free speech, just in the sense of the question, "Where are you?" When God asked the man and the woman. And so I just write and it's kind of from like Julia Cameron when she talks about free writing. I don't share it with anybody.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** There's no governor, it's not going to ever be a chapter in a book. It's just me trying to be intentional with, "Why did that happen yesterday?" I'm still like carrying that frustration around, right? I feel shame about something I said and so I just like trying to get that out. And then from there, I have a list. There's a great pastor in Florida named Tyler burns, and he talks about like, "I am, and I am not." And he told me that maybe a few months ago, I've just been doing that every day, this is who I am and this is who I'm not. So I just write that.

And then I go through a few different environments. And it's a little bit of like a prayer of examine, but if you think of like the Hebrew story with the people being in Egypt. It was a place of oppression and struggle, and I just write in the last 24 hours, where did I feel tempted? Where did I feel struggle? Where did I just feel

like the enemy coming after me? I just write or kind of type that out on my phone.

And then God leads the people and He takes them to Mount Sinai and He meets them. And in the last 24 hours, where did God meet me? That might be through a text, that might be through a friend, that might be through a song, that might be through creation. And then kind of in Spider-Man theology, He takes these former slaves to Jerusalem. And in the past 24 hours, where have I been responsible and irresponsible with the unique gifts, talents, and opportunities that God's given to me?

**Annie:** Wow.

**Steve:** And I just write about that. Hebrew people were irresponsible, so they go into exile, they're going to Babylon. And from that point, I go, "Okay, what do I need to do next?" And the Bob Marley, Psalmist just saying, "By the rivers of Babylon we cried as we remembered Zion."

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** And I think in the next 24 hours, what's the next best right step? Do I need to ask this person for clarity? Do I need to forgive this person? And then kind of in the center I just draw a little cross, with a circle at the bottom representing that the ground is level for all of us. But if I'm going to carry this cross, what do I need to let go of? And some of it is my anger, some of it is my sadness, some of it is my fear, some of it is just control. And so I write that down. And then there's another piece of paper that's typically or I just envision like a blank canvas. And I just think about two pieces; one is, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there's freedom."

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** And I just go, "What's that mantra? What's that vision? What's that picture?" And so, right now, it's been kind of this phrase, "A life anchored in Christ or life anchored in Jesus is one that has nothing to prove, nothing to lose, and nothing to hide."

**Annie:** "Nothing to prove, nothing to lose, nothing to hide."

**Steve:** Yeah. And so that's just been something I keep saying. So and then in Dallas Willard's language, the vision, intention and means. you have a vision and now I can live with intention as all the 35,000 choices come my way.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** Am I going to try and prove here? Am I going to try and hide and pretend? Am I going to act in a way of scarcity? Or no-

**Annie:** I mean, scarcity in abundance?

**Steve:** Come on!

**Annie:** I have to talk to myself about that all the time.

**Steve:** Yeah. And I think probably people are like, "You do?" You know, like, "No way." And the same thing for me as well, like it's just somehow by the osmosis, and maybe growing up in Southern California, that was the air I breathed. And so part of it is just unlearning that and learning to trust God's healing and God's sanctifying grace. And then that's kind of what I do most mornings, and some hike or on a chair.

**Annie:** An hour?

**Steve:** Probably about 35, 40 minutes.

**Annie:** Okay. I just think we love here hearing people how different everyone's rhythms are.

**Steve:** Yap.

**Annie:** It helps when you feel like a quiet, quote-unquote "Quiet time," which I hate that phrase. If our quiet time is supposed to look like this, but then we hear everybody's looks so different. Yours is so intentional and so methodical. That's the word, it's so methodical.

**Steve:** Well, I think for me, I've struggled at kind of gaining access to my feelings. I think I could live in content, live in ideas, live in like out there with the future. I think the real work for me, I think it was Neil Armstrong that was interviewed once and someone said, "What's the farthest journey that you've ever been on?" And the journalist was like trying to lead him to talk about going to the moon, and he simply said, "It was 18 inches. Taking what I know in my brain down to my heart."

**Annie:** "Down to my heart."

**Steve:** And I think that's the piece that I've really been trying to just kind of get more intentional with. Like my sadness or my disappointment or my expectations, and my counselor will just say that's just premeditated resentment, but like just trying to be intentional with that.

**Annie:** Actually, my number two here, my COO, my staff boss Ashley says that too.

**Steve:** Yeah. And so I think the more that I can be aware of that, instead of it like subconsciously driving me.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** I think, be conscious of it and then bring it before Christ, and bring it before the Spirit, bring it before God's love, I found more healing in that for me personally.

**[00:20:39] <Music>**

**Annie:** Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, Liquid IV. It's one of my goals for my team and for the team when we go out on tour, that we're becoming healthier versions of ourselves all the time. Like prioritizing rest, and having wise spiritual rhythms, and being good to our bodies. Making hydration a priority helps us feel healthier on a day-to-day basis and fuels us to work hard at the things we get to do.

That's why Liquid IV is part of my and most of my team's daily routines. One stick of Liquid IV in my water bottle hydrates faster and more efficiently than water alone. It contains five essential vitamins more vitamin C than an orange, and as much potassium as a banana. It's non-GMO, vegan, and free of gluten, dairy, and soy, which all makes me happy because that's all clean. And the flavors, I mean, I like plain water fine. But when I can have all the extra hydration, and it tastes like lemon, lime or strawberry, yes, please.

As if all that wasn't enough, Liquid IV is on a mission to change the world, and I just love their heart for that. They're donating over 4 million servings in response to COVID-19 with donations to hospitals, first responders, food banks, veterans, and active military, I know they're the best.

So grab your Liquid IV in bulk nationwide at Costco or you can get 25% off when you go to [liquidiv.com](https://liquidiv.com) and use the code THATSOUNDSFUN at checkout.

That's 25% off anything you order when you get better hydration today, using promo code THATSOUNDSFUN at liquidiv.com. And now back to our conversation with Steve.

[00:22:14] <Music>

**Annie:** Right when not right when, but soon after you left Willow Creek you wrote a book?

**Steve:** Yes.

**Annie:** And we were talking a lot about that, and then it never came out.

**Steve:** Yep.

**Annie:** And then you wrote this one?

**Steve:** Yep.

**Annie:** Tell me that story. Tell me why this is the book we're reading? Why are we reading *The Thing Beneath the Thing*, instead of what you wrote last time?

**Steve:** Yeah, I think-

**Annie:** If you want to talk about it, and if you don't say, "Annie, shut up."

**Steve:** No, no, no, no, I appreciate you asking, honestly. I think, what as I started to reflect on what was really going on. There was so much that people didn't know, and my social media was being blown up. And there were things that were being said, like, "You're a coward, you abandoned us, you left us." And from people within the church, and honestly, like, you have to work really hard to translate people's angst.

But I also knew that they felt safe enough to tell me how they felt. So I received that, but it was hard for me.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Steve:** And I felt the parts of me were like, "If they only knew, if they only knew." And I got away, and I felt like I had some mentors just say, "Just you need to write it out, just write it, just so you have it." And so I just did that-

**Annie:** You wrote a book in like a weekend?

**Steve:** Yeah, it was pretty crazy, it was pretty crazy.

**Annie:** It was really fast, you texted me, you're like, "I'm going to write." And then you're like, "I wrote out." I was like, "Steve!"

**Steve:** And I think, some of it was speaking into a recorder. Some of it was just like it was such a passion for me because I wanted people to know what happened.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** And then, as I started to really kind of get to *The Thing Beneath the Thing*, I think I wanted people, when I started to hear phrases like, that some people on staff are saying, as someone would leave a meeting, "Don't Carter, me."

**Annie:** Steve!

**Steve:** And I just felt like I couldn't control the narrative. I couldn't get the thing I thought that people would see or recognize or do they couldn't because the whole story wasn't out. And I just felt like too much of the reasoning behind it was me trying to tell my story, and trying to help these women understand what they did was brave, and help the congregation understand what really happened.

And just as I stepped back I was like, "This is a little too much image management, and I hate it even admitting it. And this is a little too much of me trying to just get the truth out." And I think as I really prayed about it, I realized, I have way more to grieve, and I have way more to... And so I think there were days I wanted to release it. But I think at the end of the day I didn't want to add fuel to the fire and be a part of the collateral damage.

I just wanted to step back and go, "You got to work on you." And so that was really helpful because it solidified three values for Sarah and me. One was, I wanted to get well. Two, we wanted to make sure that our kids were well, our family was well. And then three, we wanted to create beautiful things.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** And that became the focus, rather than everybody needs to know. This is how it went down. This is dah, dah, dah, dah. Like, at the end of the day that story,

probably, is going to be told, it's not my story to tell. I don't need to be the one that tells it. Somebody else can tell it but like I-

**Annie:** Christians today seem to be going after some of this stories, so who knows?

**Steve:** Yeah, so that's kind of the heartbeat. And so I think, though, what began to kind of emerge was this phrase, the thing beneath the thing has been something I've said in Michigan, in Fullerton, and at Willow. And for me, it just, I had to ask myself like, "Okay, if you were willing to do this, what was really going on?"

**Annie:** What was the thing beneath the thing?

**Steve:** Exactly. And it was my sadness, and it was I lost the job I loved, I lost the people I loved, I lost an area that I loved. But like that's connected to something else, let's talk about that. And let's invite this good, good Father into the conversation and grace, that I actually think really wants to make us whole and holy and spiritually healthy, instead of just talking about it. But being motivated by shame or fear or anger. But let's actually live what we keep preaching about.

**Annie:** I think about our friends listening who have had a really painful experience, and they want to write about it. Talk about what the healing was in just writing it even if no one reads it?

**Steve:** Yeah, I would encourage people to write it.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** Not publish it.

**Annie:** That's a whole different thing.

**Steve:** That's a whole different conversation

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** But to get it out, to take the governor off, to take the internal editor off and just get really, really comfortable with the sadness, with the pain, with the ache. Again, because we know this, if we don't deal with that we're going to transfer it.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.



**Steve:** And every time we react we're just reenacting the past. And so the more that we can literally find ourselves diving in to say, "Man, for my kids, for my friends, for the relationships that matter most. My life's going to be held in check." And this person who wounded me, it will be a constant holding my light, there will be power ties until I do my work to say, "No more. No more."

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** But I can only do that by going through the desert. By just sitting in moments where you feel deserted, you feel alone, you don't feel like anybody's got your back, you have to go through that. And then it's amazing how God led us to Phoenix. But even just the mythology of Phoenix rising up. Like going just this stripping away, this preparing us for what's next, the stirring, there's something that that process is really, really human and beautiful.

**Annie:** Yeah. Do you see God in things like the Phoenix tie? Do you see Him? Because I'm like real charismatic in my soul.

**Steve:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Annie:** And, so, anything like that, that feels like one of the ways God loves me.

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Is by letting me see Him show up in things like that. Did you feel that when y'all moved to Phoenix?

**Steve:** Definitely. Well, I mean, the way that we got to Phoenix. I mean, I remember just waking up in the middle of the night and just kind of felt this impression upon my spirit, like where God was saying, "Go to the desert and wait for instructions." And I was thinking like, metaphorical-

**Annie:** Moses?

**Steve:** Yeah, exactly. I was like, "All right, we're moving to Biloxi or like Shreveport." I don't know where we're headed. But as I got up like probably 3:00, 3:30 I got out my journal and I just started writing. And I think in my mind, I kind of was built on this mentality of everything is up into the right.

**Annie:** Yeah,

**Steve:** So what was better than Chicago? Okay, I started thinking about these cities. And I felt like God just said, "You can't grieve your way out. You can't achieve your way out of this, you can only grieve your way through it."

**Annie:** Oh my gosh. "You can't achieve your way out of this, you can only grieve your way through it."

**Steve:** And I didn't have muscles for grieving. I had muscles for achieving.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Steve:** So the next morning, I'm making coffee for Sarah and Sarah, I kind of share with her what I had felt like I had heard and experienced. And she just teared up and she said, "I've been sensing the same thing, I just want to go home."

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** And she's from Arizona. And, so, I was like, "Okay, we're moving to Arizona."

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** And so to move there to a place where it's hot, and I just I started reading all the desert mothers and fathers, any books that I could get on. When Eugene Peterson talks about this, like, "Your topography is your theology." Like it shapes it, shapes and forms your theology-

**Annie:** "Your topography... I've never heard that before. Your topography is your theology.

**Steve:** Yeah, just like you go to the Holy Land, and they'll talk about like, "There's five gospels." Which now sounds heretical, but hear me, you know Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the land. And once you've experienced the land, the other four makes sense.

**Annie:** Yes, that was true for me.

**Steve:** Exactly. So it's a sense of like, "Okay, this place, this space, like is meaningful for your spiritual formation and development. And so I've just been trying to learn as much as I can because everything in my life and everything in my spirit has been trying to bypass the desert.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** And you realize as you flip through the Scriptures we're desert people.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** It's character school, it's character formation. And so for me, that's getting in touch with the pain and so if you've been hurt, like whether in a relationship, whether with a church, whether with a leader, first hear me I'm so sorry. And but don't be afraid of those emotions. Sit with them, surrender them, be honest with them, be human, but getting in touch with them has been a real gift for me.

**Annie:** Yeah, I bet. Who, when you say desert mothers and fathers, who should we read that we're not reading? Who does that mean?

**Steve:** Oh, that's a really good question.

**Annie:** Thank you, my dad loves when people say that.

**Annie:** So I started reading a ton of Thomas Merton. I know that's probably not necessarily a desert father per se, there's a whole bunch of older ones, but I felt like he was the easiest one to kind of, get into.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Steve:** With some of the thoughts, and the feelings, and just the awareness. You get to some of these desert mothers and fathers, and you're like, "Man, their view on sin, their view on stability, their view on life." Some of it was like, "Man, this is such a different reality." But I learned so much about holiness.

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** I learned so much about sanctification. Words that in my context, in the church that I had been a part of, had been almost pushed to the side.

**Annie:** Yeah, we don't talk about those very much.

**Steve:** Right. And so I think just trying to bring those back. And that was even at the heart of the book is like trying to get people to understand what sanctifying grace is all about. Just help people see this is actually good for our souls, it's good for our being, it's good for our bodies, it's good for our mind and our hearts.

**Annie:** Yeah, I have a friend who calls it salty grace.

**Steve:** Yes, I love that.

**Annie:** I thought, "Man that feels," when he said that to me, I thought, "That feels so true."

**Steve:** Yes.

**Annie:** That grace never feels smooth.

**Steve:** Yeah, that's right, that's right.

**Annie:** I mean it always feels grainy and challenging and so hard.

**Steve:** Yeah, because grace will find you and that's usually what we preach, but the truth is Grace is going to find you out. And grace will be relentless in trying to help you become whole, holy, and spiritually healthy. But I think those second and third versions of grace is on us to receive that, and welcome that and invite that in. But for many of us were like, "I just want to get to heaven."

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** You know, "I don't want that right now."

**Annie:** Yeah, and I just want it to stop hurting.

**Steve:** Exactly. Exactly.

**Annie:** I want everything here to stop hurting.

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** What you say the interesting thing about us being desert people, I was sitting with, walking with an engaged couple to their marriage. And so we're reading a book together and kind of talking through it, and we talked about quitting last night. And I said, "You know, actually the Bible, like, God doesn't ever tell people to quit hardly."

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** It is almost always, "Stay. Stay. Do. Do." Like, keep asking, keep seeking. the persistent widow-like. Because we are discussing, particularly for them, their commitment.

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** But because the Bible is just so clear that, "We are hard-pressed on every side but not crushed." I mean, the Bible never kidded us that this was going to be easy or that we should give up on faith.

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** It was always like, "No, stay with faith, and being a human is hard.

**Steve:** Totally, totally.

**Annie:** Right?

**Steve:** Well, and I think the old adage of, "Wherever you go, there you are." So all of the issues, and trauma, and the pain and the problems they are going to follow you.

**Annie:** Yeah, right.

**Steve:** Until you honor its truth. And I remember being with a rabbi in Israel once and just saying, "Okay, Egypt, the desert, the promised land. This seems like a pretty prominent metaphor for your life."

**Annie:** Right.

**Steve:** "For the average human's life. How much time do you spend in Egypt? How much time do you spend in the desert or wilderness? How much time do you spend in the promised land?" And the answer was so funny. He just said, "You Americans are so funny. You think all of your life is going to be the promised land?" Like we 10 to 15% we think Egypt, 10 to 15% is in the promised land.

**Annie:** We think we pass through Egypt and the wilderness in just... No.

**Steve:** Exactly. And he's like, "70, 80% is in the desert."

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** So that was such a reframing thing of like, how do you become more comfortable in the reality of the stripping away. In Deuteronomy 8, of being aware of the places where our heart has been shaped more by Pharaoh than by God's goodness and grace.

**Annie:** Right. Right. So talk to our friends who feel like they're right in the wilderness and they want out, they want out.

**Steve:** Yes. I would say we have taught people tweetable phrases.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** And a formation of like discipleship, because you can't microwave spiritual formation, it takes time.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Steve:** And so a simple truth of "God is with me," I could say that. And then you find yourself being surprised you didn't see something coming. The betrayal, the abandonment, the way that you thought your life was going to be, all of a sudden, you just got uppercut and you just didn't see it. And now you have to go, "Is God with me here in the desert, in the deserted place, in the forsaken place?"

But when you can dive into the depths of your heart, your mind, your past, your soul and you experience that He is with you and He's for you. That simple phrase has gone through the struggle and now becomes profoundly sacred.

And so you start to say, "God is with me." It's not some tweetable phrase. It is like a part, it is like a stone you carry it that you are building an altar. And the more that we collect over our life, the more of these stories of faith that we have, that we go, "Yes, God met me here, and God met me here, and God met me here and God met me here." And I just say if you're in this, one other thing I would say is a great bottle of wine takes 12 years.

**Annie:** Right.

**Steve:** So you might be year three of this, and that's where I'm at personally. And at year three, on a vine, you're just beginning to bear fruit.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Steve:** So, often, as I'd sit with couples, when I was pastoring in a local church, and I just said, "This is going to be a great bottle of wine someday, you just got to give it time."

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** You just, like, keep remaining the main thing. Keep remaining and abiding and make your home in Christ, I promise you, He's not going to desert you. But just know this is going to work out.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** This is going to be a great bottle of wine if you allow the process to do what the process needs to do.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** But if you take a shortcut, like writing a book, like I wanted to do or you take a shortcut where you're trying to push those feelings away. You just spend a longer time in the desert. I mean, the Hebrew people were 40-days away from the Promised Land.

**Annie:** That ruins my life, and it took them 40 years.

**Steve:** 40 years.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** That is the human story. So the work that, and God is so kind that He's going to keep giving us opportunities, and He's going to slow it down. So that we can actually be ready for what is in store for us.

**Annie:** Yes. Yes. I think about that 40-day, 40-year journey, I'm like, I love the numbers kind of stuff too. And so tell somebody, like, what's something we could pray for 40 days? Or what's something like, if we're right in the middle of the wilderness and we want out, it doesn't matter if that's God's plan, but we still ask for that. But God's going to, because he's kind, He's going to do what's right for us over what we want is what I've learned in my 41 years.

This is supposed to be my year into the promised land Steve, if you'll just note, I'm 41. Talk about a 40-day prayer journey here. Is there something people can do? I'm springing that on you, I hope that doesn't stretch you out.

**Steve:** No, no, no, no, not at all. Well, I mean, I think Deuteronomy 8, is really, really powerful. Because here in this passage He's kind of talking about what the desert will do, and so much of the desert is unlearning. So the Hebrew people had to recognize that God is nothing like Pharaoh.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** So there's unlearning that has to happen in that, "Hey, you don't have to work seven-days a week, you could have Sabbath. Your identity is not in what you produce." So there's unlearning. So for me, part of the desert experience has been what were truths that I thought were gospel.

**Annie:** Uh-huh.

**Steve:** It's almost like Genesis 3, "Did I really say?"

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** Like, "Who told you that?" You know what I mean?

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** And so I realized there were parts that I had thought, "This is what makes you healthy." And then the other thing is in Deuteronomy 8, it talks about humility, obedience, and testing. And so I would say, "Okay, God, what are you trying to teach me in this season? And what does obedience look like?"

It means to listen and respond quickly. Like, "What am I hearing from you?" And then in the test, the test is, "Am I going to want to go back to the familiar or am I going to trust you in the unfamiliar, and trust you in the refining, trust you in the shaping and trust you in the forming?"

So I think for me, it would be, I'm not necessarily like a 40-day breakdown, but something maybe each week where I would think about what do I need to unlearn for a week?

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.



**Steve:** What does humility look like? What's preventing me from obedience? And what are the tests that God has before me? All anchored in probably a few breath prayers, and one of them for me has been let the Lord surprise you.

**Annie:** Ah, wow.

**Steve:** And God has surprised me in this season. He surprised me with friendships, He surprised me with kindness. He surprised me with recognizing the parts of me that He still is like going, "Hey, we're going to work on this. We're going to work on this."

**Annie:** Yeah. I don't think, I hope this isn't a surprise to you, but I would say from the outside watching versus like living in your house with y'all, the outside is your friend watching. The Lord has given you incredible influence over pastors.

**Steve:** Wow.

**Annie:** Have you seen that? I mean, it feels like what would have been walking away from the place where you'd have the most influence, has ended up giving you an uncountable influence because you're mentoring pastors.

**Steve:** Yeah, I mean, it's like, weird, because I get a little emotional. Because on August 5th we were together and you, I blame partly you-

**Annie:** And Ira Glass.

**Steve:** Yeah and Ira Glass. But you were preaching a message the night before on being brave off your book, and I just had a 100-days of brave. And I just was like, "Oh, my goodness." And then you read this story of this woman, and you're sitting and you're like, "Oh, my goodness." And I'm in that bathroom in the back office, and all I can think about is, "I'm done."

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

**Steve:** I mean, I am being the guy that didn't show up for work like, I'm done. So I did not foresee this, like I didn't foresee, I thought this, "I don't know what else I'm going to do."

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** And so the surprise was when all these pastors started to reach out to me and just said, "Thank you."

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** And I was like, "What?" Like, again, I could not see it in that moment, all I saw was the loss. And I saw friendships, and congregation, and city, and place I saw the loss. I didn't see what God was going to do, and how He was going to restore what the locust had taken.

And so I think now putting myself in this kind of place, my biological father, his dad was a general for the Army and the Air Force, he's buried at West Point. The West Point would teach all their new cadets this cadets prayer, it's stunning you should read it sometime, it's unbelievable. There's a line in it and it just says, "May we be committed to the harder right over the lesser wrong."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Steve:** And I think that in itself is what people love about you. I think this is what people, I saw are desperate for, is people who are committed to the harder right over the lesser wrong. And I didn't know how much that would preach. I didn't know how much that and character and integrity-

**Annie:** People just watching you do that.

**Steve:** Yeah and I just didn't. And so I think that was people going, "How?" And it was me going, "Well, this is just what my mentors taught me. This is what people just drilled in me from a young age in the church." So I think it's been surprising and humbling, scary, and beautiful all at the same time.

**Annie:** One of the reasons we talked about *The Thing Beneath the Thing*, when we did our Singleness podcast a couple of weeks ago. Is for all of us, and you do such a beautiful job at this I can't wait for people to read this. Because you literally go through triggers and potholes, and masks you're wearing. I mean, you kind of expose us in every way. And go like, "Well, oh, if you don't have any triggers?" Which we all do, of course. "If you don't have any triggers, I bet you have some potholes."

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** "If you don't have any potholes, I bet you have some like masks you're wearing to protect yourself from being known and experiencing that." And so that's one of the reasons we brought it up in that particular podcast. But as I'm listening to you talk about this, I think, man, there are so many of our friends listening, who are afraid to give up the thing that is the thing they're known for. Even though it is not what God has for them anymore possibly, even though God has something else for them, not necessarily up to the right, but He has a Phoenix for them.

**Steve:** Right.

**Annie:** So how do you have the courage to do it? What do you say to them if they're like, "Oh my gosh, I'm just buying asparagus, I can't believe they're saying this, this is my moment?"

**Steve:** Well, it's amazing as you get so familiar with your bitterness.

**Annie:** Right.

**Steve:** You get so familiar with that trauma. You get so familiar with being known as this title. I mean, the way that, we even use the word former; former NFL athlete, former lead/teaching pastor at Willow Creek, former... And we're so often defined by these formers, even if we're not speaking them, but we're just holding on to them.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Steve:** And they're literally holding you back. Like, the only thing we have control over is right here and right now, and how we spend right here and right now prepares us for what God has in store for us. And so for me, I would just say it might feel like there's no way forward.

But the goodness of God is there is, there is and He will work it out, He will work it. I just experienced it with incredible voices, incredible opportunities, incredible people. And it's in Dallas Willard's language, "Grace is opposed to earning, but it's never opposed the effort."

And the effort it takes to say, "I'm not going to be defined by this. I'm not going to let this train wreck or sabotage this relationship. I'm not going to let this get in the way, I'm actually going to begin to see myself each day a little bit more as God and as Christ sees me."

**Annie:** Mh-hmm.

[00:45:25] <Music>

**Annie:** Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about my favorite hack to save time in the kitchen, and one of our amazing partners of the podcast, Green Chef. Green Chef is a USDA certified organic company that makes eating well easy and affordable, with plans to fit every kind of lifestyle.

I'm here for anything that makes my life easier and healthier. And eating well is easier than ever with Green Chef's satisfying home-cooked dinners and options that work around your lifestyle, not the other way around. They take care of the meal planning, grocery shopping, and even some food prep, giving you more time to tackle this back-to-school season.

With Green Chef you get to choose from 30 easy-to-follow recipes every week with options for keto, paleo, vegan, vegetarian and plant-based power diets, as well as meals to help you eat in a more balanced way.

The honey mustard salmon, y'all, it's so delicious and paired with roasted carrots and sautéed broccoli. And my team just loves it when I bring my salmon leftovers to the office for lunch the next day.

Green Chef is the number one meal kit for eating well, so premium ingredients like organic veggies and high-quality proteins are a given. And their expert chefs design flavorful meals that go way beyond ordinary no matter what's on your menu.

Don't stress the next time someone asked what's for dinner, because Green Chef will have your back the way they have mine. Just go to [greenchef.com/thatsoundsfun100](https://greenchef.com/thatsoundsfun100), and use the code THATSOUNDSFUN100 to get \$100 off, including free shipping.

Again, that's [greenchef.com/thatsoundsfun100](https://greenchef.com/thatsoundsfun100), and use the promo code THATSOUNDSFUN100 for \$100 off and free shipping. And now back to finish up our conversation with Steve.

[00:47:06] <Music>

**Annie:** Where do we go from here? Where do you go next? What happens after now *The Thing Beneath the Thing* is out? You have two podcasts; "Crafting Character", which is so extraordinary, Steve.

**Steve:** Oh, thanks.

**Annie:** It's such a good show. It's so helpful for any of us that do anything publicly at all or that are teaching anywhere.

**Steve:** Thanks.

**Annie:** And then "The Home Team" Podcast, of course, with Sam Acho, who we love around here. So what next? What happens next for you?

**Steve:** Yeah, I did like a life plan coming out of the desert season, because I was like, "Okay, what are," not coming out coming into the desert season. Like, "What am I-"

**Annie:** Literally when y'all left Chicago, you were like, "Let's make a life plan."

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Steve, that's a terrible time to try to do that.

**Steve:** But I think I needed something, what am I focus on?

**Annie:** Yeah, sure.

**Steve:** I didn't have a boss or a coach to tell me, and so it was like, "Okay, keep teaching, keep writing, keep coaching and do something with sports."

**Annie:** Okay.

**Steve:** So coaching was around communicators, and pastors, and mentoring and that stuff. Sports-

**Annie:** Which is Crafting Character?

**Steve:** Which is Crafting Character, right. And so I just think it's continuing to slowly just continue the work of healing, and providing opportunities to preach, to write,

to coach communicators, and almost like, "Re-dreaming all up again," as one of my mentors said. Just like, "Okay, let's see, it's going to become clear."

We have felt like fall of next year was the kind of year, we're not saying was a finish line. But it was a year that we were going to either have to stay in Phoenix, because Emerson our oldest would start high school, and I didn't want to move them in high school. So we really feel like that is the time that we're going to put down roots either in Phoenix or somewhere else.

**Annie:** Yeah. Did you have any idea when you had kids that they would look so much like you? That's so weird.

**Steve:** It is so weird. It's so weird and I mean-

**Annie:** They're so handsome and so beautiful as children. But I mean, it is you and Sarah, again, y'all made a you and a Sarah?

**Steve:** It is, it's pretty wild. I mean, Emerson's and Mercy, they both got Sarah's eyes. But Emerson, I mean, it's-

**Annie:** Does he look like you as a kid?

**Steve:** He does.

**Annie:** Okay, because he looks like you right now.

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** But I didn't know if you looked like him.

**Steve:** I mean, when he was really young, I mean, he had wrinkles, I mean, rolls galore. He was such a cute kid with like, really tight curly hair. So I didn't have that, but as he is totally gotten to middle school, like it's pretty telling how much he looks like me.

**Annie:** Oh, my gosh, Sarah posted a picture this week of Emerson and Mercy both laying on the couch together, and I was like that is actually just Steven's hair. That is actually just a repeat, the remix of the originals, I mean, it is wild.

**Steve:** Totally, totally. Yep.

**Annie:** How are the kids doing?

**Steve:** Yeah, I think that was probably the hardest piece for us.

**Annie:** Oh, sure.

**Steve:** Our son was in fifth grade when we moved, and so, Emer is so Americana living a little neighborhood, walk to school, your best friend. And then you move, and all of a sudden we're in COVID and so you're online too. So I feel like in some ways Phoenix hasn't been given the best chance for friendships there. But they've been really connected still with their friends back in Illinois. Just through-

**Annie:** Fortnite, whatever-

**Steve:** Fortnite, all those, and so that's been really, really great. But I think it's really kind of my son is an old soul, I mean, he came out wearing a cardigan just like he is a professor, but he's asked a lot of questions.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Steve:** I mean, he asked me recently, he said, "Dad, you say that when we do the right thing it always works out. So I'm just trying to figure out, did you do the right thing? Because it doesn't feel like it's working out. And so I don't know if it's like that's not true, what you've always told me, or you didn't do the right thing or it's something else?"

And these are the questions that we're having at our table. These are the conversations that Sarah, and when I'm on the road traveling, she's navigating through and she's so gifted and amazing. But you just remember it's not just us, but it's the collateral damage. And how all of us were very, very perceptive or just crappy interpreters of reality and what we perceive, but it's the stories that we tell.

And so, when Emerson asked me that, I just looked at him and said, "Hey, when mom was pregnant with Mercy was the hardest pregnancy ever. But she would never, never question it when she held Mercy for the first time, it was all worth it. And I don't know what it's going to be like, when we hold mercy in the future."

**Annie:** Right.

**Steve:** "And I'm not going to say it was all worth it. But I'm hoping and believing, I'm choosing to see that it will be just like Mercy was for us." And he's like, "I hope you're right."

**Annie:** Oh my gosh.

**Steve:** So, again, that's kind of the conversations that we're having in our home. But I think trying to give them a healthy roadmap to not stuff like I did, a lot of my sadness and feelings or put that on the golden calves in our life. But to really begin to be honest and human to say, "You have space to speak what you feel, and ask what you need to ask, and sit with what you need to sit with."

**Annie:** I just think that is it, it's really inspiring, I would imagine, for a lot of our friends raising kids that you don't have to hide, they don't need to know every detail, I'm sure.

**Steve:** Totally, totally.

**Annie:** But you don't have to hide your sadness or I mean, you can't hide moving cities.

**Steve:** Right, right.

**Annie:** But it just like, I think, "Man, when Emerson is 25, he will be more patient with God because of what y'all are letting them process right now at 13."

**Steve:** I hope so.

**Annie:** So that's amazing, Steve.

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** They seem like great kids, and Sarah is an incredible writer in her own right, my gracious.

**Steve:** She really is. I mean, she's thoughtful, I mean, she just will ask questions that just draw the best in you. But the way that she can just put feelings to paintings that she creates or to writings-

**Annie:** Oh, I love her paintings too.

**Steve:** ...I mean, it's just amazing.



**Annie:** Okay, we can't go without talking sports for a minute.

**Steve:** Come on, let's go.

**Annie:** College football is back.

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** And people are going to be in the stands which is great. How's Michigan going to do?

**Steve:** So I think Michigan is going to be a second or third place team in the Big 10.

**Annie:** Okay. Who else is in the Big 10? Talk to me, is that up there, it's all up there?

**Steve:** Ohio State is going to be good. We've got six teams that are ranked right now in the top 25 out of the big 10.

**Annie:** Geewiz. So is Big 10 and SEC up there?

**Steve:** Yeah, those are the two, those are going to be the two. I mean you'll get Clemson and ACC or Oklahoma this year, but really those are your squads. But there's a kid in high school his name is J.J. McCarthy. He was in Illinois, I watched him play in high school, and this kid is special. He went to IMG Academy in Florida, and then-

**Annie:** What's that?

**Steve:** Because Illinois didn't have football, so he went to Florida, transferred there, and it's an academy for like stud athletes.

**Annie:** Got it.

**Steve:** And he dominated went to Michigan, so he's a freshman this year.

**Annie:** Are you ready?

**Steve:** I think this is like the kind of Tua moment, that Justin Fields, as a Georgia fan Jake Fromm-

**Annie:** I can be with you on a Tua moment, because if you know recall it happened against us in the national championship.

**Steve:** So I'm like give us two years, give us three years, I think when J.J. has the keys-

**Annie:** Is he a quarterback?

**Steve:** He's a quarterback. He's special, he is special.

**Annie:** Oh, y'all, we're all done for, yeah that's great. I just when you walked in, I just talked to Kirk Herbstreit and having Kirk Herbstreit on the show just had me having all these in my feelings about how Saturday mornings feel. When it's like there's a bite in the air, and you kind of open up your doors or windows and I have like patio doors. I open up and just put Sports Center not Sports Center, just put Saturday Game Day on, College Game Day, and, oh man, it's just one of the best feelings ain't it?

**Steve:** There's nothing like Midwest and southern falls, I mean, just in the sense of like, Saturday mornings. I mean just like the leaves changing, football, I mean-

**Annie:** I mean, those noon games when you used to go tailgate at 7 a.m., what were we doing? What were we doing? What is your sport of choice is football the top one? You talk about all of them really well.

**Steve:** Right. Football is like I love it, but football and basketball are probably the top two-

**Annie:** Oh yeah you love basketball I forget.

**Steve:** ...huge basketball fan.

**Annie:** Sorry, that's hard, I mean, I was like, we don't have it here, number one. Number two, I grew up in Atlanta, and it was the Hawks with Dominic Wilkins, Spud Webb, like when I was little it was great. I saw Michael Jordan play one time against the Hawks. But I just have never, sorry, we were a highlight factory for a while and they were great this year.

**Steve:** Okay. So real quick, just because you got Georgia.

**Annie:** Sure.

**Steve:** And then for Bulldogs, you're also a huge soccer fan?

**Annie:** Yeah, totally huge soccer fan.

**Steve:** So EPL team?

**Annie:** Arsenal.

**Steve:** Arsenal? Wow.

**Annie:** Do you have one?

**Steve:** I'm a Liverpool.

**Annie:** Oh, of course. So, listen, Klopp is one of my heroes-

**Steve:** Oh, he's amazing.

**Annie:** ...I think the world of him. And one of my favorite players plays on that team Ox Chamberlain-

**Steve:** Well done.

**Annie:** I love him.

**Steve:** Oh, my goodness.

**Annie:** I think he's great, I think he's very talented. I think he just needs something, he needs one push over the cliff that will make him a superstar.

**Steve:** Yes. Yes.

**Annie:** He just hasn't had that push yet. He's very good, though, he's incredible to watch, so he was on Arsenal.

**Steve:** He was.

**Annie:** And then he went over to Liverpool.

**Steve:** The whole mantra of, "You'll never walk alone" too it just feels like you know-

**Annie:** It's great.

**Steve:** ...like why wouldn't you be a Liverpool fan.

**Annie:** Have you seen them play in real life?

**Steve:** I've not seen them play in real life.

**Annie:** Yeah, me neither.

**Steve:** So I would love to, it's just so hard to get seats over there. But someday I'm going to make it happen.

**Annie:** Okay, Liverpool, that's great. We could throw ourselves a little another way there in the future, because Liverpool and Arsenal, well not this year, let's not because we're having a tough start-

**Steve:** A tough start, tough start, sure.

**Annie:** ...tough start for those Gunners. Yeah, so Georgia Bulldogs, Atlanta Falcons.

**Steve:** Okay. That's all right.

**Annie:** Though I try with the Titans. I mean I'm like I'm here, I'll go to games, I'm very for it.

**Steve:** They're going to be great this year.

**Annie:** My entire wardrobe is red and black.

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** I mean, Arsenal, Georgia, Falcons.

**Steve:** That's right.

**Annie:** I've just never worn another color, and so this baby blue situation and navy it's just not me. But now we have Julio, so who can beat that.

**Steve:** He and Derrick Henry, I mean, just you're sitting there and you're like, "What are you going to do? What are you going to do?"

**Annie:** And Corey Davis was here last year, and he's been here for a couple years I know him as a human.

**Steve:** Cool.

**Annie:** He's a wonderful human. I was very sad to see him go.

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Annie:** And it feels like, correct me if I'm wrong, but it feels like he was one of the things we lost to gain Julio.

**Steve:** 100%. 100%

**Annie:** Which is a sad trade for me-

**Steve:** The business of it all is always like, it's hard, it's hard to get tied to these people, and then you're like, "Oh, yeah."

**Annie:** Yeah, exactly. You're Cubs?

**Steve:** Cubs, Clippers, which is a train wreck-

**Annie:** Clippers? Sure

**Steve:** ...because when I grew up in California, the cheaper seats and you could see all your favorite players.

**Annie:** Got it, Clippers.

**Steve:** And then all things Michigan, so Michigan football.

**Annie:** Yeah of course. But not Detroit other things?

**Steve:** No, I would say for me, it's probably more of the Bears, Raiders, granted growing up. But I've always liked, I always liked Chicago, I loved Jordan-

**Annie:** You're such an '80's guy, Bears and the Raiders, get out of here. Also Buffalo Bills that is your other team, Gosh! And the Braves.

**Steve:** And the Braves,

**Annie:** Braves right there in Atlanta that's it. I'm Atlanta almost all the way through, except I tried to, and Nashville SC, Nashville is my soccer team, because Atlanta didn't exist.

**Steve:** With Moses, I love it, I love it, he's awesome-

**Annie:** Right, oh he's great. Is there anything we didn't talk about that you want to make sure that we say?

**Steve:** No, you're awesome, this is great.

**Annie:** It was so fun, thank you. I feel like we journeyed in a way, this does not happen every episode. But it felt like when I'm reflecting back on it, I'm thinking, "Man, we walked through some conversations that are going to walk people through some stuff."

**Steve:** Cool.

**Annie:** And that means a lot to me, so thank you for doing that. I cannot wait for people to get *The Thing Beneath the Thing* it is very good.

**Steve:** Thank you.

**Annie:** So if they don't have it already, they may have it already because I told every single person in the world to buy it. Okay, the last question we always ask because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you?

**Steve:** Well, I would say I'm a huge fan of healthy escapes.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Steve:** And so again sports-

**Annie:** Yeah, you do a great job teaching that in the book.

**Steve:** So sports for me has been a healthy escape. I think concerts coming back, and so but the latest probably funniest thing for me was I was at the USA Gold Cup, when we beat Mexico.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Steve:** The goal happened right in front of us.

**Annie:** No. Did you lose your mind?

**Steve:** Oh I lost my mind.

**Annie:** Oh, I'm sure.

**Steve:** So I just I think anytime that I can have a moment just to be with people, and celebrate after a couple years of not having that.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Steve:** Obviously trying to be smart and safe, but like the heart of it is just going that brings me so much joy.

**Annie:** One of my Sabbath practices is cheering for sports.

**Steve:** That's great.

**Annie:** Because I can give my full, every other thing I do, this is true for every person. Every other thing I do, I am in a battle that I affect. Against the enemy, against all the things, we're like everything we're doing we're trying to advance a team that we are on.

**Steve:** Yes.

**Annie:** When I lose my mind cheering for Nashville SC or for the Georgia Bulldogs, I am advancing a thing that I have no control.

**Steve:** No control.

**Annie:** So it is just pure let er rip tater chip screaming because I can't control, it does not affect the outcome at all. I do not, I just get to be a part of it, and the rest of my life doesn't feel like that. So it's actually a real Sabbath thing for me to watch sports.

**Steve:** I've never heard someone describe it like that, but all I can say is 100%. I agree. I agree.

**Annie:** When can I be a guest on the Home Team Podcast?

**Steve:** I mean, I feel like you need to be our SEC correspondent.

**Annie:** Oh my gosh, in a heartbeat. Do you need one?

**Steve:** I just feel like-

**Annie:** Oh my gosh!

**Steve:** ...we're going to go do that.

**Annie:** Can you do that for me? Oh, I'll get there, we'll pull up that Georgia, there's a song at the beginning that the trumpet-

**Steve:** Oh, yes.

**Annie:** We'll do that every time when you call me. That'll be the bat signal that you need me on the show, anytime I'm ready. I can talk down every coach that Nick Saban has trained and released across the SEC, it's fascinating. We don't have time for this I'm doing it anyway. I mean, it is amazing how Nick Saban has trained all these men to go and coach against him. Who's going to be the next Nick Saban and is the SEC eventually going to split into two SECs that are against-

**Steve:** I mean, that the Bible verse I like to quote is, "Get behind me Saban." Because like, I just this is unbelievable what he's been able to do.

**Annie:** It's unbelievable.

**Steve:** It's amazing.

**Annie:** Does Spurrier come close to him in legacy?

**Steve:** No.

**Annie:** No.

**Steve:** Nobody does.



**Annie:** He's the other one that I think of when I think of like, "I wish he'd retire." I remember thinking that in college like, "I don't want anything bad to happen to Spurrier, I just want him to stop leading teams that will hurt our school friends."

**Steve:** Totally. Totally.

**Annie:** That's all I thought. Oh, Steve, well, I love you, I'm thankful for you. Thanks for being a part of this.

**Steve:** Thank you. Thanks for your friendship, it means the world.

**Annie:** Same.

**[01:01:58] <Music>**

**Annie:** Oh friends isn't he the best? My gracious, isn't Steve Carter the best? Hey, be sure to grab a copy of *The Thing Beneath the Thing*, and make sure you're following Steve and tell him thanks for being on the show. And while you're at it, don't forget to pick up your tickets to That Sounds Fun Tour. We're hitting the Gulf Coast, the East Coast, the West Coast and we cannot wait to see you at one of these stops in October.

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's how you can find me. And I think that's it for us this week, friends, what a good week of conversations, y'all I loved it.

So you go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you, I will do the same. Have a great weekend. And we'll see you back here on Monday with our friend and one of our favorite cookbook authors, and now a memoir author Danielle Walker. We'll see you guys then, have a good weekend.

**[01:02:55] <Music>**