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Annie: 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've got a great show in store. The music you're hearing in the background is from our friends for KING & COUNTRY. It's their version of *Little Drummer Boy* from the album *A Drummer Boy Christmas*. Be sure to check that out. It is so good.

And I'm so, so excited because our 2021 Christmas party here on the pod starts tomorrow. Y'all, it's 12 days in a row of super fun episodes. It's going to be so great. In addition to some amazing guests, a crowd favorite around this time of year, we'll be making a return visit as well. That's right, Santa himself will be here to answer your questions. We love those Q&A episodes. So you can follow the link in the show notes to send in your questions. I cannot wait for these 12 days to get started.

But before we dive into today's conversation, I want to take a moment and share about one of our incredible partners, pretzels.com. You heard me right. Pretzels.com. You guys, I'm a huge fan of pretzels. I mean, salty, crunchy, endless flavor options. What is not to love? That's why I was so excited when I heard about pretzels.com.

This website was made for pretzel fanatics like us around here. How much easier can it get at pretzels.com? They have an amazing collection of over 50 gourmet flavors that you're going to love and they make the perfect holiday gift too. We got the buffalo ranch flavor from pretzels.com and loved it. It has like a little kick. But nothing too spicy, just a ton of flavor.

And the packaging was so impressive. Dark brown with warm orange tones. I love the sleek and sharp design on their canisters. It's really like a perfect gift. I'm thinking teacher gifts—Listen, I used to be a teacher. I love some pretzels.com—a treat for your pastor, maybe hostess gifts. All of them will love the pretzels from pretzels.com.

[Pretzels.com](https://pretzels.com) bakes micro-batches of their 50+ gourmet flavors and it makes a huge difference. And listen to some of their flavors, you guys. Chipotle Cheddar, Brick Oven Pizza, I want to try that, Mediterranean Style Blueberry Bourbon hello. With so many options to choose from, there's something for everyone on your gifting list this season.

And if your family and friends have a sweet tooth, then check out [Licorice.com](https://licorice.com) too. They have over 50 premium gourmet licorice varieties from around the world,

including Licorice Candy Canes, Finnish red, Dutch Rainbow Sours, Piña Colada Shorties, they go on and on.

Order these amazing holiday gifts for your family and friends from pretzels.com today and check out licorice.com today, too. If you go right now, I have an amazing deal for you. You get 20% off your order, but only when you use the code THATSOUNDSFUN. So don't wait. Go to pretzels.com today and use my code THATSOUNDSFUN for 20% off.

Intro: Today on the show, you guys, today on the show I get to talk with Mitch Albom. Yes, that Mitch Albom. Mitch Albom is a bestselling author, a screenwriter, a playwright, and a nationally syndicated columnist.

He's the author of five consecutive number one New York Times bestsellers including the memoir, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, which is, as you'll hear us talk about, the number one memoir in the world in all of time, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, which is an awesome book. His books have collectively sold more than 33 million copies in 42 languages worldwide.

He's founded six charities in and around Detroit, including the first-ever 24-hour medical clinic for homeless children in America, and also operates an orphanage in Port au Prince, Haiti that you'll hear us talk about.

His new book, *The Stranger in the Lifeboat* is a really thought-provoking story about the essence of God on earth. So fascinating, really beautifully written. I am a huge fan. And so I'm thrilled to get to share this episode with you. Here's my conversation with author Mitch Albom.

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Annie: Mitch, thanks so much for being on That Sounds Fun.

Mitch: You're welcome, Annie. It's good to be with you.

Annie: Man, it's such an honor. Okay, here's where we got to start. I grew up a granddaughter of a small business local bookstore owner. So my grandparents owned a local bookstore. And you just did the coolest thing for local bookstores. So before we even talk about that, will you talk about how much local bookstores matter to you?

Mitch: Well, the truth is that I don't think *Tuesdays with Morrie* would have become the book that it did without local bookstores. It had no following, it had no anticipation. Nobody really wanted me to write that book, first of all. Most publishers turned it down. And then when I wrote it, they only printed 20,000 total copies and I thought I'd have them in the trunk of my car for the rest of my life.

There was no real publicity for it because nobody knew what to make of a sportswriter who was writing a book like that. So really, it was the independent bookstores doing what independent bookstores do best, which is customer comes in, "Hey, I'm looking for something kind of like this." "Well, you know, we just got this book, I read it and it's good. Why don't you try this?" "Okay, I'll try it."

Comes back a week later, "That was really good. You know, I told my friends about it and they came. My friend said that I'd like this book *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Do you have it?" That's literally how it was built.

I mean, *Tuesdays with Morrie* came out in August of 1997 and didn't even get on the bottom of a bestsellers list until like November, and didn't reach number one of the New York Times bestsellers list until April. So you can see the sort of slow, slow, just sort of word of mouth building. And independent bookstores were hugely behind that. So I owe them a huge debt of gratitude and always will.

Annie: All of us have read *Tuesdays with Morrie*. That's kind of the nature of that book ; everybody's read it. I mean, it is the number one selling memoir of all time.

Mitch: Yeah, that's pretty strange considering how many people told me, "No boring. You're a sportswriter, it's depressing. Nobody's going to want to read a book like that." And it was just written to pay Morrie's medical bills. It wasn't ever supposed to be. I was surprised and I am as anybody at the success of that book. But it struck a chord and it certainly changed my life. And apparently, it's changed a lot of other people's lives as well.

Annie: Yes, mine included. As I watched your Instagram video about going to the local bookstore, I started dreaming up like what would it be like in my next iteration of my career to have my own bookstore here in Nashville. And Patchett has Parnassus, which is our local bookstore that I love.

Okay, so in a world where you open a local bookstore, what matters most to you to have in there? What is it? The people that work in for you? Is it the variety of books? Is it good coffee? What's going to matter the most?

Mitch: Well, I think a variety of books that, you know, you have to become a big bookstore to have the real full variety of books, and then you lose the old small bookstore thing. I think people and places to sit. I always found that standing up and reading is almost like trying to fly and walk at the same time. There's something about reading a book that makes you want to sit down and get into it.

My favorite bookstores are the small bookstores that kind of have a lot of little cozy chairs just kind of strewn around the place, and you find your own little corner. And next thing you know you've been there for four hours.

Annie: Right. That's right. And those are my favorite bookshop owners, the ones that will let you sit and read part of a book and not feel like we're stealing from them in that moment.

Mitch: Well, I would definitely be that person. I would say, you know, just come in and hang around and you'll buy something. People are pretty good by nature. They understand that they stay in there for a long time and don't buy anything they're kind of taking up the space. So I would trust everybody.

Annie: Will you tell the story of how that independent bookstore books and mortar, how you found out about it?

Mitch: I don't know where I was, on TV or somebody sent me a video of this bookstore. I had no idea where it was. I didn't even know that it was in Michigan, the state I live in. It was just they did the support of this bookstore, was small, been in the community for a long time. And they had to move. And they were wondering how they were going to afford to move because times are tough. And so all the people in the community just came down on one Saturday or Sunday and boxed up all the books, and then marched them across the town to the new store.

And I saw the images of all these people just happily carrying boxes of books. And I just called up the people who were handling the tour for *The Stranger in the Lifeboat*, my new book, and I said, "Listen, I just saw this thing. I don't know where this place is, but I want to go there and help them, support them. So please can you try to find a way to put it on the tour." And then I found out that it was in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which is in my state, but on the other side. So it's about two and a half hours away from me.

And I went out there over this past weekend. And, of course, as you would expect in a little bookstore, I walked in, the place was packed with people. And they were

all fans of the bookstore, although some of them had come from like two or three hours away. I don't think they either had never been in the bookstore.

But it was so lovely to just be in a place that I'd never been before with people that I'd never met before and just happy to help them. And they sold a ton of books, which was good for them and made me very happy.

I did feel a little sheepish though. I told the story just like I told you about why I came out here and a lot of smiles. And I said, "So by the way, how far away is the old bookstore from here?" And they said, "Oh, it's just across the street." I was like, "Wait a minute. It looked like they were walking for miles." I guess that was just my mind. Just across the street, really? Well, it's still worthwhile doing so.

Annie: I mean, talk a little bit too as it's so easy to go online and buy from one of the big retailers because you hit the button, it's a little bit cheaper, it gets to you really fast. Why should we still go to local bookstores first?

Mitch: Look, I don't want to insult the national retailers. They have a place too and I have certainly benefited from their existence as well. But it has to be a complimentary system. If it's all one or the other, if the world is just online retail people, then it's too much power in one pocket of the business. And there influences that make an online business want to do what it does that shall we say are not the same as what a local bookstore can do, particularly for smaller books, or books that don't sell a gazillion copies.

The thing about a small local bookstore is when you walk in you make your own map. Yeah, they might put some books in the front, but you devise your own little map, and you find your way, you wander through, you look, you peruse, maybe they make some recommendations that are on a shelf or whatever. But for the most part, you weave in the creativity of just finding your way through a bookstore. That in of itself should be celebrated.

Whereas when you go online, it's so much in the control of the people who program that site. Well, let's face it. If you're programming big sites, its algorithms, and what are people going to click on the most. And it's really hard to sort of find your way to anything other than the really big books or the ones that for some reason, that particular retailer is pushing or chose or whatever. Those reasons can be good, solid reasons. But they could also maybe not.

And then how are you going to find your way unless you already know the name of the book? How are you going to find your way towards a smaller book or a little

gem? And then there's the last thing is just feeling and touching books is part of the attraction. And that goes back to my library days, you know, when my mom would drop me off every Saturday morning at the library. I think you'd have that happen to you for years.

And the feeling of pulling out a book when it's wedged between two other books, that's a unique feeling in and of itself. And then it's in your hands and opening it and feeling it. Maybe there's a smell to the pages or just beveled edge pages versus straight edge pages. And sometimes the binding is really nice, and you rub your hand over it. There's something beautiful about the tactile nature of books that shouldn't go away. And if we don't support our local booksellers it could go away.

Annie: That's how I spent my Saturday too would be at my grandparents' bookstore. It was my whole Saturday of my whole childhood. And so now anytime I go in Parnassus, I'm always like, "I'll be here for 45 minutes because I'm just going to roam." I just absolutely love it. I'm a big fan of local bookstores. You're right. I've never thought of it like that. But the building of your own map as you walk through there really does something for you. It's really beautiful.

Okay, can we talk about your new book?

Mitch: Sure.

Annie: Will you tell me a little bit about your story of how, I mean, from a sports writer to a guy who's so many of your books have a real faith base to them, a real interaction with God or Heaven, what was that transition? Why is that such a draw for you?

Mitch: Well, first of all, I don't know that it's such a transition. I think there are plenty of sportswriters in this world who have deeper sides to them and maybe faithful in their own ways or whatever. It's just that's not what's on display when they write sports.

For me, I had a real career turn with *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Obviously, I was a gung-ho 90-hour week sports writer and I would have probably remained so. I had a major, major right turn in my life and real screeching of the brakes. Not because of the book *Tuesdays with Morrie* but because of the experience of it.

Going and visiting a dying professor who I really loved and seeing that this class that I ended up taking with him every Tuesday for all the Tuesdays he had left in his life, which was better part of six months. Everything that he said was important in life was the opposite of what I was sort of pursuing. I couldn't keep going there

every Tuesday and listening to what he said and not have some kind of turnaround in my own life.

And so that began the process long before I wrote *Tuesdays with Morrie* of reexamining what my priorities were and realizing that, you know, the way ALS hit him out of the blue, you know, he was fine, and then all of a sudden he had it, the same thing could happen to me.

And I had seen that happen with an uncle of mine who had kind of been like a second dad to me. And suddenly got hit with pancreatic cancer and was gone within a couple of years in his 40s. And here I was 37. And I always thought that I wasn't going to live very long because I kind of put myself in his category. So the combination of those things made me say, "You need to change now. You can't be something that you wait till you're 70." And so I started to change then.

And then when I wrote *Tuesdays with Morrie*, you know, I always tell the story that before I wrote that people used to recognize me in airports because I was on television on ESPN all the time. And they would stop me or they'd wave at me, and they'd say, "Who's going to win the Superbowl?" And I keep going to go, "Patriots" and just keep on the moving escalator.

But then all of a sudden, I have *Tuesdays with Morrie*, people would say, "Hey, my mother died of cancer and the last thing we did was read your book together. Can I talk to you?" And you can't go, "Patriots," and just keep going. You have to stop.

And if I tell you, Annie, how many times I have stopped in my life and had conversations with people about who they lost, how they're grieving, how they're dealing with it, not once, not twice, not a hundred, not a thousand, not ten thousand, but hundreds of thousands of times, I'm sure over the course of the last 25 years.

It changes you. It changes your priorities, and it changes what you want to write about. So when it comes time to sit down and put in a year of sitting in front of a computer writing, the idea of doing that about a guy who hits baseballs for a living, it doesn't hold the same appeal anymore as "Let me tackle some issue here that I'm grappling with and all these people who have stopped me and come to my book signings or my talks or whatever and talk to me afterwards are grappling with. And that became my focus.

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Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, [Modern Fertility](#). What if I told you you could get important fertility insight without going to the doctor or even leaving home? Well, I'm telling you just that.

Modern Fertility makes that possible with easy at-home fertility hormone testing. That's why Modern Fertility was created. It's the easy and affordable way to test your fertility hormones at home with a simple finger prick. Mail it in with a prepaid label and you'll get your personalized results within 10 days. Seriously, y'all, they've made it so easy.

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Annie: All right, I'm here with our Enneagram 8s from EnneaSummer2021, Matt and Ali. Okay, you guys, what is your favorite Christmas song?

Ali: Mine is *So This Is Christmas* by John Lennon.

Annie: Really? Why?

Ali: I don't know. It always gets me so emotional that time of year. You're like looking back and thinking like what I could have done, what I have done, and what I plan to do.

Annie: Okay, okay.

Ali: Yeah, it always makes me cry.

Annie: You feel very safe with John Lennon.

Ali: I do, yes.

Annie: Yeah, it makes you feel secure.

Matt: So if you'd asked me this question maybe six years ago, I would have said none of them.

Annie: Ah, really?

Matt: I was a huge scrooge for Christmas music. Being a musician and getting asked to play Christmas songs the majority of my life and I don't like playing it. But years ago, I was asked to put on this concert every Christmas for a couple of years that was multiple artists every night. Each night was a new show with multiple artists. And it was complicated.

We asked the artist to play for free. I had to put together this superhuman band that could literally put a new show on every single night. Sundays we do a matinee and evening show. So it's up till 3 a.m. writing charts and hiring horn players and organizing everything and then having to play old songs.

But there was this moment when I was writing a chord chart out and I actually think it was Dave Barnes version of *The Christmas Song*. People know it as *Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire*. I just like, "God, this song is freaking awesome." And it all just turned for me in that moment, it's like, "Okay, you know what I like this song." And I think it was just like, okay, Christmas doesn't have to be like Joy, joy, happy, happy. Like you can be melancholy and still enjoy an adult beverage by the fire next to the Christmas tree and things are going to be okay.

Sam: Hey, my name is Sam Collier. I'm the Lead Pastor of Hillsong Atlanta, and my favorite Christmas song of all time is by Donny Hathaway, *This Christmas*. We sang this song all around the house every single year with my house shoes on, and a little bit of eggnog. But I can't do eggnog anymore, because I'm lactose intolerant. But we did that. And I love this song.

Annie: And now back to our conversation with Mitch.

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Annie: So can you kind of tell me why or what was going on in your life that led you to write *The Stranger in the Lifeboat*? Like what was the real-life that started making this story real for you?

Mitch: So there were two things very specifically. One was it was during the pandemic and everybody around was asking for help. And I wanted to write a book about help, and what happens when we ask for it. And it comes in a way that we don't recognize.

At the same time, I was coming out of the throes of having lost a child, my wife and I, you know, Chica. If you're familiar with the book *Finding Chika*, then you know I operate an orphanage in Haiti. We have 53 children there. I've been there for 12 years. I'm there every month of my life without fail.

Chica was one of our kids who we ended up bringing up when she was five years old, because she had a brain tumor. And we thought that everything would be fine to just take it out, and she'll go back. And she never went home, she became our daughter. We traveled around the world for two years trying to find a cure.

Ultimately, she passed away when she was 7. I was very angry when that happened. I was angry at the world, I was angry at God. I was angry to universe. I just couldn't understand how there could be kindness in the world or kindness in God and not be kind to a 7-year old.

And so I wrote *The Stranger in the Lifeboat* with that backdrop of everybody in the country asking for help, and me trying to heal from that anger. And so I said, "Let me create a situation where the people in the book are in the most dire situation I can think of, and call out for help, and then don't accept the help when it comes."

Annie: Yeah, because then the Lord gets in the boat.

Mitch: Yeah, right. So I created the first few pages. You find out that there's really one of the richest guys in the world. He has this big yacht. He invites all his famous celebrity and business friends on it, they're having a big soirée. And the night before they're supposed to return, out in the middle of the ocean, it blows up, and everybody's killed except 10 people who get to this life raft, five of whom are the rich guests, and five of whom are the help.

And they're in this life raft for three days, nobody's coming for them. They feel abandoned. They're running out of food and supplies, they see sharks in the water, they feel like they're going to die. And they start calling out for help.

And suddenly they see this body floating in the water and they pull it in, and it's this young, nondescript guy, just an average-looking guy. They pepper him with a bunch of questions. He doesn't say anything. And finally, one of the passengers just says, "Well, thank to the Lord we found you." And he says, "I am the Lord."

And this begins this odyssey where they're out on the sea and they don't believe what he says because you use your eyes, right? And so He doesn't look like God. He gets hungry, gets thirsty, falls asleep. It's just some guy who banged his head and probably thinks he's God now. And even when the help is right there with them, they don't want to recognize it.

By creating this story I was able to put in the mouths of these passengers as the days go on, and the things get worse and the storms get worse and the sharks gets worse, all the questions-

Annie: The sharks getting worse was terrible for me, by the way.

Mitch: Another like a good shark story.

Annie: Yeah, you really wrote that up.

Mitch: But I got a chance to put in the mouths of these passengers the questions that I had for God or for the universe. And many of the questions that they asked are the ones that I was asking in those years after Chica died.

Annie: Wow, that is really generous of you to write from that place for us. So thank you for doing that. That's incredible.

Mitch: Well, I'm sure there are a lot of other people who have gone through things who are seeking for help. You know, I always try to write a book that can be of some use. I know that most people, I guess, don't feel like their books need to be of use. They just need to entertain or be a good story or be artistic. And those are all good reasons. I'm not denying any of those. Those are excellent reasons to write a book.

For me, just for me, I feel like if they don't inspire in some way or make people feel better, it's just another book on a shelf. And I guess that's what gives me a sense of

driving me to do it is like maybe you make one other person feel a little better, you know, then it's worthwhile all the work you put in.

Annie: When you are writing a novel like this, do you see the video of it in your head? Like are you watching a movie of it? Or as you're writing, are you starting to understand the story as you go? How does it work in your head when you're starting?

Mitch: It's a good question. I start with an idea, not a plot. So *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* for example, as sort of plot-heavy as that is and as fantastical as it is, I did not start that with an idea "Okay, let's create a heaven where you meet five people." I started with the simple idea about I want to write a book about four people who think they don't matter and to show them that there's no such thing as somebody who doesn't matter.

Because my uncle Eddie, who was the inspiration for that book, was one of those guys. Even though he fought World War II, and he was beloved uncle to me, real tough Popeye kind of guy, you know, talk like this all the time. But he would always say, "I'm a nothing. I'm a nobody. Never been no way. I've never done nothing." And I could never break through that.

And so heaven didn't exist, five people didn't exist. All that existed was that idea of I want to create a story that by the end you realize there's no such thing as "a nobody. How do I do that? Then I start putting the meat on the bone and say, "Well, okay, who could point that out to them the best?" Well, you know, maybe... what happens if you find that out after you die, because a lot of people go to their death like my uncle, thinking he didn't matter.

So I wanted for people like him to get a resolution. So I said, "Well, let's set it after you die." All right Well, all right, maybe people have through angels, something. And then I came up with eventually the idea to meet five people from your life, some of whom you knew well, but some of them you didn't know well at all. And you might have had spent five minutes interacting with them, but you change the path of their life forever and they changed yours.

And then I started setting, Okay, an amusement park, we'll work on an amusement park. And then we'll have other amusement park, and then we'll have a guy with blue skin. And then we'll have an army captain. You know, it gets fatter and fatter and fatter. But it starts with what point do I want to get across?

So for me, now, I have a lot of writer friends, because I play in this band of writers and there are a lot of writers in it. And so we talk periodically about writing. Not as much as you would think. And a lot of them say things like, "Oh, I don't know, I start a book, I just let the characters kind of tell me where to where to go."

And I just don't understand that because like to me, you know, like if I open the drawer and the characters are in there, and I say to them, "So where are we going today?" They're just going to look up and say, "Where are we going? You're driving the car here. We were just passengers on this thing." So my characters don't speak to me or tell me anything. They're waiting for me to drive them to school. So I have to always kind of know where I'm going when I'm writing. I have to have a North Star that I can sail towards.

Annie: What instrument do you play in the band?

Mitch: On the piano. The keyboard player.

Annie: That's amazing. That's awesome. Do y'all do a lot of gigs?

Mitch: Yes. Well, we've been together for a long time. Let's see who's in the band. There's Stephen King, Dave Barry, Amy Tan, Ridley Pearson, Scott Turow,-

Annie: What?

Mitch: James McBride, Greg Iles, Mari Carr, Roy Blount Jr. So it's one of those bands that just keeps getting bigger and bigger. It doesn't matter. A lot of people don't actually play anything and we're pretty terrible as a whole. But we just give all the money to charity so we can't be blamed. And we're punctual. If we say eight o'clock we'll be there at eight o'clock. How many rock n roll bands can say that?

Annie: That's right.

Mitch: And we play mostly oldies music and stuff. So I was a musician so I cheat a little bit because that was my... you can see in the background here is my keyboard over there. But that was my first love. So I can play a little bit and so can a couple of the other people in the band. Music and writing aren't that-

Annie: What's the band called?

Mitch: The Rock Bottom Remainders.

Annie: Oh, I love it. The Rock Bottom. Okay, sorry, you were about to say music and writing aren't that different?

Mitch: No, I don't think. I find that the rhythm of writing is very much like the rhythm of a song and the cadences of your sentences. I'm always very pleased when people say to me, "You know, I start reading your books and before I know it, it's like all pages... I'm just way deep into it."

Or they used to say that when I wrote a newspaper column. They would say, "You know, I start your column and I get right to the bottom." And I really liked that because sometimes I read, like I have to stop right in the middle, I have read again because I got lost, whatever. A lot of that is just the cadence and the rhythm of your sentences that you have to write with a beat that kind of goes like this and you don't want to stop. You don't want to write bah bah bah, herky-jerky like that.

My wife says that when I write she has observed that I bob back and forth like I'm doing now on your camera and that I write like that. And that if I stop it's usually something has gone wrong. Like I've hit a snag or something. And I realized she's right. Like I have a beat that always goes in my head when I write. And that means it's going well. That means the cadence of the sentence is going well. So that's what I mean by music and writing they're similar.

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Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our amazing partners, [EverlyWell](#). There are plenty of things in life that are difficult to understand, but knowing how to feel your best shouldn't be one of them. EverlyWell can help you learn more about your body so you can finally take control of your health and wellness and you can do it on your own time.

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to better understand how my body works. You'll know that about me, especially if it's going to help me be a better friend of myself.

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[00:34:16] <music>

Annie: All right, we are back with our Enneagram sixes, Ethan and Taylor Ann, welcome, from our EnneaSummer2021.

Ethan: Thanks for having us.

Annie: I'm so glad y'all are here. What's your favorite Christmas song? Ethan apparently should be able to.

Ethan: I'll go. My favorite Christmas songs are *Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus* and *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. Because there's something about being in the longing and the waiting and the gray of the mystery that draws my heart to something bigger and greater and to hope.

Annie: Really?

Ethan: Yeah.

Annie: Is that fit with...? I mean.

Ethan: Oh, yeah. Because the unknown is cure. It's not cured, but there's a gift in sitting in and being held in the waiting, in the unknown of Jesus' return. But He is returning. But I don't know when, and that's okay.

Annie: Wow, beautiful. Taylor Ann.

Taylor Ann: That was very deep.

Annie: You're like rocking around the Christmas tree which will be fine..

Taylor Ann: Mine is *Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer*.

Ethan: I love it.

Taylor: And the reason why is because my daughter Jane Taylor, we did a talent show in the backyard with the neighbors all during quarantine. And that was a song that she sang every single time. And there's something innocent and sweet and fun about that song. That is my favorite Christmas song.

Jess: Hey, this is Jess Connolly. I am the author of *Breaking Free from Body Shame*. And my favorite Christmas song is *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen* because my kids are obsessed with it and they sing it obnoxiously loud, specifically the Pentatonix version.

Annie: And now back to finish up this conversation with Mitch Albom.

[00:35:53] <music>

Annie: Well, I mean, I think *The Stranger in the Lifeboat* is beautiful. I found myself as I was reading kind of having that taken a long experience. And that is your writing

style, which is just incredible. *The Stranger in the Lifeboat*, when people are picking this up and reading it... I mean, we're at Christmas time, and we're gifting it as well. Who do you hope we gift it to? Much less who reads it? Who do you hope we gift it to?

Mitch: Anybody who is healing from something, who lost somebody, who doesn't feel real good about themselves, maybe a little down on themselves, or who has gone through a rough patch over the last few years?

Because as I said before, I get to put the questions that we would want to ask, whether you believe in God or the universe, or the general goodness of people or humanity, whatever it is, I get to put those questions in the mouths of these passengers. And they ask things like, you know... one of them says to this God character, "Well, if your God do you answer prayers?" And he says, "Well, I answer every prayer. But sometimes the answer is no." Which is something that we need to learn to accept.

Or, of course, the big question, you know, why do people die? And one of the passengers, who has lost his wife years earlier, has never gotten over it much as I never got over losing Chica, he breaks down and says, "Why did you take my wife? Why did my wife have to die?"

And the response is, "Well, whenever people die on Earth, people are always saying, 'Why did God take them?' Maybe a better question is why did God give them to us? What did we do to deserve their love, their affection, their special memories that they made? Didn't you have those memories with your wife?" The guy says, "I had them every day." And the response is, "Well, those memories they're a gift. But their absence is not a punishment. This isn't about being cruel when they stop. I know that you on earth cry for your loved ones when they die, but I can assure you they're not crying."

When I write something like that, which even when I'm saying it I get a little choked up because I wrote it for myself as much as for anybody reading it. Because that's the attitude I had to learn to take in order to get over the death of a 7-year-old girl was, "All right, well, but who were we to have deserved her in our life?"

My wife and I didn't have children of our own. We wanted to, we got married kind of late, didn't happen. So that was a prayer we thought wasn't answered. And then here's 16 years later, this 5-year-old comes into our lives, she's sleeping at the foot of our bed, she's waking us up for breakfast, she's giggling, she's laughing, she's putting her hand over my mouth when I tried to sing. She's doing all those things

that make... you know, every child makes a world for you with those amazing little memories. And we had that for two years.

And instead of saying, "Well, why did we only get two years? Why did you take her after two years?" a better question is, "Well, what did we do to deserve those two years? We were in our 50s already. Nobody gets that opportunity in their 50s or rarely. And all of a sudden we had it. And yeah, two years is short. But there are a lot of parents who have a child for six months, six weeks, six minutes and they have to deal with it.

So when you can come at it from a point of view of like "we didn't lose, we were given," no matter what your loss is, your job, your position, something you had before, your house, you know, or a loved one, it's a lot more healing to think of "Well, all right, we were given that for a period of time We were lucky and fortunate to have it for that time" than it is to keep saying, "Why me? Why me? Why was it taken? Why do bad things keep happening to me?"

So my hope with *The Stranger in the Lifeboat* is beyond the exciting story. and I think it is an exciting story. It's probably the biggest adventure story I've ever written. It's at sea, and there's waves into shark attacks and there is storm-

Annie: It's wild.

Mitch: I had a read up and study about how you can eat shrimp that get caught in barnacles underneath your boat and they can keep you alive. Shipwreck stories are always interesting anyhow. But underneath all of that hopefully is a message of hope and inspiration and healing in times of hell.

Annie: It's absolutely beautiful. I'm so grateful you wrote it. So thank you for all the work you put your hand to. But to write out of a place of pain and suffering for yourself, it takes a lot out of you too. So that is very kind of you to do that for all of us.

Mitch: Well, I appreciate your reading it. Thank you, and your listeners.

Annie: I have a sports question for you. Can I ask you a sports question?

Mitch: Okay.

Annie: I'm a Georgia Bulldog.

Mitch: Oh! Feel sorry for you.

Annie: I know, Mitch. What's going to happen? Who wins the national championship?

Mitch: I think Alabama's going to win no matter who. But you're going to have to take on our Michigan Wolverine.

Annie: Against you. I know. It's me versus you.

Mitch: Well, not me and you. They are schools.

Annie: Not that personnel. Yeah.

Mitch: Yeah, well, that'll be an interesting game on New Year's. I always say that, you know, you can't really predict those things because they're so... you know, by the time the two teams play again, it's like almost four weeks passes. Injured guys get healthy and hot guys cool off and certain coaches are really good with that much time and they devise a brilliant game plans and other coaches don't. So it's like predicting a whole nother season.

Annie: It is. Michigan looks so good right now, by the way. I mean, I was very surprised.

Mitch: I'll make sure to tell Jim Harbaugh what you said.

Annie: Yeah, yeah, give him a call, tell him what I said. Okay, the last question we always ask, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Mitch: What sounds fun to me. Get together all the surviving 50s, do a rock and roll bands to a stage, have them do their songs, famous songs, one after the other, and let me be on stage with them. And I'll do the Bo-bom bom doo bom bom oooo. You know, those kinds of things. I'll just fit in. I know every one of those songs by heart. My favorite type of music. And I could sing it all day long and play it all day long one after the other after the other.

For my 50th birthday, my wife said to me, "Okay, this is your 50th, you get your blowout, what do you want to do?" I said, "I don't want any parties. I don't want any honorate, things where people talk..." I said, "Here's what I want to do. I want to go back to my old house, get my old high school band back together, and have a rehearsal down in the basement." And that is what we did.

Annie: Ah, ah.

Mitch: We went back to my house... It's in New Jersey, I live in Michigan. I don't know the people who live there, but we knocked on the door and told them a story. And I said, "I promise." They said, "Well, our basements is kind of nice and fixed up here." I said, "I tell you what, we'll put down new carpeting after we're done if you just let us have it for the afternoon." And they said, "Okay."

So I got all my guys who had been scattered around the country, but they came back. And we all went down in the basement and we were like an oldies band back then. And we just did our hair back like Sha Na Na and I, you know, greased our hair, we wore sunglasses. So we all did that again.

And we remembered every song and we played all the songs and we laugh those kinds of belly laughs from when you just feel like you're still 17 again. And it was the best birthday anybody could ever ask for. That was fun. I don't have to say that sounds like fun. But if it sounds like fun when you hear me saying it, then you can try it for yourself. I highly recommend it.

Annie: It makes me want to call my neighbor from my childhood to be like, "Let's go ride bikes again." Oh, that's great. Mitch, is there anything we didn't talk about the want to make sure we cover?

Mitch: Well, only that I always try in interviews to call attention to the situation in Haiti, where I have an orphanage. Like I said, "I'm there every month. So I see it." And the situation in Haiti is really, really, really serious. Our children at orphanage—we have a little third of an acre property—have not been off the grounds in two years. That's how dangerous the streets are.

We have to take armored vehicles just to get from the airport to the orphanage and we pray that we don't get stopped or kidnapped. And what's going on there is nobody should have to live like that, where you can't even get gas for your generator because the roads are blocked by gangs who threaten to kill the drivers. And so you don't have gas for a generator in a country that only gives you electricity 12 hours a day, so the other half of the day or night, usually, you don't have any power, you're in blackness, you can't turn on the fan, you can't turn on a light. Children should not have to live like that. A country shouldn't have to live in that kind of terror.

And I would just ask people, however, they can help Haiti. If they want to help us, they can help us. But there's many other organizations that they can help. Ours is havefaithhaiti.org. But there are many other worthwhile organizations. Just please keep them in your prayers because it's a beautiful country with beautiful children.

Annie: Yes, I got to go in 2016, and it's beautiful. We played soccer, we saw rainbows. I mean, it was a really special place. So we will link to your havefaithhaiti.org in the show notes so that people can go and give and be a part of that.

Mitch: Thank you very much.

Annie: Of course. Thank you so much for making time to do this. It is such an honor to get to chat with you.

Mitch: Thank you. Well, it's been a pleasure talking to you, Annie. Best of luck.

Annie: Thank you.

Mitch: Bye.

[00:46:22] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, isn't he the coolest? I mean, what a big deal to get to talk to Mitch Albom! It is not lost on me that he is one of the finest writers of our time. And so to get to meet him and chat with him is just a huge, huge gift. I'm really grateful.

Be sure to grab a copy of *The Stranger in the Lifeboat* from your local bookstore would be where I would check first. And go follow Mitch, so you can see the video from books and mortar that I thought was so cool. Tell him thanks for being on the show. And make sure to check out his nonprofit work in Haiti. Again that's havefaithhaiti.org.

If you need anything else for 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 me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I'll do the same.

Today what sounds fun to me is listening to the *Behold the Lamb of God* album, Andrew Peterson. You guys, if you haven't heard this Christmas album yet, spin it today. Get ready for tomorrow. Y'all have a great day. We'll see you back here tomorrow.

We're kicking off our 2021 Christmas party talk at Hallmark. We've got our Hallmark Christmas movie extravaganza. You don't want to miss it. The Deck the Hallmark guys are here, y'all. It is too much. Get ready. We'll see you tomorrow.

[00:47:43] <music>

Lauren: Hey everybody, it's Lauren Daigle and my current song is *Hold On To Me*. But my favorite Christmas song has to be... well I can't pick one favorite because I'm a seven. So I need to pick three. It's *Little Drummer Boy*, it's *O Holy Night*, and it's *O Come All Ye Faithful*.

Steve: I'm Steve Carter, the author of *The Thing Beneath the Thing*. And my favorite Christmas song is *Silent Night*. And it's just because of the tradition. At most churches that I've been a part of that was the song that we would seem to close out the service, candle in hand, and kind of your family right beside you. And I just love that moment every year.

Tim: Hi, I'm Tim Hasselbeck. I think my favorite Christmas song has to be *Tennessee Christmas* by Amy Grant. In fact, that entire album really takes the cake for me. I grew up on it now living in Tennessee. It's perfect.

Elizabeth: I'm Elizabeth Hasselbeck, author of *Flashlight Night* for kids and big kids. My favorite Christmas song this past year was Carrie Underwood's *Drummer Boy* with her Isaiah. I just thought that was so sweet to do something with a little one in your house. And I would have to agree our favorite Christmas album is definitely Amy Grant's *Christmas*. I think the first time I'd Christmas at Tim's house, I got a glimpse into his childhood listening to all Amy Grant's. And that tender *Tennessee Christmas* is always going loud and proud in our house in December.