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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 have got a great show in store.

Y'all, okay, your feedback and your kindness about the TSF prayer series in April have meant a ton to us. Hey, if you haven't had the chance to fill out the survey about it, it's like just a couple of questions, just let us know your thoughts about the series. You can still do that. The link is in the show notes. So wherever you're listening, just look at all the words below and that link is right there. We always put some notes down there for you that I think you'd really like.

Sponsor: Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to take a moment to share about one of our incredible partners [Epic Will](#). When you hear how inspiring the story of today's guests are, I have a feeling it's going to have you thinking about living intentionally and making the most of every opportunity. And that's what Epic Will is all about too, helping us steward what we have, what we've earned, and our relationships with the people we love so that we can leave a lasting legacy.

We need to flip the script on what it means to plan ahead for our estate and the gift it is to the people in our lives not to have to make difficult financial or health-related decisions on our behalf without knowing our wishes. I mean, the real real is it's a gift to ourselves do these things through and have them taken care of and to mark them off the list of things adulthood tells us we need to worry about.

That's where Epic Will make things quick and easy for us. The expert team at Epic Will has developed an efficient and user-friendly platform that helps you think through things like who to name as your financial power of attorney, and who you would trust to care for your children. And in a few simple steps, it also helps you designate who your belongings would go to and to create your Advanced Directive. Basically, [epicwill.com](#) empowers you or you and your spouse to make these important decisions, all with the guidance of people who truly know what they're doing.

And while they're helping us, they're also dedicated to caring for single moms and orphans. In fact, they provide single moms with kids under the age of 18 access to a free will and they donate 10% of their proceeds to organizations helping orphans find their forever home. I love that. Let's get in on that, friends.

Epic Will has built the most comprehensive self-guided early estate plan for you. And in as little as five minutes and for less than you've been on a trip to Target, you can create an earliest date plan with Epic Will. So go to [Epicwill.com](#) and use the

promo code FUN for 10% off. Again, that's epicwill.com and use the promo code FUN for 10% off.

Intro: So today on the show, y'all, I get to talk with a pair of friends with an incredible story. You probably know Mr. Fancy Like himself, Walker Hayes. He's a Grammy-nominated country music singer, songwriter originally from Mobile, Alabama, and being ridiculously talented. And then becoming a TikTok sensation had Walker everywhere. Y'all, he was on Good Morning America, The Today Show, The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. But it's his friendship with his neighbor Craig Cooper that's the star of the show today. It is such a special story.

Walker and Craig have written a book inspired by it called *Glad You're Here: Two Unlikely Friends Breaking Bread and Fences*. Y'all, I loved this book so much. I couldn't wait to meet these guys and introduce them to y'all. I love when my friends become friends with my friends. So here's my conversation with co-authors, Walker Hayes and Craig Cooper.

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Annie: Gentlemen, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Craig: Thank you for having us.

Walker: What's up?

Annie: I mean, what a treat! Thank you for doing this. Your new book, *Glad You're Here*, comes out tomorrow.

Walker: That's right.

Craig: Crazy.

Annie: What does it feel like? What does it feel like to write a book, Walker? I mean, you've done music for forever.

Walker: Ah, you know, writing the book was one of the hardest tasks I've ever undertaken, even though I'm just regurgitating the story. But yeah, it was tedious. It's a lot longer than a song. A song is like 16 lines to say a story and this was 2,000-ish words a chapter. And it did challenge my relationship with my best friend. The publisher told us, she was like, "You're going to hate each other before this is over." And she was... I didn't hate you.

Craig: She said you're going to hate the book.

Annie: Oh, you do hate the book. I know that's right.

Walker: So it was very interesting. But honestly, I'm just blown away that tomorrow just my name and my mess of a story is in a book about Jesus. It's quite fascinating to me only because when I initially wrote a song to thank Craig for a gift, I was merely just... I was curious.

Like you say, you want to reach curious people. I was going, "Man, this dude might actually know Jesus." And I was not a candidate anybody would have believed would have said that at that time in my life. So it's just pretty remarkable that with everything that's going on in my life that I'm sharing my testimony with my neighbor who was a stranger eight years ago. Somebody wouldn't have been like, "You and Craig Cooper would hit it off." You know, Annie?

Annie: Yeah.

Walker: So it is wild. I can't really process what all is going on. But the easy thing to me about this book and my favorite thing is that it really has nothing to do with me. It all just points to Christ. And I just get to tell the story. I marvel at the reaction and the impact it has on people. Again, nowhere in that book is it like, "Hey, I lifted some weight," or "I put something on my shoulders and carried" It's a lot of the music and the dream. It's just a very freeing thing to share the love of Christ knowing I had nothing to do with it.

And also, man, what a blessing to do it with literally the closest thing to the definition of a brother I've ever known in my life. I mean, it's nuts. I wish I could consolidate it into a really cool sound bite but I can't.

Annie: You don't have to do that in 2022.

Walker: Yeah, that's great.

Annie: It's in a radio interview. You got all the space. This is like dancing the song in a book.

Walker: There you go.

Craig: There you go.

Annie: You get to be a book here. You get to be a book with us. Craig, how much did you hate the book in the middle?

Craig: Oh my goodness! In all honesty, we had a moment there where I wanted to give up. I remember having a call with Walk. You sent me a voicemail, you're like, "Dude, we're on the one yard line and this is going to do things for Jesus. Just come on, man."

Annie: And you're like, "I don't care. I'm out."

Craig: And part of it, too... So I had started a staffing firm in the fall of 2019.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Craig: We had a great fourth quarter, we had a great first quarter. And then COVID hit and everything, like my whole world came to a screeching halt. And in the providence of God, that's when Walker and Laney, their whole family they moved next door. It was literally right as the pandemic hit. You had a contract on the house-

Walker: I mean, we closed the week it started. The week the world shut down, we signed the papers outside the title company.

Annie: Yeah, crazy. Outside?

Walker: Yeah, we had to sign it outside. Yeah.

Craig: So a lot happening right then and we decided, "Hey, we'll just quarantine together. He came off the road. It was a wonderful time for us as a family to have them next door.

Annie: Yeah, of course.

Craig: We needed them. We have all these pictures of our kids together. We ripped the fence out between our two backyards so that everybody could just go back and forth and everything.

Annie: Did y'all do it yourself?

Walker: Yeah.

Annie: Did y'all rip up the fence?

Walker: We tried to do it in a very structured... you know, unscrew, make sense, but in the end we ripped the metal. Like bringing it back and forth till it's snapped.

Annie: What a great COVID activity! Like, "You know what we're going to do? We're going to tear down a fence because we're going to be outside."

Walker: It was awesome.

Craig: It was awesome.

Annie: Still no fence?

Walker: We got dogs.

Craig: Yeah, the dogs. We got two dogs and we got Berns and Doodles. And then it was nuts. Honestly, cleaning up after four dogs, we started feeling bad, going, "Oh, man, they're going over there and doing their business."

Walker: Their dog poop is much bigger than our dog poop.

Annie: Like the Hayes corner under the bathroom and it ain't fair.

Craig: So I was like, "We got to figure this out." So yeah, it was down during basically all of COVID.

Annie: That's incredible.

Craig: We put it up when we got the dogs. But yeah, a lot happened where the staffing firms and everything kind of went to a screeching halt. I started really struggling. And then I started writing. And that's kind of where we ended up getting... This book came out of that. But you know, a lot of wrestling and all of that. And I'm just so happy with the finished product. I'm so grateful that basically Walk just kind of put his arm around me and lifted me up and held me up throughout the remaining part of the process. And we got the book written.

Annie: I'm telling you, if you don't hate the book at some point, I don't think you're doing it right. I don't know any of us that don't hate the book at some point.

Walker: Oh, that's good to hear. That's encouraging.

Annie: I mean, I've quit on books at 7 p.m...

Walker: Have you really?

Annie: Oh, yeah. And go like, "I'm not writing this thing." And then the next morning I'm like, "Okay, I'll write it."

Craig: But you never actually just quit the whole book process?

Annie: I've abandoned one.

Craig: You have?

Annie: I've abandoned one book. But also, like y'all, when you're contracted for a book, you can only abandon it so hard.

Craig: Yeah. Yeah. Like, "I have to turn this in at some point."

Annie: "I got to turn this in at some point. Somebody's got to see some." So many of our friends are out here listening and that live in Nashville are songwriters. And y'all do have to simplify a message.

Walker: Right.

Craig: Mm-hmm.

Annie: So would you say there's a version... I mean, does the song Craig parallel really well with the book?

Walker: Yeah, yeah, it does. And honestly, just hearing him talk about the fence, I'm telling you this book, it'd be nice to be like, "Oh, we wrote it," or "we designed this." The finished product is baffling to me how-

Walker: Me too.

Craig: ...it's a billion different things that came together in the fence. And the story was still being written while we wrote it and-

Annie: You can tell that. You can tell you're writing as... I loved it.

Walker: Totally. What I love about the song is it so perfectly documents the earliest stages of my heart softening from the love of Christ through a human, which is crazy. I think God was super merciful to me in showing me Himself through a broken individual because I think I'd given up on the thought of transformation or somebody really be moved in the action by Christ or a light shining through us.

So anyway. But yeah, the song like I said, the song stemmed from my confusion almost as being like, "Why does this family love us so much? It doesn't make sense. I have nothing to offer them." I'd been in Nashville 12 years, well aware... Like all

of Nashville knew me but didn't know what to do with me. I'd been dropped by so many labels. I mean, I was working at Costco coming face to face with music execs that I had worked-

Annie: No!

Walker: ...hand in hand with. It was just a very humiliating but just a downtime. Like I said, I had nothing to offer Craig but they just embraced us. And not just me, my kids, all the chaos, the mess, the poverty-

Annie: You have a lot of kids.

Walker: We have a lot.

Annie: Seven?

Walker: Well, six on earth, one in heaven.

Annie: How many have y'all got?

Craig: We have four.

Annie: Golly, that's a lot in the neighborhood.

Walker: And they are all best friends.

Craig: Super cool.

Walker: But the song it's really me talking to myself, but it was thanking Craig for the car. But it's me saying, "I don't know, this dude might actually know Jesus." And again, you know what's funny, Annie? When I wrote that song, I thought I was so smart and clever to not say the name of Jesus. And I was like, "Christian folks will love this." But I was like, "I didn't say the name of Jesus."

So again, it just fascinates me that, again, now I'm writing about Jesus in books. But yeah, the center of the book I think became... You know, the song is kind of somewhat of a nucleus of the book in some form or fashion. But there's a lot of redemption that occurred. There's a lot of paths like the one behind our house. And that's kind of what we describe in the book.

Annie: I love it. For our friends listening, they can go ahead and preorder today, they'll get there tomorrow because it releases... But y'all, there's two different fonts throughout the whole book.

Craig: Yeah.

Walker: Right.

Annie: So you know who's writing. I think that is a cool design thing that y'all did. Craig, will you back us up, how did y'all become friends? I know it's in the book, but give us a heads up so everybody knows what we're expecting.

Craig: Early 2014, our family had moved here to help plant a church. We moved in 2012. We went 2013 Laura and Laney, so my wife and Walker's wife had met at a neighborhood gathering. One of those short meetings where you kind of get together. Honestly, I think it was a doTERRA-

Walker: I thought the same.

Craig: It was an oil-

Annie: A multilevel marketing moments?

Walker: One of those pyramid schemes.

Craig: Yeah, as all these oils-

Annie: In the neighborhood, they all came home with a diffuser. I know.

Craig: So they had met there and we were renting a house in that neighborhood. And then later on January of 2014, my son and some of their kids were playing basketball at an Upward basketball at a church off Hillsborough and Laura recognized Laney. Walk was there. I think you were probably holding Loxley at the time.

Walker: Yeah.

Craig: And we would have had a brief interaction, but they talked and Laura invited Laney to go to church with us that night. Our church we were meeting in a rented facility on a Saturday night because they were using the church on Sunday morning. It was super small. We probably had 30 or less people. And they showed up that night. And a lot of times people will say, "Yeah, we'll come," and they may not come. Well, they came. I remember I lit up like a Christmas tree. I was like, "Oh, my goodness. You're here."

Annie: Why did y'all come?

Walker: Laney wanted to come. I did not want to come. I wasn't a huge fan of Laura. We were in that phase of life where we, out of respect for Laney, I had given some churches a try. She was a believer, I wasn't. They just didn't fit. And it's a lot. You know, six kids, a lot to get dressed. So I thought we were kind of out of that church hunting phase.

Annie: You thought you'd done your time?

Walker: Oh, yeah. So when Laura got us back into the market, I was so mad. But I went. And I'm ashamed to say... I mean, they met on a Saturday, so I was hammered every day. So when I walked in, I know I wreaked of alcohol and just had... You know, I'm really good at writing on my face the stinks and I'm good at making that face. And that's probably the face I was making.

Annie: He still lit up like a Christmas tree.

Walker: I know. I know.

Annie: That's so sweet.

Walker: He made a beeline and said, "Glad you're here." And then we just kept being friends with the Coopers.

Craig: It was nice because I think we went out to eat that night. You know, "Have you guys eaten?" "No." So we ended up doing that and they kept coming back.

Annie: And Walker you were like, "Now we gotta go eat too?"

Walker: Yeah. Yeah.

Annie: I know. I know, man.

Walker: There was a phase too where I would enjoy it and I would be like, "Don't enjoy this."

Annie: Oh, I know. I know.

Walker: "They're not really lovely."

Annie: "Do not like this."

Walker: Yeah, exactly. And I would catch myself being like, "No, I don't want to hung. We just hung with them. Okay." But it was like a persona that I guess I was just used to

always putting on. And they, I don't know, they cracked the code. I got more and more comfortable with hanging with them.

But again, feeling welcome when you haven't felt welcome or you've not even welcomed yourself, it's a little uncomfortable. And when you find yourself in it, you're like, "Wait a second, I don't like this. I'm not supposed to enjoy hanging with this family." So yeah, it was many years of just this confused feeling. And we still... yeah, we go to church. Now, we're always out of town on the road and I don't get to Redeemed Grace as much as I would like. But we're next door to the Coopers.

Annie: So Craig, why didn't you give up? When you knew his face was saying, "I'm not having a great time"? And it was years. I mean, it was years before... right, Walker-

Walker: Many.

Annie: ...before you decided to follow Christ and it was years before he was having a great time with it. Why do you keep calling?

Craig: Man, I think I felt like God was smiling on us when He brought that family to us. We just loved them so much and wanted to be together. I mean, he truly became like one of my closest best friends. He was an unbeliever at the time but for us, we were spending time together at our kids' baseball games, at basketball games. We were spending time together.

He would do this Walker Wednesday thing on Wednesday nights at Puckett's in downtown Franklin. And there'd be 15 to 20 people there and they're all chewing on a chicken bone or eating French fries and stuff and I was honestly, like, "Everybody, quiet. Listen to this dude sing." I was blown away.

But God knit us together in ways that I think are miraculous in so many different ways. I mean, we talked about it even in the book. Our dogs, anytime we would go out of town, we would drop our dogs off and they were watching. Anytime they would go out of town, they would drop their dogs off and we would watch them. And we just kept being together all the time.

So for Walker, he's a dreamer and a doer and I felt lifted up anytime I was with him. I remember I was writing back in 2015 and I was kind of pouring my heart out on the page. I was writing something about living in your 30s. I was 30-something, and the only person that I felt comfortable sharing with outside of Laura, my wife, was Walker.

Annie: Oh, wow.

- Walker:** That's the kind of relationship that we had. Vulnerable stuff I would feel like I can share with him and he's not going to judge me for it. He's going to embrace it. He's going to encourage me. And he always did. I honestly was lifted up by his company. It wasn't like we were looking at it going, "Oh, man, we need to really help them." No, it was more like, "Wow, that was refreshing, encouraging, strengthening." And I was just praying that God would grab his soul, bless his career, and all of that. But yeah, I just loved him and we loved spending time with him.
- Annie:** What do you think? You've heard him say that a hundred of thousands of times now.
- Walker:** Oh, I love him. No, no, no. As I listened to you, it's almost like I was frustrated that I was never a project, which I was so used to being around people like that.
- Annie:** Wow.
- Walker:** I mean, I literally just thought of that. I should have put that in the book. Dang! Maybe next one.
- Annie:** That's right. Part two is coming.
- Walker:** And again, it wasn't always comfortable feeling so loved and well-
- Annie:** You knew you weren't a project.
- Walker:** Right. I knew I wasn't like... yeah. And you allowed me to encourage you. I became sober while I knew Craig. And I remember a guy from Redeeming Grace came to me inquiring about my sobriety and I was blown away. I was like, "He knows what I don't believe, yet he respects me and is vulnerable enough to me to go, 'Hey, did you get that figured out? What do you do? Can you help?'" You know what I'm saying? That was touching for him to come down on my level. And that's kind of what you did with me.
- Craig:** I felt the same way. When Walker talks about getting dropped from record labels and whatnot, and shares that really openly, but is still pursuing his passions and writing music, and he doesn't stop and everything, well, I could really relate with that because, you know, I've been fired from pastoral ministry before. I came to faith in Christ when I was 18 as a college freshman, University of Tennessee in Knoxville, and then just kind of shot right into ministry. And I thought, "I want to be a pastor for the rest of my life, all of this."

Well, I started working with a church young, newly married. I just gave everything every night of the week except for Sunday nights when Laura and I would connect for an exhausted date. And we started having conflicts, then I started having bad attitudes and I was feeling resentful. And after about two and a half years, they let me go. I was completely burned out.

Annie: In your 20s?

Craig: In my early 20s.

Annie: Gosh.

Craig: And it wasn't change of job. It felt like the change of a calling and a purpose and why God had me in and all of that. It really broke me. So when he shares about the heartache that he's gone through, I was always looking at Walker going, "Man, dude, I can relate. I get it." And I felt like we just were companions in a broken world, if that makes sense.

Walker: There's your nugget right there.

Annie: That's right.

Walker: There's a... what do you call it?

Craig: Soundbite. That should have been the subtitle.

Annie: Right. We're saving that for the next book. We are really working on the second one.

Walker: I know. We're taking notes.

Craig: oh, man.

Annie: Yeah. Because you're going to hate it and you're going to call me like, "Annie, you made us do this." You're like, "You have to come write a chapter, Annie because we're sick of this thing."

[00:24:14] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our incredible partners, [KiwiCo](#). In my kid's book *What Sounds Fun to You?*, so many of the scenes take place outdoors in the garden and the farmers market, laying in

the hammock. And I love getting outside when the weather turns warm in the spring.

Spring is like the perfect time for kids to explore the world around us. So why not nurture that natural curiosity for the MiniBFFs in our lives with projects designed to teach them about everything from rainbows to rockets and all the things in between?

KiwiCo delivers a monthly science and art projects that spark a love for lifelong learning in kids of all ages. I especially enjoy doing the mechanical and engineering crates with some of my friends' kids. Like putting together robot that can actually walk and creating a machine that sets out dominoes so we can knock them down together has been so fun.

It's fascinating to see how the supplies and the motors and the batteries all work together. And it really encourages the kids in my life to be innovators and creative thinkers. Your kids won't believe what they can build and accomplish with KiwiCo. Give them the tools to learn new skills, build new experiences, and make new connections to the broader world.

Step into spring and celebrate the season of discovery with a KiwiCo subscription. Get 30% off your first month plus free shipping on any crate line with the code THATSOUNDSFUN at kiwico.com. That's 30% off your first month at kiwico.com, promo code, THATSOUNDSFUN.

Sponsor: And I have another amazing partner to tell you about, [Family Camp](#) the movie. Y'all know it's kind of my life's mission to make sure that you're prioritizing fun, right? And if you're looking for a fun, funny, lighthearted movie to watch with your whole family, I've got one for you. It's called Family Camp. It's the first feature film by the skate guys who are hilarious.

It'll be exclusively in theaters on May 13th. Here's a sneak peek. Okay. Imagine two polar opposite families who find themselves sharing a cabin for an entire week at a family camp. It was pretty much their only commonality, being the desire to win the camp trophy.

The dads end up lost in the woods and have to deal with a whole trail of hilarious mishaps while everyone else searches for them. High jinks galore. You guys, high jinks galore. It's such a fun movie. It's good for the whole family. So get your tickets to see it in a theater near you by visiting familycampmovie.com. Again, that's familycampmovie.com.

And now back to our conversation with Walker and Craig.

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Annie: Walker, a lot of people know you for music for a long time. But clearly, *Fancy Like* isn't a normal. Oh, I hope it's not. I hope it's the first of many.

Walker: Yeah.

Annie: What's happened with that song-

Craig: Nuts.

Annie: ...is nuts, right?

Walker: It is. But what's nuts is I'm telling you, Craig was right beside me when I became a believer. I was so inquisitive with the Lord. Like, "What is this?"

Annie: How long ago was that?

Walker: Three years August.

Annie: Okay.

Walker: And I was just like-

Craig: It was right before COVID?

Walker: Yeah. I mean, I would ask friends and I would ask the Lord, "What's this look like? What does me loving You look like? How does that change...?"

Annie: That's a great question.

Walker: And I still don't really know. I guess it's a daily come to Jesus conversation we all have. I feel like honestly every day it looks different than I thought it would, especially where my faith is concerned, which is just... it's my favorite thing. So when I met Jesus, that's all I wanted to write.

I mean, I wrote like 10 gospel albums over the course of COVID. Like a little kid who just met Jesus. My team was like, "What is going on?" You could tell my team was like, "Okay, okay, well, here we go. This sounds good, but you're a country artist." And then *Fancy Like* happened in the middle of this book. Like chapter frickin five of this book.

Craig: We had signed the contract, we had turned in the first draft, all that kind of stuff. We're in the middle of working through everything and *Fancy Like* hit.

Walker: And honestly, I know, I know, there's no question that all that silly stuff and the massiveness of my career and the trajectory, it is all so I can tell people this story every night.

Craig: Come on.

Walker: It is. I tell you that over and over, but there's no other explanation. Because again, like I said, I mean, I'm the kind of guy... I was like, "Let's move to Luanda. Let's give it all up. Put the guitar down. I don't love that guitar more than Jesus. I want to work with our friends in Uganda." I'm that guy. I'm like, "Let's go. Let's preach to that one dude on Mount whatever." But no.

When *Fancy Like* was blowing up, I was like, "Well, this is weird." And also I love my team so much. I mean, they're blown away by what has happened in my life. It's crazy. Again, the *Fancy Like* stuff is cool but I'm 110% sure every night when I walk on stage that those, you know, however many 1000s of people... and I tell them, and I try to talk to unbelievers especially. And I'm like, "Hey, if you're here and you want me to shut up because you know where I'm about to go with this, I get you. And it wasn't long ago I was you. I was so you." And I beg them to just pay attention for a few minutes.

Right now occupationally that's my purpose. And I think it's pretty magical how it all lined up. And again, my team, they wonder, they're like, "I don't understand." Because again, when we started this book, we just sold like 50 copies. Now, we have some people who are ready to listen. And it's crazy.

Craig: It is crazy.

Walker: I remember being in the kitchen with Walk, and we're having this conversation. And you're like, "Man, sometimes I just want to turn off all my socials, just stop it all and give it all up and just move to Luanda, do some... And it's so cool to see what the Lord was doing.

Annie: He was like, "But I am going to do one more TikTok dance."

Walker: Let's go.

Annie: Let's just one. Just one.

Walker: But with the social thing and just my job and I'm sure y'all can all relate, it leads me to narcissism way.

Annie: Oh, dude.

Walker: I really struggle. And even with this, you know, I've confessed this to Craig, sometimes I'm like, "Am I doing this tonight so people will cheer or am I really going back to that... What has really changed me and who I come to...?" And it's so easy to do in this community because some places you say Jesus and to them it's just another word on your resume. And that's not what Jesus is for me. I want Him to be the only name on my resume. I don't know if that even makes sense. But you know what I mean? It's weird. Honestly, it's unique and there's some adjustments and things to be aware of as my testimony becomes part of my job if that's some way. I'm sure you know exactly what I'm talking about.

But like I said, my favorite thing is the story just wrote itself. There's nothing made up. Which is kind of songs I have to like embellish. This is just so real. And it continues daily. Craig, as far as our friendship is concerned, I'm so inspired. You know, a lot of people give me things or helped me in life or made me smile, you know, music has made me smile, but Craig shared my Savior with me. You know what I mean? And I'm just like, "Dang, what else could a dude give some other dude who's just angry and mad and an island? You know what I mean? So, yeah, what a story!

Annie: I mean, Craig, I'd like to make an observation and you can respond or tell me I'm wrong. Well, you can respond by telling me I'm wrong if you want. However you want. We grew up similarly. I was involved in college ministry in college. And then you lose all of that and you walk away. I'm going to get teary saying this to you. And then this. Right?

Craig: Yeah.

Annie: You thought you've lost your ministry and then it was your neighbor. I mean, what other God?

Walker: Wooo.

Craig: I think you're right. And your tears mean a lot. Actually, you have no idea how many I've shed over this topic. I'm so grateful for what I walked through. I'm so grateful that God put me right into ministry in my early 20s and then He just pulled me right out. I was preaching on a regular basis, the church was growing, all of that and then all of it was kind of taken away. What was so cool for me is my relationship with the Lord got deeper. I read a book-

Annie: Because we don't work for Him anymore. We just like know Him.

Craig: Sundays were hard for me because we stayed in the same church.

Annie: You stayed in the church?

Craig: Yeah. So what happened was-

Walker: Ain't that crazy?

Annie: Oh, my gosh. That's heroic.

Craig: So that's the church that had shared the gospel with me. So what Walker was saying, I felt like I had received eternal life through the message that they gave. I thought, well, if I'm not called to be a pastor here, I'm just not called to be a pastor anywhere. And I had my phone rang, I had a few different opportunities, and I could not bring myself to accept any other ministry position. And I felt like God just had His hand on me and wanted me to humble... humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and He'll lift you up in due time

And so we did it. And it was hard for me and my wife, and our family in many ways. But I read a book called *The Bruised Reed* by Richard Sibbes, and it just was healing to my soul. I started to shift from a horizontal thinking to more vertical like, "God did this and He's in charge. Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it." And so I just wanted to humble myself.

They ended up about five years later coming back and hiring me back. And then five years after that went and planted Redeeming Grace Church. I feel like God helped me see that He doesn't need me at all. He didn't need me with Walker. God does not need Craig Cooper. But what a privilege it is if He says, "Hey, I'll use you as an instrument right now in this moment." So it's deeply humbling for me. It was the hardest thing I had walked through, and one of the greatest things that I've walked through. And I'm staying on this side just grateful that God is a Redeemer.

Annie: How old are you now? Do you mind me asking?

Craig: 45.

Annie: Okay. So 20 years. I mean, the zoom out of the maps of our lives, right? Like, if we zoom out and go, If I told 25-year-old Annie what 41-year-old Annie was doing, if you told 25-year-old Craig about 45-year-old Craig, can you imagine?

Craig: No.

Annie: Same, Walker, can you imagine?

Walker: No.

Annie: No. No.

Craig: And there's a parallel with our stories. I mean, Walker is 17 years in Nashville. And then... boom.

Annie: 17 years, Walker.

Walker: Yeah. Yeah.

Annie: And working at Costco.

Walker: Yeah. But I'm a weird dude. I mean, I'm a different... You know, I feel like y'all can relate with the thing... like writing it doesn't... I mean I'm going to write a song tomorrow no matter what. And again, I mean, I love the *Fancy Like* stuff. I love the countryside of my job and I love the people I get to share music with but this is far more important than all that.

Annie: We spent the whole month of April on the podcast talking about prayer. We did a whole series just to like... it's the number one thing our audience, our friends listening said they want to talk about. So we did a whole month. So will you tell me what your life looks like in prayer? When do you pray? What does it look like?

Walker: I describe my prayer life... And honestly, this by the grace of God, because I'm a 3-year-old believer. I've read the Bible two times.

Annie: You've read the Bible two times already?

Walker: Listen-

Annie: Walker. I've read the Bible a time in 35 years.

Walker: I don't understand most of it. Like I would be embarrassed to put a percentage on what... I'm not a good reader.

Annie: That is a very long book.

Walker: Well, I got on one of those like year plan and I've done that. I hit it hard.

Annie: That's impressive.

Walker: Right when I became a believer, I rushed through it.

Annie: Wow. Read the whole thing.

Walker: And then I did a year thing. But look, prayer to me is not as structured I guess. It's most, you know... I don't know. I feel like I'm... For instance, I'm always writing a song.

Annie: In your head?

Walker: Always. And that is my conversation with the Lord. When I'm on my pillow, I'm usually talking to Him on my head. When I wake up, I'm usually just taking the day in my head to Him. When I'm driving my car, when I'm having a conversation that's not going so great or going good, I feel like I'm constantly writing a song with the Lord if that makes any sense.

Annie: In 2016 you were putting your head on your pillow and writing a song and weren't talking to the Lord?

Walker: No. I was a loudmouth atheist. I had read some stuff where I would argue with a believer about facts. I just thought it was all hoax. When we lost Oakleigh, Craig preached at... He did like a little sermon at her grave, and it just made me mad. But I was also thinking, "My wife, you know, somebody gotta say something hopeful, even if I don't believe it."

I mean, that was completely opposite of me. There was no light coming for me. I mean, I even see pictures of me prior to knowing the Lord and there's just this deadness in my eyes. I've talked to some people who can relate but like, I don't know, there's just something different. But that's what prayer... We were talking about devotions with... You know, I'm not a structured person. Like the minute you make anything an appointment with me, it loses the fire.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Walker: Our life lacks structure. We might be screwing out there but yeah, it's a lot of chaos in our house. But I'm a creative cat and when it comes it comes. But like I said, I mean, by the grace of God, I feel like I'm in a continual text chain with the Lord all day.

Craig: That's so great.

Annie: That's good.

Craig: That's so good.

[00:41:48] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friend! Just interrupting this conversation one last time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Brooklinen](#). I love a birthday. Y'all know that. Mine's come in July 7th and I basically celebrate for an entire week if I can.

Well, it's Brooklinen's birthday this month and they're partying and you are invited. For their eighth birthday, the makers of the internet's favorite sheets are giving our friends the gift of savings with their biggest sale of the year. Oh, I'm very interested. This birthday sale is definitely something you're going to want to unwrap. Every Brooklinen product is on sale. We're talking the soft sheets, the luxurious towels and robes, snugly weighted blankets, lavish silk eye masks and pillowcases. There's something for everyone in this sale.

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Sponsor: And I've got one last amazing partner to tell you about, [EveryPlate](#). I know we're all looking to be wise with our money and make our dollars stretch as far as they can. I also know that not all of us, myself included, are experts in the kitchen or love being in the kitchen. No problem. EveryPlate is going to help us with all those things.

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And now back to finish our conversation with Craig and Walker.

[00:44:54] <music>

Annie: What about you, Craig? What's your prayer life look like?

Craig: I mean, I can relate completely with Walker's-

Annie: I like the continuous text chain. That's so good.

Craig: I mean, when you ask the question, I'm like, "I'm always praying." It feels like it's the default in a sense of I don't have a list where it's all written out or anything. But when my eyelids open, I'm like, "Lord, thank you. I need you. Helped me." When I read the scriptures, I do the same thing as Walker. You know, I have a plan I read through. I don't just read it. I'll pray it back.

Annie: Oh, do you know how many times I said, "You said" in my prayers or "You're the one who said."

Walker: Craig taught a class at Redeeming Grace, and I took that from him. I mean, that's just such a freaking fun way to read the Bible is like you're reading it with the Lord. And you're like, "Oh, come on."

Craig: "You're kidding me right now?"

Walker: And you're like, "Yes, that new mercies morning. It's morning and I want some new ones."

Craig: I think that is so like this morning... Sometimes I'll read for a while and I wait until something jumps. Here's the first verse I read. I always start in Proverbs and then go to Psalms and then go to the New Testament and then go to the Old Testament. This one was, "Hope deferred. makes the heart sick but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." Well, that just stopped me right then, and I'm going, "Lord, I've been on the hope deferred place and my heart's been sick, and it's happened..." And I listed all the different places, including business, all that kind of stuff.

But, man, we get to go hang with Annie Downs and do a podcast with a Walker and talk about you. This is a desire fulfilled. And I started praying, "Lord, let it be a tree of life. Let it have fruit for our families, and then fruit for everybody who's listening on this podcast. Let it give life, let our words be life-giving." I didn't even get very far after that. So that would be in my regular reading.

And then for me, I take walks. Long, long walks. And I think that started happening in that part when I was released from ministry, because Sunday afternoons were hard. And I would always go take really long walks, and I just kept that whole pattern. So most days, I'll go walk. And when I'm walking I think about that Psalm. I think it's Psalm 62:8a. Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him, for God is a refuge for us.

So for me, trusting God looks like pouring out whatever's going on and hear in my heart, even if it's nasty. Like I'll just tell Him what I'm struggling with or what's going on and then ask for His help and stuff. But I feel like it's a continual conversation, too and I really relate to that.

Annie: Walker, for our friends listening, that maybe you remind them of their husband-

Walker: Oh, yeah, I've heard that.

Annie: ...where he is, or their brother or their dad, and they've been praying... I mean, I imagine Laney prayed for a long time that you'd become a Christian, right?

Walker: I wasn't a fun husband in that respect for a believer. That was our fight. We didn't have any money so we didn't fight about money. But boy, when we started having kids and she wanted to teach them things, I mean, I would put up a fight. I'd be like, "Hey, I know mom taught you this, but this is where I stand on this." And sometimes Laney would be yelling at me or something and I'd be like, "Did Jesus die so you could yell at me like that. Is that what...?"

Annie: Wow.

Walker: Trust me, I got pretty good at hitting those bullseyes.

Annie: You were a monster.

Walker: I'm ashamed of that but-

Annie: Oh, I don't want you to feel shame for that. I was kidding you.

Walker: No, no, no, no. Trust me, I'm not proud of those moments because it's all beautiful... You know, the way God orchestrated, I wouldn't trade my testimony for a million years. I wouldn't trade the loss of our child for a million years. That's what it took for me to hit my knees and just look somewhere else.

Annie: So what should they pray for their husband or their brother or their dad? When you look back, what did Laney pray that helped?

Walker: Shoot, I mean, Laney was patient. Again, Laney did a remarkable job with alcoholism. She could be naggy but the lines of communication with Laney were always a wide-open highway. When I was ready to talk, she was always ready to listen. And when I wasn't, she would either try to find a way to turn on that faucet or just give up and stay next to me. You know what I'm saying?

Again, Laney made it a point... Like when I bought a Bible, she knew I was hiding it. I walked into Barnes and Noble and I had my head down. I didn't want anybody to know. I didn't want to run into anybody I knew. It was in Brentwood. And I bought a Bible and I put it in the bag and hid it. I'll read it early in the morning and leave it in that bag.

And then when she noticed,—This is a great example of how she treated it—she told the kids, she was like, "Don't say anything to dad. Whatever is going on, let's just pray for him." And I think a lot of her... Again, I wasn't Laney's project. She just loved me.

Also, you know, I think she kind of like... if this makes any sense, it's like my wife, as a believer, adopted me as her husband almost. She knew why I was like I was, she knew where I've been wounded, hurt, she knew why I drank. She could relate in other way. She copes with life in ways that just weren't alcohol. So she was very understanding. Which is the kind of way Craig was. We met each other. We made a relationship. He was not judgmental. As I was vulnerable, he began to understand why Walker is like this this way. Because when you adopt a kid, you're like, "where do you come from? Why are you scared of men?" You know what I'm saying?

Annie: Yeah.

Walker: Like you learn. I think that's kind of how Laney treated me, is if I did come home and didn't know how I came home, she would remember this is what went on when he was a kid. But again, she was patient. I'm pretty sure Laney would tell you she just prayed for some supernatural action to happen. I think at some point Laney had probably given up on the whole she was Jesus, she's going to fix somebody's thing.

Again, I don't think Craig came into my life thinking, "I'm going to make a difference in that guy's life." I can be guilty now as a believer walking up to somebody going, "I'm going to save that guy." No. So it's just pray that the Lord would do something to capture their heart. I don't think Laney would have ever said, "Well, I pray that we'll lose a kid and that Walker would just be utterly wrecked. She wouldn't have prayed that. But like I said, I wouldn't trade it because it got me in a place of need that I never experienced in my life. So if that makes any sense. I know that's a long-winded answer but...

Annie: It's beautiful. What I think is cool about *Glad You're Here* is this is the book that we can put in everybody's graduation gift or get ready for Father's Day-

Walker: Oh, man.

Annie: ...and just go like, "Lord, do it. Do the miraculous thing." Because both of y'all stories are so profound in this book that every man is going to relate to both of you. So what a gift they have created that we can hand to all the men in our lives, the ones who know Jesus and the ones who don't. That's the cool thing about your job is all these dudes who don't know Jesus, no *Fancy Like*, right?

Walker: Right.

Annie: The thing you're wanting to do is what you're getting to do of come for *Fancy Like*, leave with Jesus. Right?

Walker: Yeah.

Annie: And that's what we'll get to do with *Glad You're Here* is put it in their hands. I think the timing is supernatural.

Walker: Yeah, it is.

Annie: Okay, the last question we always ask.

Craig: Let's go.

Annie: We're running out of time, but we got to ask this last question. Is there anything we forgot to say that you want to make sure we say?

Walker: No.

Craig: No, that's been awesome.

Annie: This is great. Y'all, sorry, I cried choking.

Walker: No, it's great.

Annie: Okay, the last question we always ask. We'll start with you, Craig, give Walker one more time because you may know. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what you do for fun.

Craig: Oh.

Annie: Oh.

Craig: We love to travel.

Annie: Oh, yeah?

Craig: Yeah. The family we've hit I think 37 out of the 50 states. We did an RV trip last spring break and went out to the Grand Canyon and all that. We're trying to hit all 50 of them. I'm always planning a trip. On the way over here, I was talking to Laura on the phone going, "Okay, what do you think about... This date is open for everybody including my oldest who's in college. So we're always planning a trip. What's fun for us is traveling and experiencing new places. We love national parks. All of it.

Annie: I've got three states left, but I think I'm going to try this year.

Craig: Wow.

Annie: Iowa. My friend Russell Dickerson, a good buddy of mine is going to play Iowa in September and I was like-

Walker: You're going?

Annie: "Buddy, I'm coming.

Walker: There you go!

Annie: "I got to get to Iowa."

Craig: That's awesome.

Walker: Have you done Hawaii?

Annie: Yeah. I got to do Hawaii and Alaska, which are the hard ones. Now we need to just-

Craig: Some basic ones left. It's like Mississippi.

Annie: I've got West Virginia and Vermont. I can drive there this weekend and be done, right?

Walker: Yeah.

Craig: That's awesome.

Annie: That's a great answer. 37 out of 50. That's very generous of you as a dad to get to let your kids see that much of the country.

Craig: Oh, it's my joy. It really is.

Annie: That's awesome. All right, Walker Hayes because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you. Really just the best thing honestly, Craig knows this, but the greatest thing about all the success for my team and music is just my family. They travel with me.

Annie: Oh my gosh, you're all on the bus.

Walker: And it is life-changing. About two months into the *Fancy Like*, I told my manager I'm going to quit. Because I never saw them. I just left. I went from being home over COVID to just I didn't come home. And you know, the kids that dynamic really messed up the unity in the house. I would come home long enough just to fight with Laney for two days and then go back out. Every phone call the first night on the bus was like, "I'm sorry. It's been a minute. I get out here and it's all about me and then I come home and you're like, "Do the dishes and I don't want to do the dishes.

Annie: That phone call happens in 50 households every day.

Walker: It's crazy. I know. But honestly, my favorite thing is Wednesday night when we just all get on the bus. It's everybody. And not just my family but my bus family, my tour manager, my merch people, the band. We're so tightly knit right now.

Annie: How many buses of y'all?

Walker: We're two buses deep. We're going to get a semi in the fall.

Annie: Walker!

Walker: The growth career-wise is pretty nuts. I don't honestly-

Annie: You're going to wrap that bus with your face. You're wrapping it up?

Walker: Dude, I might wrap it in some Applebee's stuff depending on what they'll pay me.

Annie: Listen, Applebee's owes you a lot. I mean, they brought back the shake because of you.

Walker: The shake. We changed the menu.

Annie: Walker, that is the weirdest gift of the Lord.

Walker: I know.

Annie: You changed a restaurant.

Walker: Dude, I have a drawer in my house with gift cards. That's what you're getting for-

Annie: I'm ready. I'm ready.

Walker: But that's my favorite is just... I mean, I love kids. Man, I love our kids. And I love Laney. Laney is just.. she's the best. I love having her out.

Annie: What a gift! I mean, you're both real generous dads and I have a real generous dad who has made me who I am. So you all are doing-

Walker: That's awesome.

Craig: Awesome.

Annie: You're doing a good thing. Well done, gents. Well, I can't wait for people to read the book and get to know y'all there too. Like they got to know you here. That was real kind of y'all to do this today.

Walker: No, thank you. This is crazy.

Craig: Thank you for endorsing the book. You're on the back.

Annie: Oh my gosh, of course, yeah. Me and my good friend Hoda there on the back. Just two of your girls. Just two of your girls.

Walker: I love that.

Craig: I love it. Thank you so much.

Walker: I was telling you earlier, yeah, everywhere People are like... I'm like, "Do you like the book?" And they're like, "Yeah. But Annie Down read your book?" I'm like, "Yeah, she totally did." And we never met till today.

Annie: That's right. It's a good book. I can't wait for people to read it.

[00:58:44] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, aren't they just the best? Oh my gosh, I could not have loved that conversation more. I mean, already a fan of Walker, huge new fan of Craig. I just am thrilled to get to introduce them to y'all and for y'all to get to read this book. So be sure to grab your copy of *Glad You're Here*. And follow Walker Hayes and Craig Cooper on social media. Tell them thanks so much for being on the show.

If you need anything else from me, I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that's how you can find me. And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same.

Today what sounds fun to me is our team is heading out in just a couple of minutes to go see the Braves World Series trophy in Nashville. I cannot wait. I brought Braves shirts for everybody. It's going to be great. So what sounds fun to me is seeing that trophy.

Y'all have a great week. We'll see you back here on Thursday talking kitchen stuff, and live with the lazy genius herself, our friend Kendra Adachi. See you guys then. Y'all have a great week.