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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I am your host Annie F. Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today. I am back. Oh, I hope y'all loved the Hall of Fun series in July as much as I did, as much as the guest did. I love getting texts from our guests when their show came out about how many of y'all were reaching out and telling them how much you enjoyed hearing that conversation. That is my Hall of Fun.

Now, if you go to my Instagram, if you go to the That Sounds Fun podcast Instagram, you can fill out your Hall of Fun. Do make sure you grab that graphic, fill out which shows were your favorite over the last nine years. Who would be in your hall of fun for That Sounds Fun episodes. We would love to see it. We've had the most fun sharing those.

I'm back in the office this week after my summer Sabbath. We have had a great week already back together and we have got a great show in store for you today.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I gotta tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Athletic Greens](#). I don't know about y'all but if you're getting back into your routine after some vacation time like me, you want to make sure you're incorporating all the daily nutrients you need into your rhythms.

AG1 by Athletic Greens is the way to go. With AG1, you can get the daily nutrients you need without taking a bunch of different things. It is the healthiest thing you can do in under a minute. You just mix one scoop of powder in cold water once a day. Every scoop is filled with 75 vitamins, minerals, and Whole Foods-sourced ingredients of the highest quality that give us major benefits like gut and mood support and boosted energy and even healthier-looking skin, hair, and nails.

And it supports your immune system. Listen, those single-serving travel packs, I took them with me everywhere in July. It can just be thrown in your purse or carry-on when you're on the go. It makes it so easy for a busy schedule or for traveling as I was doing. You don't have to set a reminder to order it or worry about running out because AG1 is delivered like clockwork every month. So it is super easy to make it a daily habit.

If you're looking for an easier way to take supplements, AG1 is giving you a free one-year supply of vitamin D and five of those free travel packs with your first purchase. Y'all, they are amazing. I love them. They went out of the country, out of the state. They went everywhere with me. So go to athleticgreens.com/soundsfun. That's athleticgreens.com/soundsfun. Check it out.

Intro: Today on the show I get to talk with my friend, Granger Smith. You are going to love getting to know him and his story. After 24 years touring as an award-winning, platinum-selling country music singer-songwriter, Granger chose to leave the music business to pursue a future in ministry. This summer marks his last tour as he continues to step into teaching opportunities and pursue a seminary degree.

But his story is marked with a lot of grief too. Today we talk about his new book, *Like a River*, which is his journey through losing his three-year-old son, River, back in 2019 and the grief and guilt, and even addiction he's walked through to get to this point.

In my life, this week marks one year since we lost my nephew TJ so it is not lost on me God's timing to remind me and all of us of what He can do with grief and loss. It's a story none of us want, but we are often faced with. And Granger's story felt like the exact right one for this week. This conversation is emotional. I cried just about the entire thing. And it is heavy at times. But it's also hope-filled and a reminder of what God can do with our grief, what He is capable of restoring and redeeming.

And a little heads up. If your MiniBFF is listening along, this may be one that you want to hear before you invite your kids into the... everyone faces grief, so it's great for kids to talk about grief. But Granger gets very detailed about losing his son and about the process of his family life after that. And I just think it's a grown-up conversation that you'd want to hear before your kids hear it as well.

So here is my conversation with my friend Granger Smith.

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Annie: Granger, this is coming out the week that your book releases. And the part of my story, I don't know if you know, is my nephew died last year this week. So we are at one year exactly of him passing away.

Granger: Oh, wow.

Annie: And I thought, what a perfect episode to have you on because we share the loss aversion of child loss and family loss. So as I was reading your book yesterday, I was like, Well, I was ready to talk about you becoming a pastor. I did not know how deep this... I mean I knew your story because we all, you know, lived at it particularly here in Nashville and all the people we share. But will you kind of tell me why in the world did you want to write about this, Granger? Why do you want to write about the loss of your son?

Granger: That's a great question. I think my best answer is, especially over the last four or so years, I have been trusting more than ever, as I feel deep in the spirit, as I feel like my prayer life is somewhat healthy. It's never-

Annie: Right. Certainly.

Granger: I feel like at that point, I could trust more what my desires are.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Granger: Because He will give us the desires of our heart. Not so much like we might think He gives us whatever we want. I believe He gives us, God gives us our wants. He gives us new wants. So I have begun over the last half-decade to further identify, Oh, this is a strange desire that I cannot extinguish. I can't stop thinking about this. I'm a little bit obsessed by this thought. Nothing else is going to get rid of this thought. There's been a lot of things like that.

And writing this book was definitely one of those new desires.

Annie: Really?

Granger: And I just thought, Maybe I should write this book. No. And then the next day, "No, I think I should write this book." And then it's like, "No, probably not. No." It starts to get worse and worse. I feel like God puts heat on me and He goes, "Oh, you don't have to write a book but I'm gonna keep this pressure on you. If you can withstand that pressure..." It's almost what it feels like. Really, that's the beginning.

So then I called my brother, who's my manager, and I said, "I think I need to write a book." And he goes, "I would reach out to some author friends and just see what the next step is." And the next step ended up being find a literary agent. So in my life, it's always been, Let's just take the next step. We don't have to think about 10 steps forward. Let's just think about, what do we do next?

Annie: And you found Esther, who's one of the best literary agents. So well done. She's amazing. I love her.

Granger: Yeah, she is. She is.

Annie: I hate asking you to retell this story of River. I'm sorry to do that because it feels like... I don't want to put you in pain. But-

Granger: You could have also said that by saying, "I don't want you to tell the story. I don't want you to have to tell the story again but I'm making you tell the story again because... Do you know what I'm saying?"

Annie: I know. I'm making you tell the story again. You're right, Granger. I'm sorry.

Granger: You should say, It's my podcast and you will do what I ask you to do.

Annie: It's not that. It's not that. I just want you to hear me say that I am holding with you that you're having to retell a terrible story every time you talk about this book. But also you get to honor your son. So will you tell us a little bit about what the book is about?

Granger: Yeah. Let me say this. I don't mean anything by this question-

Annie: Sure.

Granger: ...but how much have you read of it?

Annie: I read the whole thing. I read it yesterday.

Granger: Wow.

Annie: Tapped in everything.

Granger: That's impressive. Okay. Okay. Well, thank you for that. That's amazing. What's interesting is my editor, Kyle-

Annie: Used to be my agent.

Granger: Oh, did he?

Annie: Yeah.

Granger: Oh, that's amazing. I love Kyle. So Kyle, just two days ago, he texted me and he said... Because I did a... they sent me a copy, the official hardback copy, and I unboxed it and put it on my Instagram. And he texted me after that. He said, "I watched your unboxing." And he said, "For the first time, I realized that this book is not so much about the loss of your son as it is about the rebirth of your soul."

Annie: That's true. Yeah, that seems true.

Granger: And I knew that but at that point, it became apparent that maybe not everyone will know that, at least not at first, including the editor himself. After all of the editing that we've gone through with this book, he's just now seeing the real meaning, the real story behind it. So I think it's interesting maybe to even start off by saying, that River... I lost my son River, and that was the catalyst of writing the book and that was the beginning of the story. And it's actually Chapter one is that-

Annie: Oh, man, like the first three pages are his death.

Granger: But that's a pretty good indication that if the first three pages give away the story, then that's definitely not the climax of the story. So the rest of the book, the other 200 pages after that it's really the aftermath and what happened after that. Yeah, so I think it's important.

Because I think a lot of people might start to read the book just because they're like, "I want to hear about the loss of a son." But my hope is that they'll realize that ultimately that's not what the book is about. So that's the beginning of what I'll say.

But in 2019 in June, so four years ago from when you and I are doing this interview, we lost my son River. He drowned in our swimming pool, in my backyard at home while I was in the backyard with him. I have three kids. So I did at the time. I have four now. But I had three kids. The two older kids were with me playing in the backyard. It was on June 4, 2019, about 7:30 p.m. The night before I was actually going to fly to Nashville for the CMT award show.

Amber, my wife was inside, taking a shower and kind of getting ready to wind the kids down for bed. The boys were playing water gunfight and my daughter and I were playing gymnastics, which she loved to do at the time. Texas is just beautiful in June. The grass is green, and the sky is blue and the clouds are puffy and white and the weather's not quite too hot yet.

She was doing handstand and I was holding her ankles as she was trying to get her form perfect on the handstand. And I thought to myself, "It's a little bit quiet, where's River?" I knew that they were playing water gun fight. And now this part of the story, I still don't know exactly how much time went by from when I saw Riv last, but it could have been as short as 30 seconds in as much as maybe two minutes. But we were all there in the backyard.

Annie: Yeah, because you say in the book you asked a lot, "Where's River?" if it got quiet because he was always getting himself... And he sounds like a super fun, funny kid.

Granger: Yeah, he was a fun kid. He was super athletic and outgoing. We lived in the country. So there was no busy street or anything. Our pool was fenced and gated

and had the child lock on it, the kind that you have to pull up for it to unclick, and then the gate opens. So he couldn't get in there. At least that's what we thought for the three years prior to this event.

But when it got quiet, I thought, "Where is River? And I turned around and I just had this feeling 20 feet behind me in a swimming pool, I looked into the pool, then I saw him in there. And he was face down and I just... that moment for me and that sight, it still just feels like it didn't happen. It feels surreal. Because your brain... When something like that happens to you, when you try to process that kind of information, your brain, because it's so unthinkable, tries to give you a better suggestion of what might have happened or how it might have happened.

Annie: Wow.

Granger: And when it comes in when it can't figure that out, it comes up empty and kind of repeats. So what happens, at least, to me is I've thought about this a lot. It's just like a spinning wheel on a computer. So you kind of freeze and the wheel starts spinning and you can't really comprehend any kind of logic besides just basic motor functions.

So I ran to the pool. I jumped over the fence. It was closed. The gate was closed. And he was in there. Later we found the water gun floating because he was obviously trying to fill it up. My son Lincoln was gone. He had left. We still don't know exactly what Lincoln was doing. And we've talked about it countless times. We don't try to push it.

But when I got to him I thought that I was going to flip him over and he was going to be coughing and scared and terrified and I was gonna go, "River, what are you doing in here? How'd you get in here? You know, buddy, you know you can never get in here by yourself." But that never happened. Instead, his face was blue and his eyes were open and rolling around and he was limp like a rag doll. I was in complete shock and took him out of the pool and started CPR, which I didn't really know what CPR was.

Annie: Oh my gosh, reading that part where you're like, "How do I count?"

Granger: It's like I'd seen stuff from the movies. I know that CPR is important, and everyone should learn it. But I didn't really... I just had basic knowledge. So I also didn't have my phone on me. Which, you know, we always have our phones on us, but not in situations like that. I didn't. So my daughter was with me, and she ran to get my wife, Amber.

So Amber comes out, and then I had to make her go back in because she didn't have a phone either. So then we call 911. We live in the country. So that took about 10 minutes for the emergency services to arrive. And that was just too long.

They were able to get his heartbeat back but the brain damage was too significant. I didn't really know any of this. I could say that for years in hindsight, but I didn't really know. I still had hope. When I got the heartbeat back, I thought, "Well, okay, you know, we really dodged a bullet here. We're going to get him back in. It's going to be a long process. I thought maybe. But I didn't know that just 48 hours after that they would officially call him brain dead.

Annie: I mean, what are you praying in the middle of all that? Are you praying? Is it just like... do you remember?

Granger: Yeah. It was the prayers then on ground zero where, Oh, God. No, please. Jesus, save this boy. Help us? Oh, no, this can't... Please, God, help him breathe. Help him breathe. It was just very basic.

Annie: Because when I'm thinking about that, Granger, and we're gonna.. to fast forward four years, the thing that a lot of us have seen recently on social media is you're leaving country music for now. You're leaving the road, and you're stepping into full-time ministry. So from four years ago begging God to save your child, now you're giving your life to Him in ministry. How is that? How is that the change?

Granger: Well, as you know, that's really why I had to write an entire book. Because it was a day-by-day, week-by-week process. So much of that process was me getting the world stripped away from me. Because immediately after we lost River, I dove into the attempted healing of myself. It's like, okay, what can I... I'm not good. I'm in a really bad place. Our family is at the brink. This is the moment when families just break apart.

My kids were there. They saw something with their little brother that no child should ever have to see. And they did. They saw it. They were there. My wife lost her little baby. Where do we go from here? I'm in a bad spot. So I thought, I better learn everything I can about healing and about fixing a family. I better learn how to do that.

So that was what I set off to do. I set off to read and wake up a little bit earlier and monitor every bite of food that I had, just to make sure that I was as good as I could be to be the rock of the family. And all of those ideas were slowly crumbling. It was a house built on shifting sand.

Annie: That's one of the best parts of the book. I can't wait for people to read it, Granger, because it is like, "I tried this, that wasn't it. I tried this, that wasn't it. I mean, it's just so honest. The journey is so honest.

Granger: I remember writing and just almost thinking, if someone was not a witness to these things, they would have thought I was just making this stuff up.

Annie: I mean, the fact you had to go back on the road and start doing shows like that month, right? Wasn't it in June that you went back and started doing shows again? I mean, people wouldn't believe that part if it wasn't documented, right? I mean, those first shows, what do you remember? Do you remember doing the shows?

Granger: I remember specifically... definitely the first one. Because I remember how terrified I was to show emotion. Maybe I was gonna break down on the stage. That would be terrible. That's going to be on everyone's Twitter feed. Do I just try to act normal or is that weird? Wouldn't it be weird if I didn't say anything about River? I sure didn't want to. I didn't want to bring it up. That would just possibly cause the train wreck to happen. But wouldn't it be weird if I didn't? Would I look like just that emotionless father?

And all of that, you know, kind of wrapped into the identity that I was carrying around with me that as I walked on the stage, everyone was going to be thinking, Ah, there's the guy that was in the backyard as his son drowned. How terrible do you have to be as a dad to fail at the one job that you're here to do—keep them alive till they're 18. That's the kind of the joke that everyone says, you know.

Like, you know, my job as a parent is just keep them alive till they're 18. Well, I failed at that. What do I do now? How can I possibly face anyone? How can I have any kind of credibility as a musician or anything if I've failed the easiest task that any parent could have? I mean, parents have done this for millions of years and I failed at it. Whatever. Not millions. But you know what I mean.

Annie: Yes, yes.

Granger: So that's what I was carrying around. Now, I will say, and I kind of mentioned this in the book that I was relieved to walk out on the stage and see a lot more sympathy on faces. There were a lot of tears and people wearing the Red River shirts that we sold for the hospital benefit. That helped. That helped.

But the irony, I guess, in that too, is that I also... I didn't really want to see that either. I didn't really want to see the red shirts. I didn't want to see people sad. So I didn't know what I wanted. And there was no right or wrong answer. I think I just wanted it to all go away really.

Annie: Yeah, that's what our family has experienced in the grief as well as like, it's still... I mean, I'm sorry, I'm just so teary about it but-

Granger: It's okay.

Annie: ...talking to another family who knows, I haven't done very much in last year. Sorry. So it is this like, man, we don't want this to be our story. This is not the story that you want to carry. As I was going to bed last night, I was thinking about talking to you and I was like, The thing that I feel is we don't ever get away from this. We don't ever get away from this now.

So whether you're on stage, or whether you're pastoring a church, or whether you're writing a book, or whether you're at Buches getting gas, this is your story forever. How do you reconcile that internally? How do you reconcile that no matter where I go, even if no one knows, it's the story I carry of the loss of River? How do you reconcile that with yourself and with God?

Granger: That is probably the segue for the gospel really.

Annie: Aah.

Granger: Because I had to learn. And part of writing the book is, and this is just an idea. I don't know if it's true or not, but it's like, I want people to listen to my story so that they can advance quicker than I did. So they don't have to go through all the meaningless trash that I did to end up in the place that I needed to be all along.

Annie: Wow.

Granger: So I kind of want people to use this and just bypass. Stop trying to define yourself with the world and stop trying to find identity in what you do or what has happened to you in your past. Instead, it's Jesus that defines your identity. I could say that.

Annie: No, it's good.

Granger: It took me a long time to completely unpack that. In one aspect of that, for instance, I felt guilty. Extremely guilty. And there's a sense that I still do in the sense that people's told me, "Hey, this is not your fault. You were in the backyard. I understand you're saying that you're watching the kids. But it's not your fault. It could happen to anyone. It was an accident." They could say that all they want. I'm not hearing it. I'm not believing it.

Okay, thanks, thank you but I don't believe it because I was responsible. I am a father. I was in the backyard with a swimming pool and a three-year-old. And regardless of the fence or the gate, it's still on me. And you can't, just by being nice, take that away by saying I shouldn't feel guilty. So I had to reconcile that.

The only way, the only offer we have as humans to be reconciled of the guilt like that is the gospel. Because the world says that we need to internalize our identity. And no one can tell us, including ourselves, what we are. We go out and we get it. We go out, we strive. We achieve. We erase our past. We define our future. We, we, we, I, I, I.

But the Bible says opposite. The Bible says, You are guilty. You are a sinner. You are not worthy of grace. And God says, "But because of my great love for you, as I send my Son into the world to cover your guilt, to cover your shame, to cover your sin, your worthlessness, to cover you, out of great love, because you are my child. And I've redeemed you. I have restored you. I have adopted you as my own son, and you are now forgiven. Not because of anything you could have done but because of what I have done for you. You are now declared not guilty. You are now declared worthy. You are now declared holy.

And we sit in that we go, thank you, God, because I'm not worthy. And I am guilty, and I am a sinner. But you have had mercy on me because of your great love for me. That's the only answer for a situation like mine. My identity is wrapped up in what I have done or not done. And God goes, "No, you are mine. And nothing will stop that from... nothing will let you slip through my fingers. You are mine." And that is an amazing idea of peace and rest that the gospel provides for us.

[00:26:54] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to share about one of our amazing partners, [Reliefband](#). Okay, isn't nausea the absolute worst feeling ever? Whether you're prone to motion sickness, fighting morning sickness or getting nauseous from a migraine or you're going through chemo, Reliefband is the number one FDA-cleared anti-nausea wristband that has been clinically proven to quickly relieve and effectively prevent nausea and vomiting. And you can even use your HSA and FSA dollars to get a Reliefband. Okay.

Reliefband literally works. Y'all, whether you need everyday nausea relief or just occasional care from nausea because you're heading on a road trip, or a plane or a boat that was made this summer, their patented technology makes feeling sick a thing you don't have to deal with.

You can skip the nausea pills that make you groggy and exhausted because Reliefband is legitimately a band you wear on your wrist to give you relief from nausea so your trip isn't ruined, neither is your day. Plus, you get to change the intensity depending on how you're feeling to make it stronger or weaker, which I think is brilliant.

So if you want the band that actually works at relieving your nausea, check out Reliefband. Right now we've got an exclusive offer just for our That Sounds Fun friends. If you go to reliefband.com and use the promo code THATSOUNDSFUN, you'll receive 20% off plus free shipping. So head to reliefband.com and use the promo code THATSOUNDSFUN for 20% off plus free shipping.

That link and pretty much every other link you could ever hope for are in the show notes below or in Friday's AFD Week in Review email. So be sure to check those out.

Sponsor: And one more amazing partner I got to tell you about, Nutrafol Okay, are y'all seeing how Nutrafol is everywhere. It is literally everywhere. And millions of Americans experience thinning hair. In fact, it's super normal. It's just not talked about a lot, especially among women. If you're among them, you are not alone, there's a solution you can trust to deliver results.

Nutrafol is the number one dermatologist-recommended hair growth supplement clinically shown to improve your hair growth, thickness, and visible scalp coverage. It supports healthy hair growth by targeting the five root causes of thinning: stress, hormones, environment, nutrition, metabolism. Yep, we have all of those. And Nutrafol addresses all of them through whole body health.

I love that Nutrafol offers three different physician-created formulas. They all support women through all stages of life, including postpartum and menopause. So no matter what season you're in, they've got us covered. With the natural drug-free medical grade ingredients, they're bringing us the most reliable results.

In a clinical study, 86% of women reported improved hair growth after six months. 3,000-plus top doctors and stylists recommend Nutrafol as an effective and high-quality solution for healthier hair. You can grow thicker, healthier hair and support our show by going to Nutrafol.com and enter the promo code THATSOUNDSFUN to save \$10 off your first month's subscription.

This offer is only available to US customers for a limited time. Plus free shipping on every order. So get \$10 off at Nutrafol.com promo code, THATSOUNDSFUN.

Okay, now back to our conversation with Granger.

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Annie: The sad thing that happened, I don't know if it was sad for you, the thing that we all watched happen as we were watching your story is the internet being sympathetic and horrible to you. So when there's these outside voices being horrible to you about your son's death, how did you let the Gospel be louder? How do you let the Gospel be louder than Twitter and let the Gospel be louder than the horrible things people said in that season? And maybe they still do. I don't know. I'm not on Twitter. It was too big for me. I got off.

Granger: Well, hey, good for you. And that's probably good advice for a lot of people. It's probably pretty good advice to just stay off of social media, especially if you've had something like this happen, or if you're a little sensitive to that. Now, it took me a while to unpack what that could mean. I'll try to do it right here. It kind of looks like this. Through an extreme loss, we gain a new sense of longing for heaven.

Annie: Yeah, that's true in my story, yeah.

Granger: We get a new mortality sense that we are exiles here on this planet. That there is another home that is beckoning us. And death, especially to a loved one close to us, has that effect upon us. In a good way. In a good way, it creates this new longing, like, oh, everything in my bones is longing just to be home where there is no death and there are no tears and there is no darkness and we're in the presence of our Savior. I just long for that.

So that longing, a subset of that idea is a desire to tell other people about the gospel so that they could be home too, right?

Annie: Yeah.

Granger: A subset of that is having compassion for people that are angry on social media.

Annie: That's good.

Granger: It's very difficult to get from point A to point F, however many steps you got to jump to get from the gospel to you're okay with people criticizing you on social media. But we have to, especially as Christians, we have to see those people that are evil and hateful, and angry with us for any reason, we have to see them as just people outside of Christ right now. And if they only knew Christ, they could feel peace and rest and they could have this longing for home like we do. Not because we're better than them but just because we are in a relationship with Christ. So we want to think of them as a new missionary field.

Annie: That's very generous of you, Granger.

Granger: I'm not saying this in some way that I'm good at it, or saying I'm a pro at this. I'm just saying that's the goal. That's how we get from A to Z here is we got to look at them as they are a mission field. And we're not going to help anything by rebuking them or cussing them out or rejecting them. The best thing we could do is just say, "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry you feel this way. I love you and I want to talk with you offline if I can."

If you could get to that point where you truly feel like it, then you are starting to become the image of Jesus. You're starting to be what our Savior... What separates ourselves in so many other religions is that our Savior was rejected and tortured and brutally hurt. And yet He said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." That's our Savior. If we could just start becoming more like that, then Twitter is just not that big of a deal.

Annie: Yeah. Listen, that is the truth. When did you guys start having fun again? Did y'all laugh that week? Was it a year? How do you parent other kids and start having fun again in the midst of such a loss?

Granger: I think you kind of said it right with parenting other kids because we realized quickly, like within hours that these kids, Lincoln and London, they deserve to have a full life. They deserve to live like other children and have fun and enjoy themselves and not be held down by grieving parents. We can't do that. We know that that is a huge disservice to them.

So we're going to have to sometimes fight against the current and as parents and as an entire family... because I say Amber and I, but it's really, you know, my mom, and my brothers and our close friends, we're all involved in this. And when one person is heavily grieving, the other person might not be. So we have to learn to take advantage of that. And that one person can't drag the whole family down. We support them. But my wife and we're rarely on the same grief schedule. We're rarely-

Annie: That was fascinating when you wrote about that, the different grief schedules, and how that plays out.

Granger: Yeah. We were rarely, if ever. Both of us were on rock bottom, or both of us were feeling pretty good. Grief comes in waves. So you're going to be in the trough one day and in the crest another day. But realizing that you are traveling on the wave is so important.

So we wanted to be able to provide our kids because they're so resilient, we wanted to provide them with as normal life as possible. The problem comes when you laugh. And sometimes you laugh on accident because something is legitimately funny. And then you think, how dare you laugh right now? How dare you, the person who lost their child five days ago, laugh at this silly joke? What kind of sick person are you? Well, that is a lie. And that is that guilt that is a thief to steal your joy.

What we had to learn through that is that grief and joy can coexist at the same time. There's nothing wrong with laughing just like there's nothing wrong with crying. Whatever emotion you're feeling at the time, none of it takes away from the love of the child that you lost. I say child but grandmother, mother, brother, sister, whatever.

Annie: Sure.

Granger: None of it takes away from the love. They can coexist.

Annie: Yeah. Last year, I remember right after... because it wasn't my child because it was my sister's and because I have the public life, there was a real balance of when does Annie tell that her nephew died. So when it was finally right for me to tell, it was about a week after. And then my next post was, I need y'all to give me permission to have fun, because I'm balancing grief and suffering at the same time. I've got this fear that the internet is going to be nasty if I'm just living my life and not publicly grieving constantly.

It was a teachable moment for me and also for our friends on the other side of my work to be like, Hey, listen, trust me we're grieving. And also, I can't live at the bottom of the ocean. I have to come up. You have to let me be at the crest of the wave or I just can't do the internet at all. If you can't let me be both, I can't do the internet at all.

That was probably one of the most profound lessons for me in that loss of losing TJ was we're still glad to be together as a family. We're still enjoying like... Christmas still happened and we still had a butter board competition. We still and we grieve that he wasn't with us. Is that just the rest of our lives? You're three years ahead of me so...

Granger: Well, you are thinking a lot of right things. And I say that in a way because I know a lot of families that don't. There are families that create a shrine out of the bedroom of the child that they lost. And it's like a memorial and it's nothing has changed and like the mother is gonna get mad if anyone even goes in the room. And then I've seen families that delete the kid. They're gone. There's no pictures.

There's no more bedrooms. They're gone. We probably did something right in the middle. We moved. We moved from that completely.

Annie: Did you move to all the way different town? Will you talk about that part? Did you stay in the community, but moved houses?

Granger: The first thing we did was we moved twice. We moved the first time just to get out. My brother who has a similar story to you, Annie, with his kind of situation, he was grieving the loss of his nephew and they were so close but he was also trying to comfort his brother and be strong for him. And there was a sense that he had of and it's a wrong sense that I don't know quite how deep this grief is, as my brother does because it was his son. And I don't know as much because I'm just the uncle. And that was a wrong sense because everyone grieves on their own levels. And it has nothing to do with the title that you have of aunt or mother or father. It's not that.

So we moved into my brother's house. He was gracious enough because he was selling it anyway. He was like, "Hey, just come on in." We lived there for less than a year. That was only four miles from our original house. And then we moved again, and kind of completely started over in the new town, like you said.

But the holidays and the birthdays, and the day that they died, all of those anniversaries are very difficult. So what I say to people, kind of to your point about when do you have fun, I just say, especially that first year, do whatever feels right. Whether Christmas time, maybe that means you're going to Destin, Florida this year and you're gonna-

Annie: Totally out of the norm.

Granger: Sunshine, white sand, you're gonna get an Airbnb, and the whole family's gonna go. There is no fireplace with empty stockings. It's all different. Or continue the traditions and laugh through it, cry through it. But I think my point is, whatever you feel like doing is not wrong at that time, especially that first year. But it will be normal again. You will have a Christmas that's full of joy again. You will celebrate birthdays again and you won't feel like there's constantly this anchor dragging you down.

You never move on from a loss. But you can move forward and you could freely move forward and you could freely have joy. I think we need loss in our lives because it just gives us such a good perspective. No one wants to hear that when they're on ground zero and that's okay.

I'm coming up now on 10 years from losing dad. I don't think as much of like I used to think, "Oh, Dad would have loved this restaurant. Ah." Now I think, "Man, Dad

would love this restaurant. And I like being here because I feel like dad would love this restaurant. There's a great difference between those two feelings. It only comes with experience and time down the road.

Annie: I like that. I think my counselor said this to me, that time is an unreliable healer without God. It is a healer but it's just not reliable. But time will heal way better with God.

Granger: That is so good. You could add any analogy without God.

Annie: It's not gonna heal right. That's right.

Granger: Even therapy. Therapy is unreliable without God.

Annie: Yes, that is exactly right. That's exactly right.

[00:43:27] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to share about another amazing partner, [FabFitFun](#). Okay, y'all, I love FabFitFun boxes. I always forget what it's on the way and then I get such a fun surprise of new beauty products and fun accessories in the mail. As a FabFitFun member, you get exclusive access to shop thousands of curated products from top lifestyle products and brands for up to 70% off. No joke.

The box is not full of sample sizes, low-quality products, or discontinued items, which has made me nuts about other subscription boxes in the past. Your FabFitFun box and mine has name brand full-size products of your old favorites, new brands, and others you've always wanted to try at a discounted price that you won't find anywhere else.

How do they do that? Well, with over a million members, FabFitFun is able to offer up early access and exclusive drops and steep discounts from brands on the most sought-after products. I have found some of my favorite products from my FabFitFun box.

And it makes a great gift too. I gotta tell you right now I am living for these little like disks that you put at the bottom of your shower that came in my FabFitFun box that makes the whole shower smell like mint and eucalyptus. Oh my gosh, it's awesome. It's awesome. I would have never known without my FabFitFun box.

So y'all go sign up at [FabFitFun.com/thatsoundsfun](https://www.fabfitfun.com/thatsoundsfun). Customize your box and get access to discounts of up to 70% of brands like Fenty and Free People and Our

Place, just to name a few. And if you're not in love with this season's options, take the credit to shop their exclusive flash sales of up to 70% and save on the biggest name brands out there.

If you joined FabFitFun as a new seasonal member right now, you'll also get 20% off your membership. So your first box is only \$47.99 for like \$300 worth of goodies in each box. Y'all, you've got to. You've got to. But you got to do it while supplies last. FabFitFun boxes always sell out. So join FabFitFun today and save at FabFitFun.com/thatsoundsfun. FabFitFun.com/thatsoundsfun.

And before we get back to our conversation with Granger, I just want to thank you for listening and being part of this big group of friends around here. Y'all, we are so grateful to get to have conversations like this, even if I can't stop crying, listening, or recording it. But it just means so much to get to have these deep conversations, and that y'all are with us and share them with your people. It just means a ton.

And I want to tell you this fall and for the rest of 2023, we've got some really special things planned. As you know, I'll be living in New York City for October and November, and that will bring some fun things to the show. And we also have a few series we've built in.

They're literally just responses to the most requested topics that y'all are asking for whether it's through email or comments on Instagram, or when I saw you at the tour in June. We are building the shows that y'all are asking for. We've got some deep spiritual conversations coming and we have some very fun ones coming too and a lot of surprises as we head toward 2024, which is the 10th anniversary year of the That Sounds Fun podcast, which I cannot believe, we're going to be going new places together, but with the same heart and don't worry, same host. So make sure you're subscribed to the podcast so you don't miss a thing.

We'll let you know who's coming up on the show each week in the AFD Week in Review that hits your inboxes on Fridays. So make sure you're signed up for that too.

And now let's get back and finish up this conversation with Granger.

[00:46:55] <music>

Annie: You talked about kind of the button pushing on you to write this book? Was the button pushing on you to go into ministry before you lost River? Was he a catalyst for this? When did the button start pushing of like... because you are a very good country singer and you are very fun to watch on stage. I mean, I've been a fan of your music for a long time. You're great at what you've been doing.

Granger: Thank you. Thank you.

Annie: So the push to go to ministry, was that before, during? What's the...?

Granger: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. No chance. Not even an inkling. I was loving it. On June 3rd, I could say, and including into June 4th of 2019, up until that point, I loved it. Of course, it had its toll. You know, the touring life is a grind. But I loved it. I loved it. I loved making music and new albums and new tours and experiencing all new cities and fans. There was no absolutely... nothing in me that wanted to slow down ever.

And after that, though, especially that first tour right after, it never felt the same. And I found myself just wanting to get through it. Everything was just a grind and just grueling. Nothing mattered. It felt like it was meaningless. And in a way, it was. I got over that. I didn't just stay in that meaningless world. And that's definitely not the reason that I ended touring because that would be an easy cop-out. No, I just never felt good, so I just left.

I would much prefer to say that the draw from God into more of a ministry role was so great, and so bright and so beautiful and so enticing that even the love that I had for music and touring couldn't compete with that new passion in my heart. So it was a slow burn (no pun intended). Slow burn. But God did restore touring and I did love it again.

I knew that I loved it when COVID hit and it went away and I missed it. And I thought, Oh, how much I would just give for a normal tour again to be in a county fair with no mask. And I knew then, Oh, I do love this. I do love the camaraderie of my band. But through sanctification, which is really after a rebirth, you start feeling things in your life that need to be stripped away. And they kind of fall away like scales on a fish. And as the scales are falling away, certain things in music started really pressing on me.

The first thing that happened was my record label. I was with a fantastic record label, BMG, loved everybody there. We had great worldly success at that label. I really started feeling sanctified about putting out another single because the kinds of a timeline came up with the record label words like, "Okay, it's time for new album. It's time for new single."

And when that happens, that means I gotta get on the road and I gotta go, and I got to talk to all the radio personnel and I got to tell them how much I love this new single and why they should play it, and take them to dinner and then play a bunch

of shows for them. And it kind of starts the cycle over and then I put an album and then I support the album with the tour.

And I was just like, "I do not have the endurance to do that. Because now I was really interested in my podcast, I was really interested in these new speaking engagements that I had. And to be able to do both at the same time just seemed overwhelming. So I thought, I think I need to back away from the record label. My brother Tyler was like, "What? What? No one does that. It's a perfectly good label. People would die for this opportunity. You're just wanting to turn it in."

I couldn't reconcile it. I just felt so overwhelmed. I couldn't sleep at night, I just thought... and I know now that was God just sanctifying me with His burner finger going, "Let it go. Let it go. I have greater things for you." Now, that's something I didn't truly understand." I'm starting to better understand it now. I think it'll take decades to really unpack it, but God goes, "I have a promise for you of better things if you trust, if you surrender. I have greater things for you. Let it go."

And those greater things. It doesn't mean wealth or success or even worldly happiness. It could just mean peace, rest, grace, love. Those things are greater than any kind of worldly success. So the record label was the first thing to go. Several months went by, I felt great. And then I started feeling the burn again. This time on the touring itself. So here we are letting the next thing go.

Annie: So it looks like going to seminary, right? Aren't you starting seminary?

Granger: I'm in seminary now. Yeah. And now I know through seminary just how much time that takes. That there wouldn't have been time for other stuff anyway, because there's just so much reading.

Annie: Right. Right. That's right. That's right. You got time to write books and read books. That's about it for a while. So one of my last questions I'd love to ask you is we're thinking about... I'm thinking about my sister and her husband, I'm thinking about my friends who lost a child in the Covenant shooting. There are so many of our friends listening who have lost children in their lives that are adjacent like me. You're right. My pain is very real. Clearly, I've cried this whole episode. But what do parents need from the other adults in the story?

Granger: That's a great question. So you're thinking other adults that are outside of this scenario into-

Annie: Yeah. It's not my child. It's my nephew or my friend's kids or, you know?

Granger: That's a great question. And I think it probably should be talked about more. Sometimes it's going to depend on how far you are from ground zero. Are we talking a week? Are we talking three months? Are we talking five years? Because that answer changes.

Because in five years, I'm going to come in there to that family and I'm gonna say, Hey, we're gonna make some changes. We're gonna clean this house up. We're gonna think about putting some stuff on Craigslist, and then taking a bunch of stuff to donate and then we're going to trash a bunch of stuff. And I'm going to help you to work through it's gonna be difficult, but we're going to roll up our sleeves and we're gonna get some stuff done. That's what we're doing in five years.

Now, if we're talking a few months, it's just availability. We don't want to fix anything. We don't want to... I don't think we're going to overwhelm them with devotionals or too much spiritual stuff. We're not dragging them to a new church.

Annie: Overwhelm them with Rice Krispie treats. If you're gonna overwhelm them with something, make it food not devos.

Granger: That's good. And you have to play the room and you have to understand that sometimes, sometimes they don't want you there. And when that's the case, drop off the rice krispies and just say, "I'll see you tomorrow, I'm gonna come back tomorrow at the same time." And if you don't want to talk tomorrow, I'll be here about one o'clock. Obviously, the rest of us on the front porch, or whatever it is that you're bringing.

And then you might show up on Wednesday, and they're sitting at the table and they want to talk. At that point, you jump in, and you open up your schedule, and you just listen. You don't have to have a solution. You don't have to tell them what they need to do. You just listen. And there's too...

I told Amber this yesterday, because she was going into a person that was grieving. And I said, "There's two things you got to remember. There's two sentences you should remember as you have this conversation. And this is great for everyone that's going into a parent that lost or anyone's going through loss.

The first thing to say is, that must be so difficult for you. And the second thing is, how does that make you feel? And then you can rotate those. So it's like this. It's like, they say, "I feel like the walls are caving in. I don't even want to go to work." You say, That must be so difficult for you. Yeah. And they say, yeah, it is because my boss is calling me and he's saying, Are you going to show up? Are you going to... I just need to know. And you say, How does that make you feel? And they say,

Well, it makes me feel kind of worthless. I wish I can just get back on my feet. I want to go to work, but I can't. And then you say, that must be so difficult.

You just rotate those things and let them unpack it. You don't have to give them a solution. You don't say, "You tell your boss this."

Annie: Right. Right. Right.

Granger: "He need to..."

Annie: "I've solved it. Let me tell you what you should do." Okay, yeah. Man, that is so helpful. I am sorry you know how to help us through that and I'm really thankful that you know how to help us through that. Both at the same time, the grief and the joy.

Granger: Can I say one more thing to that?

Annie: Yes.

Granger: I personally never liked the question, how are you doing? I would have said-

Annie: What's a better question?

Granger: I think you could say something like, can I come see you today?

Annie: Great. That's really good. That's really good. Yeah.

Granger: Because when you say, how are you doing, How are you doing, what we hear is, what? Do I look bad, or do I sound bad? I guess it's more apparent that I feel like hell right now. It's more apparent than I thought it was.

Annie: This was not my experience but I would wonder sometimes if the 'how are you doing?' feels like the other person is just checking off checking on you versus actually doing something. They're almost relieving their own "I checked on Granger and Amber. Okay, I checked on Granger and Amber. I did." And you're like, "Well, actually, we haven't gotten off the couch but you didn't ask that. You didn't ask if I've walked anywhere today. So I didn't have to answer that.

Granger: True.

Annie: So I like that. Can I come over? I mean, that's been one of the things... I mean, I'm sure you have friends involved with the Covenant shooting as well. But one of the interesting things about the Covenant shooting in the spring... I mean, I was at

dinner last night with a staff member and it is invasive. It's invasive. It's everywhere. And it's just part of everything, just like loss is. So you just kind of go...

At one point she said, "Will someone else tell a story?" We're like, Yeah, Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. We're sorry. We've been making you talk about this all time. Yes, here's some other stories. We just don't-

Granger: That's so good.

Annie: We're all learning it together, too. We're learning together how to grieve in that way. Right? And sometimes it's just, can I come over? I mean, I have one friend, Granger, that I'm just like, Can I come tomorrow? Can I come tomorrow? Can I come tomorrow? And three out of four times she doesn't answer me. But the one out of four times, I go over, when she responds.

Granger: She will remember that though. When the years go by, she's gonna look back... Not that you need credit for anything, but she will look back and go, "Wow, Annie, was so persistent."

Annie: Annie, stalked me during that.

Granger: It matters. Because there might be other people out there that think the same thing, but they don't want to cross any boundaries so they don't say anything. And then five years go by and you go, did they even care?

Annie: "Where's that friend?" I'm gonna always lean on the stalker version of a friend. That is me.

Granger: Showing up with a cold lasagna and coming in and... I had friends just come in and turn on the oven, put it in the oven, and start preheating and be like, "Hey, I'm putting the lasagna in here. I'm gonna set the timer about 45 minutes. It's gonna go off. Just pull it out. I got some plates set out here. You guys need anything?" I'm just like, "That's kind of cool. I didn't have plans for dinner. So that's kind of cool."

Annie: Yeah. Okay, what did we not say about the book or about your story you want to make sure we cover, Granger? Sorry, I cried the whole time.

Granger: Oh, thank you.

Annie: I'm thankful you, our pastor, you can put up with it.

Granger: Well, first of all, I don't think I've done an interview yet where someone actually read the whole book.

Annie: Oh, wow. Happy to do it. Happy to do it.

Granger: Thank you. Thank you so much for caring.

Annie: Of course. There's a lot of pieces we didn't get to in the book that I'm excited for people to get to read. Excited in the way of like... the IVF story is beautiful. Y'all's COVID story is beautiful. Honestly, your experience with weed is really important thing. I mean, that's an important thing for people to read and to walk with you through. So I can think of a few families that I'm happy to put this book in their hands, and a few that I will wait a few more months. I will buy it now because it's out and I'll wait a few more months, and I'll put the book in their hands.

Granger: Oh, it's wonderful.

Annie: It feels like a beautiful resource. Granger, the last question we always ask. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you. What do you guys do for fun?

Granger: Oh, yeah, that makes more sense of why you even asked that question. What's really neat is this is the last tour so I've been switching off bringing the kids. I took my son Lincoln. He loves the mountains. So he went to Utah and Idaho and Colorado and Nevada. And now my daughter is gonna go with me to New York and Boston, and Richmond so she's gonna do the Northeast run. We're having so much fun. Last night, I had a daddy-daughter date with London too. So, having so much fun right now in our place in our life of having one on one time with the parents. I think it's been a lot of fun.

Annie: One of my favorite pastors in Atlanta, Jeff Henderson, says how you end one season determines how the next one starts. So you celebrating that and bringing your kids along to exit touring feels like such a beautiful way to set up a great new season.

Granger: Oh, it's great. I love that.

Annie: What a gift to them. Thank you for making time to do this and thank you for writing this book. I think it is going to... it is just a good read. You're very good writer. But I think it's also going to help so many people, Granger. It helped me. So I'm really grateful for you.

Granger: Thank you. Thank you so much. I've enjoyed this conversation.

Annie: Thanks. Me too.

[01:02:41] <music>

Outo: Y'all what a story, right? I mean what a story! What a man! What a family! It is not easy to talk about loss. So for Granger to be willing to write about this, talk about it so openly, I'm just really grateful. This mattered a lot to me today. As you know, we celebrate one year since we lost my nephew.

Hey, y'all make sure you grab a copy of Like a River. Follow Granger on social media, thank him for being on the show today. It just means a ton to me.

If y'all need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that is how you can find me. And yes, I am really there again. It took me a minute to download Instagram back to my phone but I did it. I really did it. And don't forget you can find That Sounds Fun podcast on Instagram @thatsoundsfunpodcast.

I think that's it for me today, friends. I'm so happy to be back with you. Go out, stay home, do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is, from our Hall of Fun, Ginna Claire is in Nashville. So we are going to dinner with some friends and I'm so excited. I just love her so much. So if you missed that episode, go back and listen. She is just one of the best.

Y'all have a great weekend. We'll see you back here on Monday with one of my all-time favorite worship leaders and one of my favorite guests on the pod, Steffany Gretzinger. Can't wait for y'all to hear it.