

[00:00:00] <music>

Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs, and I'm so happy to be here with you today.

Before we dive in, y'all, I have to tell you about another incredible podcast called Just Different. Just Different is the newest show to join the That Sounds Fun Network. You are going to love these guys.

Darin and Jordan are two brothers that are passionate about helping their generation get closer to God and assisting them in their journey of faith. They talk everything: faith, life, and culture, have the perfect combination of personal experience and real-life issues, truth, and comedy.

Just Different's mission is to equip and empower individuals to walk out their relationship with God by helping people understand how to make God an integral part of their everyday lives. Y'all, I love these dudes. I think y'all are going to as well.

New episodes release every Wednesday and Friday and all of their episodes are also on YouTube. If you want some favorite episodes to start with, try episode two, called You cute, but can you pray? LOL or Episode 53 called Stay true. Y'all, I cannot wait to hear your thoughts after you start listening to Just Different.

So wherever you're listening to this show, go look up Just Different and subscribe. I think y'all are going to love this new podcast.

Intro: Today on the show I get to talk with my friend Riley Clemmons. We are in a NextGen era here on the pod, y'all. I'm loving it. Between Just Different, Riley, some of the pastors and leaders and authors we've had lately, I'm loving it.

Riley is incredible. Y'all, we've been friends for a long time. I think you are going to love her. My guess is you already know her music. She's an accomplished composer, performer, producer, and recording artist from here in Nashville who Billboard named one of the top Christian artists in 2022. Her super popular single, *For The Good*, is so good.

Today we're talking about her brand new album, *Church Pew*. It comes out tomorrow. This is another one you guys are going to love. We have got music and books. Listen, we got the resources. Riley Clemmons is the kind of friend we all want to have. She is just the best.

So here is my conversation with my friend Riley Clemmons.

[00:02:21] <Music>

Annie: Riley Clemmons, welcome, finally, to That Sounds Fun.

Riley: I know.

Annie: Do you need your water? I'm getting my water.

Riley: You know what? I'm gonna get my water.

Annie: Yeah, get your water.

Riley: I'm gonna do the right thing.

Annie: We gotta talk about stuff so we need to be hydrated.

Riley: I'm excited.

Annie: Okay. We're doing this. I'm so sorry. Public apology number one, that you're just getting here.

Riley: It's okay because it feels even more special.

Annie: The waiting-

Riley: I'm a longtime fan.

Annie: Yeah. Oh my gosh. Me too.

Riley: I admire.

Annie: Oh, you're very kind. Okay, back me up. I remember knowing about you. How long have you been in Nashville?

Riley: A born and raised Nashvillian.

Annie: Oh yeah, that's right. You were just talking about you and GC went to the same high school.

Riley: Yeah, hometown Girl.

Annie: Okay, have you been doing music full-time? How long?

Riley: It's kind of a crazy story. So, born and raised Nashville kid. I think one of the interesting parts about growing up in such a big music city is that the idea of doing music as a career, as a living never felt farfetched.

Annie: It was an option like doctor, nurse, famous musician.

Riley: Yeah, if you will. Yeah. I mean, it was one of those things that felt pretty natural. It happened a lot sooner than I thought it would.

Annie: Oh, really?

Riley: I was 12 years old, I was singing at a choir concert in middle school at school, and I met my manager of 10 years at this point. Still my manager.

Annie: Wait, Mitchell was there? Was one of those kids in the sa...?

Riley: Yeah. He was taking his daughter.

Annie: You are lying.

Riley: True story.

Annie: So he's like, "I want to sign you" at 12.

Riley: Yeah.

Annie: Riley!

Riley: I remember vividly walking into the lobby to go see my friends. I mean, I was 12. I was about to be 13. And you know, when a grown man comes up to you and asks where your parents are, I'm like, "Oh, no."

Annie: Right, right. "What did I do?"

Riley: "Oh, no." But yeah, that happened.

Annie: What did you sing? What was your solo that day? Do you remember?

Riley: I can't even remember. It was like two seconds of a gospel song.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

- Riley:** But, you know, it was my two seconds and I took the two seconds.
- Annie:** That's all. Yeah.
- Riley:** From there I signed my first publishing deal at 15, signed with my record label at 17, and now I'm 23.
- Annie:** Wow. What regular label were you with?
- Riley:** Capitol. Capitol CMG.
- Annie:** I like them.
- Riley:** They're great people.
- Annie:** They're really great people. Every time I interact with someone from Capitol CMG, I feel this like, man, they love... they don't put out music because they're trying to get their numbers up. They put out music of artists they really believe in.
- Riley:** You know what? I believe that too. I've had a long history with my incredible team at Capitol CMG and they have just been so quick to... I mean, they've been a huge part of my journey as not only an artist and a musician but as a human. I've really gotten to see them support me and love me in new ways throughout this album cycle, through a vulnerable time.
- Annie:** Do you feel like you missed out on college? Do you ever regret not going to college?
- Riley:** It's been such a wild journey. I technically didn't even graduate high school from the high school I went to.
- Annie:** Oh.
- Riley:** I was there throughout my junior year. My junior year I started getting busier and started touring. So I remember getting a special permission from our headmaster to do a work-study and I would go to the studio during study hall and I would write every day.
- Annie:** Oh my gosh.
- Riley:** But by senior year it was too busy and I was on the road too much, so I finished high school on the back of a tour bus.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Riley: I would do a set and then come off and write a psychology paper.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Riley: Right. It was a crazy time.

Annie: Who were you touring with at the time?

Riley: My very first tour was with Social Club Misfits.

Annie: Oh, I love those guys.

Riley: Great guys. I love Marty and Fern. And then later that year it was Danny Gokey and Tauren Wells.

Annie: Oh my gosh. So you're 17-

Riley: Yeah, I just turned 18 at the time.

Annie: ...and you are on the road trying to finish high school on a tour bus with a bunch of dudes.

Riley: Only dudes.

Annie: Only Dudes.

Riley: Only dudes.

Annie: So many dudes. Wow.

Riley: It's crazy.

Annie: That is crazy. How many tours have you been on now, do you think?

Riley: Oh-

Annie: Can you even count?

Riley: I can't even-

Annie: You've been out touring a lot.

- Riley:** Yes. I did that tour with him and then he brought me out on the road when he did his headlining tour which was so much fun. I mean, I've gotten the opportunity to tour with some incredible artists. I'm so grateful for that. I have learned so much. But this fall I'll be out with one of my favorites, Zach Williams.
- Annie:** Oh, I love Zach.
- Riley:** I know, me too.
- Annie:** He is so gr... you're g... Yes. What a great tour to be on.
- Riley:** I'm So excited.
- Annie:** Tell me, so going out with Tauren and going out with Danny, I mean all these guys leaders that... Social Club Misfits is another great example. What are things you're learning about how to be a good leader? What are some things you've learned about being a good leader from watching them?
- Riley:** That's a great question. I think the time when I have really soaked in the most wisdom would be in the Q&As that we do, the VIP Q&As.
- Annie:** Oh yeah, when you listen to them answer.
- Riley:** Yeah. So I'll be sitting there, and anytime Tauren would speak, I'd be like, "I gotta get out a notebook and write this down, Pastor Tauren." I mean, just so much wisdom. I think from every artist I was able to learn a lot. You know, spending my late teenage years side stage, watching artists do shows, watching them communicate with an audience, watching them communicate songs that they'd written, that was a really special part of the journey. I was a little sponge, especially, you know, back in those years. I say that I feel like I'm a hundred years old. I-
- Annie:** Touring will make you a hundred years old. So you're not all the way wrong.
- Riley:** I'm like, Girl, the gray hairs are coming any second now. I learned so much about leadership through that. But different styles of leadership too. I think that's the craziest part about touring and being around different personalities and artists, is everybody has their own leadership style. And it's been the journey of a lifetime to watch and learn and meet the incredibly strong women behind the men.
- Annie:** So it's you and Zach? Is there anybody else or it's just the two of you?

Riley: It's just the two of us.

Annie: For the whole fall?

Riley: Fall and Christmas.

Annie: You're lying.

Riley: Yeah, girl.

Annie: Oh, I'm totally coming to your Christmas show.

Riley: We're playing Fisher sooner.

Annie: Okay, done.

Riley: Yeah, I got you.

Annie: I would love to come. I would love to hear y'all sing Christmas songs.

Riley: I can't wait. I'm so excited.

Annie: Who's on your bus? Do you know?

Riley: I have no idea.

Annie: Okay. Because one of the things when we tour, I'm always like, "Okay, here's what I'm gonna bring on the bus. Here's the vibe. I'm planning the vibe of the bus."

Riley: You have to.

Annie: Yes. Because you live there.

Riley: You have to. I sense that you're this way because you're... I mean, you're an extrovert.

Annie: Yeah, girl.

Riley: Right?

Annie: Yes.

Riley: Big extrovert.

Annie: Yes. Yes.

Riley: My problem is when I am on the road, I can't help myself. I'm never gonna be the first one to leave the hangout that's happening in the front lounge. And people are still there, I'm like, "Okay, what movie are we watching? You guys want to play Mario Kart? What are we doing?" And I won't leave. And then I end up sleeping till noon the next day. You know?

Annie: Dude, I'm telling you, my first headlining, our tour manager—you and I have had the same tour manager—he said... He was the promoter rep at the time. I mean, he and the tour manager are like, "You cannot keep talking. You have to be able to talk on stage." Everyone in the lounge stopped talking till I went to bed. So they would just sit there and not talk and they'd be like, "We will have fun when you leave. But as long as you're here, we're not gonna talk."

Riley: Annie, that's terrible.

Annie: It was awful.

Riley: That's torture for you.

Annie: But I had to. I had to because I had to conserve my voice for the show. And my voice was not doing well summer of '21. But yes, they would make me go to bed.

Riley: That is a terrible feeling.

Annie: I know. Because it's like, "Let's party." And they're like, "You have to work again for the next four days."

Riley: Yeah, you gotta go to sleep.

Annie: So you have to go to sleep. And I did not want to go to sleep. I wanted to stay up.

Riley: That's a terrible feeling. The FOMO.

Annie: Oh. What do you bring? What's in your bunk? Like what do you have to have?

Riley: I'm the bag lady. I have 872 bags.

Annie: Riley, I have so many bags. I have so many bags. I'm like, "This is on the bus with me. This is in my bunk. This is in the bay." This is-

Riley: Yes. I'm like, "This one's in between. This has all of my toiletries. This has my travel toothbrush." My fanny pack goes to my bunk with me.

Annie: Yes, dude.

Riley: That's where my retainers are.

Annie: Oh, me too. Me too. Nighttime for a lifetime whether you're on a bus or not.

Riley: That's right. I listen to my orthodontist. My parents spent too much money on my braces.

Annie: Girl, listen, in Q&A when people say, what's the number one piece of advice you give someone in their 20s? I'm like, wear your retainers.

Riley: Just do it.

Annie: Because I repaid for my teeth to get straightened as a grownup because I didn't wear my retainers when my parents paid.

Riley: Girl.

Annie: So you're doing it right.

Riley: I'm trying.

Annie: You're doing it right.

Riley: I mean, wearing them on a tour bus.

Annie: I know.

Riley: That's it. And noise-canceling headphones.

Annie: Oh really? Do you sleep with them on?

Riley: Yeah. I'm so sound-sensitive.

Annie: Oh, wow. Do you do the ones that are over your ears?

Riley: I do.

Annie: Like the ones we're wearing?

Riley: Mm-hmm.

Annie: So you have to sleep with these on?

Riley: Yes.

Annie: Worth it? I guess.

Riley: I guess. Because I've always heard too, I mean blah, blah, blah, whatever. But that, you know, sleeping on your back is supposed to be better for your skin. I've always been acne prone so, you know, all this stuff. So it helps. But I've always been incredibly sound-sensitive.

Annie: Oh my gosh. Okay, can we pivot to the acne for just a second?

Riley: Yes.

Annie: Only because you are so honest about that online and stuff. Am I remembering this correctly? You did a post where you really talked about it. You and Franny talks about it. Y'all are doing this thing of leadership to other women of like, "Hey, look, this is what I look like on stage. I'm going to wear makeup. I'm going to do my hair, but also I am working through my skin stuff."

Riley: Yeah.

Annie: Why did that become a yes for you instead of just letting people think about it and you not actually addressing it?

Riley: Because I wish more people would've done that when I was 12, 13, 14, 15, and so on. I think that the way that media is right now, and I think this time in culture, we have such access to so much content, to so many images, to videos, and all of it is so hyper-curated. And I think that just the reality of that is it's so easy to lose perspective.

I've struggled with acne my whole life. I have struggled with body image my whole life and have walked through eating disorders and have walked through skin issues that have been debilitating. I mean, the first time that I ever sat in a makeup chair to get glammed for a music video, I think it was, I remember holding my mom's hand before we started glam and being like, "I don't want to walk in there without makeup on. I'm supposed to be beautiful. I'm supposed to be a pretty artist."

And I just remember feeling so debilitated by having acne on my face or not looking like what I expected a perfect woman to look like. And that's been a lifelong struggle, honestly. But-

Annie: There was probably maybe five years ago when I was deciding what to give up for lent, the thing I really sensed the Holy Spirit invited me to is to give up makeup. And I was like, "You must be talking to somebody else because you think I'm just gonna go places without makeup? People know."

I am telling you, it was the biggest challenge of my life. I wore makeup if I was on stage. I was kind of like, "Listen, I'll meet you in the middle." I'll like do my days but if I'm speaking at events or conferences, I gotta be a stage person. But other than that, I didn't for those 40 days and it was brutal. It was never easy. It wasn't like, after two weeks I loved it. It was like-

Riley: My skin's glowing.

Annie: I was like, is it Easter yet? Is it Easter yet? It was so hard because there's an expectation. You and I both live here, have public lives, and we serve at our church here. So people recognize us everywhere. So going to the grocery store... I mean, do you still feel that? I still feel that.

Riley: Totally.

Annie: I don't want to go to the grocery store in my pajamas and look like a ragga muffin because Katy may be there.

Riley: I mean, you know what? I've started leaning into it.

Annie: Really?

Riley: Which has been a huge challenge. Just being in the public eye and looking back on life, I've had skin stuff, I've had times where I feel prettier, I've lost weight, I've gained weight. I have changed and grown into adulthood. I think that really the biggest inspiration for me was watching my little sister walk through body image issues, self-image issues.

And that was what propelled me to really start having the internal conversations of what does it look like to make somebody like my sister at this point in her life feel more comfortable.

Annie: Wow.

Riley: So walking into the juice bar and having my pimples out and wearing sweaty workout clothes. I remember there was one time I... I mean, I was in raw form, Annie. I was in raw form and somebody happened to say, "Oh, I love your music." And I was like, "I can't believe they recognized me," one. And also, "I hope I wasn't picking my nose." And also, cool. You know, I've grown-

Annie: Did they ask you to take a picture?

Riley: No. Woo.

Annie: I know. I have really thought about it. What would I do? I mean, I would have to say yes. Like, when people see me at Radner and I look... I mean, I'm at Radner, so I'm hiking and I feel I'm sweating like crazy and I don't have makeup on, I always wonder what would it feel like if they posted this picture? Would you be okay? I've tried to practice it. I feel like I'm coming across. I don't leave my house without a full face. But I mean, it just is hard.

Riley: It's exhausting. And it's not worth it. I really don't believe it's worth it.

Annie: Right, Right. Because we're humans.

Riley: Yes. I follow this YouTuber and basically what she does... And it's done with love. It's not a vindictive thing. But she takes pictures from the internet of popular celebrities, people in pop culture and basically debunks the way that... it's like, "This is a filter and I can prove to you why."

Annie: He removes the filter and then... Oh my Gosh.

Riley: And like showing pictures of what they actually look like and the way they go... We as a culture have to retrain our brains into honestly allowing ourselves to understand this is normal. This is beautiful, not this faux standard of beauty that has been created and curated over time. Because that's unattainable and that's damaging. It's definitely helped to retrain my brain to look through a healthier perspective of perceived beauty versus actual beauty.

Annie: Because I would never look at anyone else and be like, she should have makeup on.

Riley: I know.

Annie: It's just me. If I see you or if coworkers come without, I'm like, "She's so proud." I mean, it never crosses my mind. But when I look at myself, I go, "Just put a little something under your eyes before you go."

Riley: I get it.

Annie: I know.

Riley: I get it. And I bet any woman listening to this can probably find-

Annie: Has had that day.

Riley: Yeah.

Annie: I know. I know.

[00:17:45] <Music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to share about one of our amazing partners, [Hatch](#). Listen, I know we talk a lot about resting and Sabbath, but getting good rest isn't just about carving out one day a week. It's also about putting some nightly habits in place to help you truly rest well at night.

It's also one of the reasons I got a Hatch alarm clock. I can put my phone in a different area of my bedroom so I don't scroll right before going to sleep or right when I wake up. And I use the Hatch Restore 2 for a more peaceful bedtime routine.

Well, if you're Annie and Eddie listeners, y'all know how much we love that Hatch at our home. So think of the Hatch Restore 2 as your bedside sleep guide, your ally in rest. It's a sophisticated sound machine, light, and alarm clock beautifully designed for your bedside table.

Good rest allows you to be the best version of yourself, which is why the Hatch Restore 2 was engineered to help you form healthy sleeping habits for life. Your Hatch teaches your body when it's time to sleep and when it's time to rise with light and sound cues. It can coach you through meditations and mindfulness exercises that transform the time before and after sleep into restful rituals.

I'll tell you, personally mine, I hit it to start, it gives me 20 minutes to read and then it dims out and then we do a little mindfulness exercise and then it is 20 minutes of white noise and then it's gone. But I'm usually asleep before that. It's always either my Hatch Restore 2 or the [O365?] that sends me off to sleep. And then when I wake up in the morning, it lights my room like a sunrise. I love it. I love it.

Y'all, you know that great sleep can't be forced, but it can't be learned. And the Hatch Restore 2 is here to help. Right now Hatch is offering our friends \$20 off

your purchase of a Hatch Restore 2 and free shipping at hatch.co/thatsoundsfun. Sleep deeply and wake gently with the Restore 2. Go to hatch.co/thatsoundsfun to get \$20 off in free shipping. That's hatch.co/thatsoundsfun.

Sponsor: And I have one more amazing partner to tell you about, [Ritual](#). Do you know? Get ready. Do you know you can swallow skincare? I know. It sounds weird. It's actually super fascinating. But if your countertop looks anything like mine and it is covered with skincare options and solutions. We put a lot of stuff on our skin, but now there's something new to just pop into your mouth and enhance your skincare routine from the inside out.

It's Ritual's HyaCera, which combines Hyaluronic Acid and Ceramides in a capsule you take daily. Ritual has been my go-to multivitamin for a long time. You know this. The minty tab, you know how I feel. And it's because of their traceable ingredients. So when they say we've also got something that will support your skin health, I was like, Let's go.

HyaCera contains two of the best clinically studied ingredients that have been shown to help hydrate skin all in one daily vanilla-scented capsule. Ceratiq, plant oil extract from France can help reduce fine lines, and Hyabest, a lower molecular weight hyaluronic acid from Japan that helps promote hydrated skin. Okay, France and Japan. Come on and make my skin healthy.

Aging like a fine wine, addressing some lines, and making your skincare a little simpler every day, HyaCera from Ritual is a skin supplement you can actually trust. Ritual is offering my friends 20% off during your first month. So visitritual.com/thatsoundsfun to start Ritual or add HyaCera to your lineup today.

Now back to our conversation with Riley.

[00:21:11] <Music>

Annie: Okay, so that's your road life. I'm so glad you're going on tour this fall.

Riley: Thank you.

Annie: We can all find you and a new album out.

Riley: Girl.

Annie: Listen.

Riley: I'm excited.

- Annie:** You said this has been a vulnerable season. Is that around *Church Pew*?
- Riley:** Yeah. I mean, I'll start at the beginning. It was the beginning of 2022, I was in the lowest place I've ever been at in my life.
- Annie:** Really?
- Riley:** I wasn't brave enough at the time to call it what it was, but it was a dark season of depression.
- Annie:** Meanwhile, people are seeing you out on the road, you're on the tour with Tauren, you got music on the radio, you're at award shows, and it's the darkest season of your life.
- Riley:** Yeah. I was miserable.
- Annie:** Riley!
- Riley:** I started experiencing panic attacks and anxiety like I've never experienced before. It was the hardest season I've ever walked through. It was lonely and isolating and I felt very vulnerable. It was just this intense feeling of burnout, of being in-
- Annie:** What was the day that you knew... you were like, "Okay, this isn't just like I'm having a bad week. This is something that isn't going away."
- Riley:** I remember exactly one of those moments where that hit. I was sitting with my mom. She and I are very close. And I just remember being curled up on her couch and weeping for what felt like, you know, the third time that week. And I just had this overwhelming feeling of I can't keep doing this. Something has to change because I'm not in a good place.
- Annie:** And what was "this"? Music? Touring? Life?
- Riley:** It was this intense feeling of burnout. I'm a very ambitious and competitive person. That's just my nature. I've always been that way. And I realized that I was making myself miserable anytime that I start thinking, Oh, it's not enough. Where is your song sitting on the charts right now? Are you booking the biggest...? Are you winning the awards? Are you doing it? Are people clapping for you? Are you the top of your game right now? Is the music better than every...?" And it became this whole cycle of, "Wait, how did I get here? This is not what it's about."

- Annie:** And when your song is at the top of the charts for two weeks or three weeks or whatever, and then it isn't. It's a game we can never win.
- Riley:** No.
- Annie:** Dude.
- Riley:** It just got to me to the point where my ambition and my drive turned on me and I was constantly triggered by things I'd never been triggered by before. Social media was... it was a dangerous place to be for me. I would get so triggered and it would ruin my day.
- Annie:** Watching other people succeed? Watching people be unkind to you in comments? What?
- Riley:** Yes.
- Annie:** All of it.
- Riley:** All of it. I mean, watching people be unkind in the comments. The main thing was just watching people's lives on social media and feeling like mine was completely inadequate and feeling like I had failed by the age of 22 and my career hadn't exploded enough and I wasn't doing it enough. I went to a really dark place.
- Annie:** Wow. And in that, you're saying that to your mom and your mom is saying, "Hey, this is different."
- Riley:** I remember her holding my hand. She met me with a lot of compassion in that moment. I've watched her go through tough seasons. She's watched me go through tough seasons at this point. As we're sitting there and she held my hand and I... this is the thing that I guess hit me the hardest. And she looked at me in the eyes and she said, "Do you know that we would all still love you if you didn't do this?"
- Annie:** Wow.
- Riley:** And I just remember sobbing. Because I think I'd forgotten that. Even scarier, I don't think I knew how to love myself if I stopped doing that.
- Annie:** Well, certainly. I mean, 12 years old.
- Riley:** Yeah. That had been my whole identity for so long.
- Annie:** So in that moment, are you thinking I should walk away from this whole thing?

Riley: Yeah. I mean, there was part of me that definitely thought, "You've done this for your whole adult life and prior, and you're miserable." I wasn't enjoying writing music. In that moment I was like, "I don't think I'll ever write a song again."

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Riley: "I don't enjoy it. I don't love it. I'm not inspired." And I didn't know it then, but it was burnout. I was feeling a lot of burnout. It was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. But I picked up the phone and I remember feeling this overwhelming nudge from God that "Riley you gotta pump the brakes for a second. You gotta stop."

I called my team one at a time and basically said, "I gotta disappear for a minute. We'll do the shows we've committed to, but I'm not booking any sessions for the rest of the year. And at that point there were, I mean, there was like eight months left in the year.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Riley: So I was like, "I'm done for the year. I don't want to do any meetings or anything. I gotta go get healthy. I have to get help. I have to figure out how to get my brain in a better spot and figure out if I can get re-inspired." I took that time away. It was the best decision I've ever made.

Annie: What did you do?

Riley: I got quiet with the Lord. It's like, you know, Abraham going up the mountain. You gotta go get quiet with God sometimes and rediscover. It became this story of identity.

Annie: Did you keep looking online? I mean, that has to be harder watching you stop and everyone else keep going.

Riley: I turned my phone off. I wasn't on social media much at all. Again, just posting what I absolutely had to post. But I was off my phone entirely. I really took that time to pray and journal and reassemble and re-identify identity, what that means to me, what that looks like, how to be okay with who I am without the sound of applause, without the number on a chart, without all of these things that I've associated as good, as success, as you've made it, as this is who you are. During that time, I allowed myself the space to discover who I am without all the extra stuff.

Annie: Did you think you were coming back to music or did you think, hey, I'm walking from this?

Riley: I will say a good three months into my time off, I had this overwhelming sense of "No, you've got something to say now."

Annie: But three months is a freaking long time.

Riley: Yeah, girl. Like not knowing-

Annie: I mean, that's a long time to not do some... For people like you and I who are so driven. I just did a month in July and the last Friday I sat up at the pool and I was like... at 1:30. I remember I sat at the pool, I was like, "I can't do this anymore. I can't do this anymore. I have to go back to work. I've done everything. I've read everything. I've watched everything. I've laid everywhere. I have to go." I can't imagine three months being the first time you have this.

Riley: It was this overwhelming feeling of I know what I'm gonna say, I know what this album sounds like, I know who I want to write it with, I know who I want to produce it, I know that I want to be an executive producer on it, I have the titles I want to write.

Annie: Oh my gosh, did the Lord just download the whole thing?

Riley: I've never experienced anything like that in my life. Again, starting so young, I took time to figure out at 23 years old what inspires me, what sounds inspire me, lyrically what inspires me, thematically what feels true and authentic to say. And sometimes it just takes space to refine that.

Again, it all stems from reaffirming myself that identity comes from being loved by God. That's why *Loved By You* on the new album was the first song out. Because it wraps that up. It's this whole idea of when the world screams at you, you know, who you should be, what you should be more of, what you should be less of, how to be enough, how not to be... all of these things, throw all that out. Identity comes from being loved by the creator of the universe. And that simplified everything for me.

Annie: And then you start writing?

Riley: I called Jeff Pardo, who-

Annie: Which you know we love him here.

Riley: I love Jeff too.

Annie: The Dove Award-winning Producer of the Year.

Riley: I know. I loved the episodes that you did with him.

Annie: Oh, that's sweet. With the before and after. So he is our producer of choice around That Sounds Fun as well.

Riley: I love him so much.

Annie: So was he the right answer for you? You're like the one who will get this album idea with me.

Riley: I just knew. It wasn't even something I had to think about. In that time off, it was immediately like, You need to write this album. You need to have Jeff as a part of it. You need to have him as a co-creator throughout it.

So I remember calling him and being like, "Hey, this is crazy. I've disappeared for a while, but when I come out of this time off, I want to make a record and I want you to help me assemble my team." And we quickly did that. Writing this album was a whirlwind. It was a tiny crew of people. It was maybe five, six writers total.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Riley: Which I've never done before.

Annie: Did you write on every song?

Riley: I did.

Annie: Oh my gosh, Riley! So none of these are even picked out of someone's...

Riley: Mm-mm.

Annie: No. You wrote all these.

Riley: There was a lot of intention behind every track on the album. I knew I wanted X amount of live moments and this amount of writer's round-ask moments that really reflected songwriting culture of Nashville and moments that would serve radio really well. All of those things became important.

And as we started developing the album, we started figuring out, Okay, this song, this idea, I want to take to Ellie Holcomb and I want to craft it with her. Or this song is for my friend Paul Duncan, he'll serve this really well. And all sorts of those things. We wrote this whole album in six weeks.

Annie: Dude! Just for everybody listening, what's a normal album length of writing?

Riley: Oh, my past albums have taken two years.

Annie: I was gonna say it's usually years from start to finish album. And y'all wrote the whole album in six weeks.

Riley: There was such vision.

Annie: You just knew. Did you wake up one day after three months and have the whole thing or was it like a faucet and it just started...?

Riley: It trickled. It trickled.

Annie: Okay. Wow.

Riley: I think there was this renewed sense of inspiration of things that mattered. There was this renewed sense of, Hey, you don't have to be the same artist that you were when you were 17 years old. You've done a lot of living and changing. I think I gave myself space to create music that mattered to me. I was able to get to a point where I knew that I wanted to create an album that I loved so much that I did not care if nobody else loved it.

Annie: Wow. *Church Pew* is ama... I mean, everyone's gonna love It.

Riley: Thank you. Thank you.

Annie: That's The crazy part, is you let go of "I don't care if everybody else loves this" and you made one that everyone is going to love.

Riley: Thanks, Annie.

Annie: It is so-

Riley: Thank you.

- Annie:** I love hearing that this is what's behind those songs I've been listening to because you're like, Oh, yeah, I feel that piece that you're in your body in this song, in this album.
- Riley:** Yes. It was this beautiful experience of I would... This is the other thing. I didn't play... Normally it's pretty standard in the industry you write songs, you're getting demos back, and you distribute them to the team and play them for the team and label management, everybody's hearing things. But for this record, I didn't send anything until I thought I had the record.
- Annie:** Oh my gosh. And you said, "Here's the record."
- Riley:** We didn't finish it, we just had demos. But basically how we did this album is I called my team into the studio and I was like, "I want to play 11 songs for you, and I want to play them in order. I just want you to listen." Because it was important to me that people saw the full vision, not just songs that, you know... Because-
- Annie:** It's why I don't send chapters of books.
- Riley:** Right.
- Annie:** It's the exact same reason.
- Riley:** It's the exact same reason. Because, you know, if somebody's listening for a song that'll be great at radio but you write a great song for a live show, it's two very different perspectives. So I was able to write this full album. The only people who heard anything throughout the process, it was family and friends. So I would scoop everybody up in the car and be like, Okay, this is the first demo for this album. I want you to hear it. What do you think?" And my family and I, we had this sacred bond of just listening to this music together.
- Annie:** Would you be like, "This is a song live, so picture me on stage?"
- Riley:** Yes.
- Annie:** And then like, "This is radio. Picture hearing this on the radio."
- Riley:** Yeah.
- Annie:** Dude! Riley!
- Riley:** There's so many personal moments on this album, too. There's a song called *This Side of Heaven*.

Annie: Oh, yeah. Will you talk about it?

Riley: Yeah. That was one of the most special experiences I've had of playing a song. This is a funny story. I'll start with the funny part before, you know, we get to the gut punch.

Annie: Yeah.

Riley: I'm oftentimes inspired by the people in my life, in my relationship, my family, my friends, all of it. And I've written songs from my mom, I've written songs from my sister, my dad. I've written songs for a lot of people.

One day, my sweet little southern Nana, fiery, she's just a fiery woman, came up to me, looks me straight in the eyeballs, she goes, "Well, guess you're not gonna write a song for me before I die." I was like, "Nana, that is so dark." But I was like, "Okay, challenge, accept."

Annie: Right, right. Here we go.

Riley: That was like a year prior to ever writing the song. But *This Side of Heaven* was the first song we wrote for the album. And I had never really explored-

Annie: With Jeff?

Riley: With Jeff and with Ethan Hulse.

Annie: Oh gosh.

Riley: And I had never written a song that-

Annie: He's amazing.

Riley: He's just unbelievable. I definitely wanted to write this song with the two of them. It's the first time I had explored grief. So this song is written from my nana's perspective. That's the idea for it. She and my aunt Sharon had this beautiful friendship. Obviously, they're family but they were friends first and foremost. They walked through hard seasons of life together. They did everything together. I just grew up admiring these two women who loved each other well and pushed each other to be better humans.

Annie: How Are they related?

Riley: Technically, my nana is Aunt Sharon's aunt.

Annie: Got it.

Riley: But they grew up like sisters.

Annie: Okay, got it.

Riley: They're close in age.

Annie: Got it.

Riley: So when my Aunt Sharon got diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer, watching how my Nana navigated that was one of the most pivotal moments of my life. This was only a few years ago, but eventually watching her grieve my aunt Sharon.

And let me just tell you something about Aunt Sharon. She was the loudest, boldest person in every room. Life of every party. We knew when Aunt Sharon was there. So the grieving process of not only losing my Aunt Sharon but watching my Nana lose her best friend was my first real experience with grief.

So *This Side of Heaven* is written from my nana's perspective of losing a best friend. It's a special moment on the record. I remember playing that song for my Nana. I will never forget that moment.

Annie: Did she like it?

Riley: She wept like a baby.

Annie: Yeah, I'm sure.

Riley: But she loved it. I mean-

Annie: It's so beautiful.

Riley: Thank you.

Annie: But it's not sad. It's just real.

Riley: It's messy. It doesn't have closure. There's no period at the end of the sentence. It's messy and real. There are so many moments like that on the album that have been directly pulled from things I've walked through or things people I love have walked

through. And crafting an album with that at the center has been a really special experience.

Annie: Wow. I can't believe that was first.

Riley: It was the first song outta the-

Annie: But it's stacked down in the playlist. So why is it a later chapter in the book?

Riley: That's a great question. I'm very picky in terms of tracklist sequencing. So when I had all of the songs that we knew were gonna be on the album, I sat with it and decided sequence for a long time. But ultimately, as we told the story, I wanted it to ebb and flow as life does with moments of joy and sorrow. And I think that starting on a joyful note and allowing the story to grow and move and change was really important to me.

So having a song about grief, where it is in the tracklist was very important. And then it's followed by a song called Angels that I think is a really beautiful continuation of picking the energy back up, finding the joy after loss, all the stuff.

Annie: Will you talk about *Jesus Cries*?

Riley: I'm so glad you asked about that one. That's... man-

Annie: Who'd you write that one with?

Riley: I wrote that one with Ellie Holcomb and Jeff Pardo.

Annie: Oh, of course. It has some Ellie in it.

Riley: It does.

Annie: It has Ellie to it.

Riley: It was the first title I had for the whole album. I remember I was putting makeup on one day in the time I took off, and I kept thinking of the Bible verse "Jesus wept" and how it's become this cultural phenomenon of the shortest verse in the Bible.

As I started reflecting on it and journaling on it, you know, what does it mean Jesus wept? And what does that mean to me? How has that shown itself in my life and in my world? So I remember calling Jeff and being like, "I have this song title called *Jesus Cries* and I think we should write it with Ellie. And we did. And that session-

Annie: That's amazing you had such clarity. After having a burnout breakdown at the beginning of the year, then you had clarity of the song and who was even meant to write it with you.

Riley: Yeah. I would say if I've learned anything from that, sometimes just stop. Don't worry about running the fastest. Maybe sometimes it's about letting the race happen when it's time to run, you know.

Annie: Oh dude. Somebody's stopping to take a note. Somebody's stopping to take a note.

Riley: Listen-

Annie: It's me. It's me. Wow.

Riley: *Jesus Cries* was one of those special moments on the record where it was the first time that I had looked back on that season of depression and wrote a song about that period of life. I think this is the interesting thing.

One of the interesting things about Christian culture, sometimes when people are going through hard times or challenging seasons of mental health struggles, or loss or burnout, whatever it is, it's really easy to want to encourage the person and say things like, "Okay, keep the faith, keep praying. Have you prayed about it?"

And listen, listen y'all, I believe in the power of prayer with every fiber in my being. I believe in the power of faith. But I believe that Jesus is incredibly empathetic. I don't think that He's up in heaven wagging a finger, "Come on, keep going." Sometimes I think He is the one that's coming down and going, "I'm hurting too. It hurts me to see you hurt."

So the song was crafted from that experience, but during the process of writing and recording that song, the tragedy right down the road here happened at the Covenant School-

Annie: In the middle of *Jesus Cries*?

Riley: Mm-hmm.

Annie: Wow.

Riley: And it was one of those moments where the song became bigger than my experience. I guess I found a new understanding of what it means to... when you don't have words for an unthinkable tragedy like that. Like, that's the thing. I just think Jesus is devastated, obviously. He's weeping. I see that visual in my head.

My hope for this song, in particular, is that when people hear *Jesus Cries*, they're able to find comfort and being able to feel vulnerable and being able to cry and let it out and not feel the burden of shame in that. That song was such an emotional release for me.

Annie: Gosh, I'm sure.

Riley: I hope it helps people. That's my whole hope for that song.

[00:41:56] <Music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to share about another amazing partner, [ZocDoc](#). Okay, wherever you are, raise your hand if this sounds like you. You jump on every health trend that comes along on TikTok. Guilty. You take all the supplements that your coworkers, friends, sister recommend. You go on all the latest food trends that we're supposed to be eating. We see you, cottage cheese. You are having a moment. But then when you rise, it's time to find an actual doctor. Just speaking to your health journey, you're kind of stuck. You don't know who to turn to or where to start.

Well, thankfully, there's an easy solution. It's called ZocDoc. It's a free app where you can find great doctors and book appointments online. We're talking about booking appointments with thousands of top-rated patient-reviewed doctors and specialists.

You can filter specifically for one who takes your insurance, are located near you, and treats almost any condition you're searching for. The average wait time to see a doctor booked on ZocDoc is between just 24 and 48 hours. That is it. You can even score same-day appointments.

Once you find the doc you want, you can book them immediately with just a few app taps. You're getting your docs in a row. Go to zocdoc.com/thatsoundsfun, and download the ZocDoc app for free, then find and book a top-rated doctor today. That's zocdoc.com/thatsoundsfun.

Sponsor: And one more incredible partner to tell you about that I know y'all love because you tell me, [Simple Modern](#). Y'all, wherever you are, is the weather getting cooler? Because here in Nashville it is and we are praying that this is not a fake fall. We are ready for cool temps to stay.

The fall weather means it is time to bring out our best, coffee and tea tumblers to keep our drinks hot. And Simple Modern has some great options, y'all. You can

even rep some of your favorite NFL teams on your water Tumbler. Let's go Falcons and Titans! Yes, I can love them both.

And as always, they have their ever popular 40-ounce Trek Tumbler with the handle, one of the hottest tumblers in the internet. We literally just had a very passionate conversation about them at lunch the other day around our double-wide team AFD and the That Sounds Fun Network are big fans of Simple Modern, and they showed me my X water bottle. Simple Modern has one that looks like it's covered in confetti and I'm purchasing it. Don't buy them all before I get a chance. I need to do it right now.

No matter what you're looking for, they are one of the top drinkware providers to Target, Walmart, and Amazon. And they are the perfect brand for getting into your routines this fall. They have everything from tumblers to lunch bags to packing cubes and totes.

So go to simplemodern.com/thatsoundsfun and share your email. You'll get a unique discount code for you. Or bundle and save for back to school. This can be your go-to brand for your family.

And now back to finish up our conversation with Riley.

[00:44:39] <Music>

Annie: When I was listening to *Church Pew*, is the first song on the album and the title track, it sounds like I could hear it on Country Radio too.

Riley: Thanks, girl.

Annie: So, is that like part of the hope? I mean, do you want to straddle between Christian and some other genres that need hope?

Riley: That's the thing. I think it's so fascinating. In Christian music, there's this special phenomenon where Christian music is a big umbrella genre, has a lot of individual subgenres from country to rap, to pop, to indie, to dance, all of these things that exist under the umbrella.

And I think as a writer, something that has been a challenging thing but also something that I've learned to use as a tool is I'm inspired by many different sounds. And I like to write things that sound like the season I feel. As a born and raised Nashville kid, I would describe *Church Pew* as an album... not necessarily as a country record, but not not a country. It's whatever people need from it. It's a very Nashville record.

- Annie:** That's a beautiful way to put it. It's a very Nashville record.
- Riley:** Yes. The songwriting culture, the music culture of my city was so important in putting this record together and creating something that felt authentic. And a lot of the songs ended... like *Church Pew* specifically ended up having a lot of the soul of old school Nashville country with all of the different sound you hear and the mandolin. It's all of it.
- Annie:** Oh, in my mind, I thought, I want to hear her sing this at the Ryman.
- Riley:** Oh my goodness. Well, you can hear me sing it at Grand Ole Opry.
- Annie:** Oh, are you gonna do it at the Opry?
- Riley:** September 23rd.
- Annie:** No way.
- Riley:** Yeah, the day after album comes out.
- Annie:** After The album comes out, you get to sing it at the Opry?
- Riley:** Yeah. I'm gonna cry.
- Annie:** Dude. You are gonna... Because there's pews there too.
- Riley:** I'm gonna cry. I'm gonna be devastated.
- Annie:** I cannot believe you. How many times have you played The Opry?
- Riley:** This will be my second time.
- Annie:** Okay. Oh my gosh.
- Riley:** I'm so excited. When we wrote that song, I think that was me, Paul Duncan, and Jeff, we had the conversation of, Oh, we gotta play this at the Opry. We gotta do it.
- Annie:** Yes. Absolutely.
- Riley:** That's the thesis statement of the album as a whole. That's why it's track one. Because it is that thesis statement.

Annie: I'm writing down September 23rd.

Riley: Don't miss it. Be there.

Annie: I put on my calendar.

Riley: Be there.

Annie: That is just unreal that you get to sing that at the... I mean, that's the feel it has.

Riley: It does.

Annie: ...is that old country... it makes you feel at home.

Riley: Mm-hmm. Yeah, it does.

Annie: So it sets up the album to go like, Oh, I'm at home here. And then you hit us with like *Lifting Me Up* and I'm like crying in my car today.

Riley: That song is very special too. I mean, all of these songs have stories. That's the thing about this record.

Annie: This record is going to mark your life.

Riley: I believe so. It feels like a landmark for me. Over the past few years, getting to write and release music and tour, I've had the opportunity to connect with a lot of families who have walked through the struggle of having sick children. And over the past few years, that's become something I think about a lot and something that heavily inspires my music.

So when I started dreaming up the record, I knew that I wanted a track on the album that specifically worked to serve families who are going through that, to encourage them, to give them hope. One that I could sing to kids at hospitals and make them feel strong, make them feel lifted up. So *Lifting Me Up* came from that place of: how can I encourage this group of people who might need to be reminded that God is strong when they can't be?

Annie: Dude.

Riley: So that's where that came from.

Annie: This is the best part of getting to do these conversations of being like, now I understand why the album feels the way it does.

Riley: Yeah, Girl.

Annie: It's scratching all these different itches that we have.

Riley: I love that.

Annie: Talk about *Miracle* real quick.

Riley: Of course. I love the song *Miracle*. It was very special to write. From the beginning of the album writing process, there was so much dreaming up before we ever wrote a song. And I knew that it was really important to me to have a love song on this album. I've run from that part of my life for so many years.

You know, it's an interesting predicament in the music industry, and a lot of it I put on myself. But I think I thought the minute that I talked about love, people would label me as, "Oh, well, she's gonna get married and run off and have babies soon." That's always the feeling I had. And that felt like the undertone of a lot of conversations that I would have with people. So I think I fought that for so long and felt so much shame around being in love.

I think one of the biggest confirmations that I got in creating this record and creating *Miracle* specifically was, no, it's important to share a story of healthy love that reflects the heart of Jesus and makes you want to grow closer to Jesus. I think that women my age, women my mother's age, little girls, I think that that exposure to that kind of love and a woman talking about that kind of love is important.

Annie: How do you balance a private life with a public love song?

Riley: Oh, that's been a fun part, you know. I've always kept my love life very private. Very intentionally so.

Annie: Me too.

Riley: Which I mean, hallelujah, amen. I think I would go back and make that choice over and over again. I think that it's like anything, little bits and pieces to... you know, it's exciting. I think people like knowing a little bit and right now the extent of what people know is through *Miracle*, which has been really exciting. It's been so wild to see people using that song for wedding photos and *Miracle Babies*, and all of these beautiful things. But yeah, that song has become, again, so much bigger than just me and my story.

Annie: I mean, it's gonna be like a TikTok rager at some point. That's what I'm predicting.

Riley: I have loved seeing the videos. That's another thing with that song in particular, with the whole album. Almost every single sound you hear from the minute you press play to the end of the record is all played live. It was live bass, drums, guitar, piano, wurlitzer, live backing vocals, live choir, and live strings. So you can feel that.

I think it emotionally has that edge to it because everything is so live and present in the way that the album's mixed and the way that the album was brought to life through these incredible musicians.

Annie: Dude.

Riley: It's exciting.

Annie: So what do you do now? Because now the album's coming out, you have to get back on social media pretty actively, you are. What have you done in the last 18 months to make sure, as best you can, we don't have near as much control as we think-

Riley: Yeah, Girl.

Annie: ...to make sure, as best you can, that your brain stays healthy when there are other artists releasing albums too and there are other women putting on makeup too, and there...? I mean, that has not changed. The pool you were in before has not changed.

Riley: Correct.

Annie: You're just getting back in to swim again.

Riley: Oof. Well said.

Annie: What do you do?

Riley: Well said. I am not gonna lie, it's been interesting. It hasn't been a flawless easy transition but I'm so much healthier.

Annie: "I'm so confident. I don't even look at them."

Riley: Oh. When I first started putting music back out, when I put out *Loved By You*, and again, that song important to me that it was the first, because it reflects that journey,

when I wrote that song, I saw the little girl in the backseat of the car singing these words over herself and singing truth over herself.

Annie: Even the t-shirts. The t-shirt. The fact that the back of your t-shirt says it first person... It's so smart. It's so smart.

Riley: I just love it. I really want that song to encourage people and remind people to sing truth over themselves. But listen, I think I wrote that song for me more than anybody. Because I needed the reminder. And, you know, putting that song out first as I started stepping back into social media, there were still triggers. There were still things where it's like, Okay, that's your... notice how you feel. Notice how you feel. Notice how that makes you feel.

This is a little insider scoop. Listen, I would recommend this to any human who breathes that is on social media. And it's not because I don't love these people, it's not because I don't admire the people I see on the internet. I have almost everybody I follow muted.

Annie: Brilliant.

Riley: I see my family's posts.

Annie: Brilliant.

Riley: Just because I don't fully-

Annie: You can't unfollow them.

Riley: No, I can't unfollow them.

Annie: If you unfollowed me, if we unfollowed each other, someone would be like-

Riley: What happened?

Annie: Did you see them?

Riley: I wouldn't do that.

Annie: There are people who have got a lot of energy and time to that kind of stuff.

Riley: A hundred percent.

Annie: It's just not worth it.

Riley: No.

Annie: I think that before I follow somebody. I think if I follow him because we went on two dates and I unfollow him, is someone gonna notice?

Riley: Girl, they will.

Annie: They will. And that's okay.

Riley: They will.

Annie: I have a public life but I think about that all the time. So muting is helpful.

Riley: When God created us, I don't think as humanity, as human beings walking around here on earth, I don't think we were designed to have as much access to the highlight reel of the people around us. I don't think that that's ever been a good healthy thing for our brains. But we are living in a culture where that is an epicenter. We're all doing it.

And I think that for me, I had to create healthier boundaries. I have been diagnosed with OCD since I was a little kid. And when I notice flares when I'm on social media and when I'm doing... so I have to make better choices for my health. I have to. I have to do it. So I would mute people and I would delete apps off my phone. I'd post and ghost.

Annie: Post and ghost.

Riley: Post and get out there.

Annie: I love it. Are you on TikTok as well?

Riley: I am.

Annie: So do you do the same thing over there? That is so much harder because it's not like you only see who you follow. They build you... I mean, I was on for a month and a half and had to get off. I was like, "I can't. This is taking over... I'm not sleeping."

Riley: Girl, I know.

Annie: I'd swipe up and they're like, "Hey, you've been scrolling for a while. Do you want to take a break?" I mean, I'm so mortified.

- Riley:** It's like, "Please don't bully me, TikTok."
- Annie:** Yeah. "Keep it to yourself, TikTok." But I can't do it. So I've just learned that's not an app I can do. I don't have enough self-control to be in TikTok.
- Riley:** It's hard. It gives you that quick hit of... is it dopamine?
- Annie:** Yeah, I think so.
- Riley:** And when you get that dopamine hit after watching a ten-second video that's entertaining you, it's like, Why stop now?
- Annie:** Yeah. I know.
- Riley:** They're such a science behind it. But no.
- Annie:** I have almost everyone's stories turned off, but I could mute all of their posts and only see instead... because building the favorites thing has been challenging. I'm like, yeah, they're favorite. No, I can't do this.
- Riley:** I can't either.
- Annie:** That's really smart.
- Riley:** If they're really your friend and you're really theirs, mute them and give them a phone call instead. That's my thought. I'm like, listen...
- Annie:** Listen.
- Riley:** If you're not gonna call me and we're not gonna be friends like that, if I don't feel comfortable calling you, then maybe I shouldn't be seeing every detail of your life online.
- Annie:** That's really smart.
- Riley:** That's my thought
- Annie:** One of the sentences that came to my mind in July when I was off social media is I said 30 days holds a lot when I'm not holding my phone.
- Riley:** Woo. Okay.
- Annie:** And I was like-

Riley: I gotta take a lap out.

Annie: I got so many books read and I saw so many people. The only things I missed on social media that were like big announcements, someone texted me and said, did you see? I was like, no. I didn't see. People that I love got in trouble with the internet. I didn't know. We were still eating lunch. I didn't know they were struggling because the internet was yelling at them. I mean, it was great.

Riley: You know, that's how life was intended to be. I firmly believe it.

Annie: I know.

Riley: I do. You gotta have social media boundaries.

Annie: Man, I am so thrilled for people to get to hear this album now. I mean, I was thrilled when I heard it. Now that we all know the journey to *Church Pew*. Well done, Riley.

Riley: Oh, I'm just... it is not all... I give the credit where credit is due. The Lord has been so faithful. And I don't just say that because we wrote a good album. He has been faithful in rebuilding what I had let get worn down within my spirit. He has been patient and kind and creating... not creating... and reinstiling identity that intrinsically lives in me because I know Him, because He created me.

Annie: Yeah. And He brought it back to the front of who you are.

Riley: Yes. Yes.

Annie: Well done.

Riley: Thanks, Sister.

Annie: I'm so proud to be your friend. I'm so proud to be your friend. I mean, I was before, but this journey is just amazing. Is there anything we didn't say you want to make sure we say?

Riley: I don't know. I don't think so. This is great.

Annie: Okay. Album out, *Church Pew* out September 22nd.

Riley: All stuff. I'll be on tour.

- Annie:** Oh yeah. This is my favorite thing is you're gonna go on tour and people are gonna be like, We're friends, that sounds fun. You're about to have a real crew.
- Riley:** I can't wait.
- Annie:** People show up. So just get ready.
- Riley:** I love that. I mean, you got some... they are so in it, you know?
- Annie:** I know.
- Riley:** They're die-hard.
- Annie:** They really mean it. It's so fun. It's really kind.
- Riley:** It's so good.
- Annie:** It's one of my favorite things. Okay, the last question we always ask. Riley Clemmons, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.
- Riley:** Right now?
- Annie:** Yeah. What do y'all do for fun?
- Riley:** Oh. Mm. Listen, I'm a crafter.
- Annie:** Are you?
- Riley:** Gimme crafts. I have to be entertained like I'm 12 years old. My brain's a busy brain. I gotta be doing something all the time.
- Annie:** What kinds of things do you do?
- Riley:** I've been making bracelets recently.
- Annie:** Oh wow. Oh, those are beautiful.
- Riley:** Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate it. I've been making bracelets for literally everybody in my family.
- Annie:** Oh my gosh. When you're on the tour bus, are you just like in the front or back lounge just making bracelets?

Riley: Crafting. I'm doing that. I got some watercolor stuff that I've been doing recently. Big into that. Also love a cross-stitch moment.

Annie: I live for cross-stitching.

Riley: I know, I know. I saw that. When you commented on my story, I was like, "Why aren't we...? We need to form a little old lady's cross stitch."

Annie: Oh my gosh. Like a quilting bee but for cross-stitching.

Riley: Yeah. Can we do that?

Annie: Won't that be great?

Riley: Yeah.

Annie: Because then we just sit around working on what we work on but we're together.

Riley: Girl, that's why it's fun. All of these things I just named you can carry a great conversation while doing them, not looking at a phone, not being distracted. That sounds fun to me. Gimme some good food, some good company, and a craft.

Annie: Okay. You grew up here. What's the best place to eat? If someone's coming and they've got to eat here, where are they eating? Did you grow up in Brentwood?

Riley: I grew up in Brentwood, yeah. There are so many good places to eat and it's changed a lot. I would say right now one of my favorites is a Lebanese restaurant on 12 South called Epice.

Annie: Girl, we had book club there on Sunday. I love that place so much.

Riley: It's so good.

Annie: It's so good. The hummus with the meat in it-

Riley: Unbelievable.

Annie: It's all I need. It's all I need.

Riley: It's so, so good.

Annie: But y'all gotta make a reservation because that place has got eight seats. It's so small.

Riley: It's so little. Go to Epice.

Annie: Good answer. Okay. Epice.

Riley: I could do a whole list.

Annie: Big ups to Epice today. All right, I love you, Riley. Thanks for doing this. Grateful.

Riley: I'll be back. This has been so fun. Hey, that sounds fun. We should do this again

Annie: Oh yeah, come on back.

[01:00:16] <Music>

Outro: Oh y'all, isn't she the best? Do you love her or what? Do you love her or what? I know. I know. I think she's awesome. Please go listen to *Church Pew*. I think you're gonna really enjoy that album. Follow Riley on social media, thank her for being on the show.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that is how you can find me. And don't forget, you can find the That Sounds Fun Podcast on Instagram with lots more fun content @thatsoundsfunpodcast.

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, hand to heaven, no kidding, I'm gonna go right now and order that Simple Modern Tumblr with the confetti on it because I'm scared y'all are gonna buy me out and beat me to it. Instead, we get to be twinsies. So that sounds fun to me.

Y'all have a great day. We'll see you back here tomorrow—y'all know we love a bonus Friday episode—with Carolyn Weber, one of my all-time favorite authors. We're gonna talk all about the brand new movie, you've seen me, heard me talking about it, *Surprised by Oxford*. Y'all, it's based on Carolyn's memoir. It is such a good book.

The movie comes out next Wednesday, September 27th. We're gonna talk about it tomorrow. If you love all things memoir, C. S. Lewis, love story, faith story, tomorrow's conversation is for you. We'll see y'all on Friday.