

[00:00:00] <music>

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

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors. This show is sponsored by [BetterHelp](#). Between the holidays and the crazy schedule and caring, all the emotions that come along with that, this time of year can be a lot and it's natural to feel some kind of way, some sadness or anxiety about it. But therapy truly can help. Having a place to process all of that can be a bright spot amid all of the stress and change, something to look forward to to make you feel grounded and to give you the tools to manage everything going on.

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Intro: Today on the show I get to talk with my friend Natalie Grant. Y'all love her so much, and so do I. She's no stranger around here. And her brand new album *Seasons* is out, y'all. Have you listened to it yet? It is like this beautiful journey of covers featuring some of Natalie's favorite songs from every season. Like not her own songs, these classics like *Make You Feel My Love* and *I Need You* and *Bridge over Troubled Water*.

It's one of those albums where you think you found your favorite song and then you flip to the next one and you're like, "No, I think that's my favorite song." Let's throw in there some incredible collabs like Mary Mary and CeCe Winans and Dolly Parton. Y'all are gonna die over the Dolly Parton story. It's so good. It's just the best album.

I could not have loved this conversation more. And I know y'all will too. We're about to go deep with our sweet friend Natalie Grant.

[00:02:06] <Music>

Annie: Natalie, welcome back to That Sounds Fun.

Natalie: Thank you for having me. I'm so honored.

Annie: Your poor voice. Will you just tell us why are... What is happening? Why are you singing? Are you just singing some... Are you on the road right now?

Natalie: Yes. Well, I'm home at this moment but I leave out tonight at midnight bus call. You get that.

Annie: Yes.

Natalie: You know what that's all about. Yeah, we've been touring a lot. You know, it's so funny I said kind of like at the start of this year, like, "Hey, guys, I'm going to slow down this year." Which why do we say those things out loud? Because when we do for some reason it puts something in the atmosphere that makes sure we do the opposite. I've really traveled and toured more this year than I probably have in the previous five to eight years.

Annie: Wow.

Natalie: It's weird. It's like I've worked way too much.

Annie: I mean, but people are showing up, right? That's the amazing thing is that people are buying tickets.

Natalie: They are. Every night, Bernie and I are like, we're just so grateful that people say yes in the world we're living in, that people choose to spend their hard-earned dollars on live music. It's a gift. But yes, the singing is...

Annie: Let's talk about it's a major difference in bus call between you and me. I'm going to describe my bus call and then I want you to tell me about your and Bernie's bus call. My bus call's at midnight, which means the bus is rolling at midnight. So I drive to Target and park my car to Target at about 11 o'clock. How do you get picked up for the bus call, Natalie Grant? Tell the people.

Natalie: It comes to my house.

Annie: Yeah, it's different. It's different.

Natalie: Can I just tell you something, Annie Downs? You have earned the right for the bus to pull up in front of your house. You have.

Annie: No.

Natalie: You have.

Annie: No, no, no, no. I'm in 100% that you have earned the right.

Natalie: No, you.

Annie: Listen, you made the Georgia Bulldogs win the national championship, if you'll recall. So I will pay for the bus to pick you up at your house for the rest of my days because you gave me the biggest tie of my life. I've never done drugs, but you gave me the biggest tie in my life when Georgia won the National Championship in 2001.

Natalie: That was '22.

Annie: Oh, yeah, you're right. I'm sorry. It was January '22.

Natalie: '22.

Annie: '21 season. It was January '22.

Natalie: Pretty incredible game.

Annie: That was so fun.

Natalie: It was actually an incredible game. But let me just tell you that I've been doing a couple of shows with my church, so they've been going out on tour. And the bus doesn't pick me up at my house.

Annie: Oh, no. They don't know. They don't know.

Natalie: So I'm like, "Oh, okay, Natalie, yes, get over yourself."

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Natalie: But when you're kind of like-

Annie: Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord...

Natalie: The Lord and He will lift you.... You are... Oh, I feel so much more seen by you that you know that song.

Annie: Oh, listen. Yeah, yeah. Because I think that's important for people to know. They're gonna hear you sing on a Friday night. You and Bernie are doing a tour right now. And they're gonna be like, Yeah, this voice is unbelievable. And what they don't know is that on Wednesday, and Thursday, you're doing tons of medical things on your throat. You're doing laundry, and then you sleep on a moving machine to get to where they are.

Natalie: It's so funny because before I asked... I wonder about this with you. Like before you started touring and going on the road, was it more romanticized in your mind than it actually possibly is?

Annie: You know, I only do like three weeks a year.

Natalie: But I do love the bus.

Annie: So it's still like I go to summer camp still. Like it's just my summer camp. I still love it.

Natalie: So you're like, This is amazing.

Annie: I think the part that I didn't have any context for was the social and physical challenges of the three days off.

Natalie: Right.

Annie: Where you're like, Oh my gosh, I would like to see my friends, but I also have got to sleep because my voice is so tired that I can't talk.

Natalie: I have to sleep. I have to do laundry. I have to do life. And that rhythm of the two different feet constantly being in this world and doing it. And then you kind of feel like you get in a rhythm and then it stops and you come back into a different moment and then you've gotta get back in that rhythm and you're just in that rhythm and it's time to pack your bag and go again. I say this like it's... I mean, I've been doing it for 25 years and I'm very grateful. I've literally been packing a bag for 25 Years.

Annie: That's why they pick you up at your door. I've been touring for five years. So you get picked up at your door as it should be. As it should be. I mean, Natalie, I think it's so amazing because it also is this like reminder to all of us that every job has amazing parts and challenging parts. There is not a job that is like, I get carried on a throne from point A to point B and then I only do what I like.

Natalie: No. Yeah. No, no. It requires hard work. It requires discipline. I think that that's too, like, you know... I've never stopped learning or I've never stopped being a student. Right? You never arrive. Whoever you are, whatever we're doing, I'm still learning different ways to take care of my voice or new vocal warmups.

Like I went to Vanderbilt Vocal Center and they said, "Hey, now that you're 50, your voice is changing. Do these warmups because the warmups you did in your 40s are..." It's like you're constantly reevaluating, how can I get better at what God's called me to do? How do I take care of the gift? And then constantly being a student. I think when people think they've arrived is where everything starts to go awry.

Annie: Yeah.

Annie: I had breakfast with someone this morning and she said, what's the number one thing you're learning in New York? And I was like, that I'm always learning. I never stop learning.

Natalie: Always do.

Annie: I never get to turn off and just autopilot like I do at home. There is no autopiloting here.

Natalie: Right. No.

Annie: And it's been really interesting because I feel... I say this a lot and I feel this way, that like the Bible is bottomless. You can just keep reading it. But with life I had gotten in my brain of like, but you can sort out life. The Bible has no end, but you can sort out life. And now I'm like, naw dog. So to hear you say you're still learning how to use your primary vocal muscle even though you've been doing this professionally 25 years is unbelievable.

Natalie: Well, it's honestly because if you don't... Sometimes I look at younger people in their craft, especially a singer and I just wanna go, Don't be shortsighted. Don't be so in this moment that you're looking at this moment you're in and thinking that everything about what you're doing is about right now. Because honestly, you want the longevity piece. You wanna be able to go, okay, how do I actually do this for 20 years? And how do I sustain this?

And I did not know. When I first got started, I would drink a milkshake before I would sing. I would not warm up. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know you're not supposed to have dairy before you sing. But I ended up rupturing a vocal cord because I was being flippant. I was being flippant with my gift.

Annie: Wow.

Natalie: I think that that's the part we can always be like, Oh, it's so easy to say, it's all the Lord. It's all the Lord. He's like, yeah, but it's a partnership. I gave you the gift but you have to steward it.

Annie: Wow.

Natalie: And I've definitely been learning that over the last... well, since 2004 when my voice blew up.

Annie: Stewarding the gift is such an under-taught concept. Because I didn't know I had to go to Vanderbilt Voice Clinic. I did the same. I went to Jenny and Kim and-

Natalie: Oh, for sure. As a speaker.

Annie: And I have a warmup now that... I don't sing a note, but I talk a note. So we have a warm up in my intro on stage is this note and my talking on stage is this note. I just had no idea. So many of our friends listening... I mean pastors... Natalie, why do we keep seeing friends and pastoring jobs and in other jobs blow up their lives? It's because they're not stewarding their gift.

Natalie: You're right.

Annie: Whether it's their voice or their soul, they're not stewarding their gift. And it's rupturing.

Natalie: They are not. Exactly. And it's rupturing.

Annie: Yes. I know. I know.

Natalie: Lord, help us actually. It's their lives are rupturing.

Annie: How has that happened? I mean, for you and Bernie... this is not marriage counseling. You don't have to tell us things you don't wanna tell us. I mean, y'all have had also a public marriage for 25-ish years, right?

Natalie: Yes.

Annie: How have you handled the gift? How have you done it in a way that keeps things from rupturing?

Natalie: Well, it's funny because you talk about, you know, I can look at so many friends or ministries and usually we all say this, but then somehow when you're in the middle of it, it's so hard to not do it. But then you become married to your gift or married to your ministry or married to your calling or married to your platform or married to your...

So before I steward a platform God's given me, I steward the marriage God's given me. And that idea that my marriage comes before my kids. Because I think a lot of times too then people have kids... and kids can become idols in your life. They can become where it's your everything, your whole energy and focus.

So Bernie and I have not done it perfectly, but we prioritize our marriage, we prioritize time together, we prioritize communication with one another, we prioritize preferring one another. And I think that putting that into practice through the years has not made it perfect, but it's made it possible and it's what's actually I think kept the other stuff that we're doing healthy and possible. It's because of stewarding the marriage, then stewarding the family, then stewarding the platform. There's like an order to it.

Annie: When are you gonna write that book?

Natalie: Girl, I'm just giving you the material.

Annie: No, you write books. I love your books. So I need you to do it again. Do it again.

Natalie: Do it again.

Annie: You know, it's interesting because I remember about a decade ago, Natalie, someone forwarded me an article. I've been in this full-time since April of 2012. So 11 years. Probably 9 to 10 years ago, someone forwarded me an article that was like, "I am single because of my job." And I was like, "That's not me. I picked marriage. I wouldn't..."

And the longer I've done this, if there is a thing that I've had to reconcile with the Lord around, well, if I put all my energy toward work, guess what? It works. And if I put all my energy toward dating, guess what? It doesn't work. So how about I just keep doing what I'm good at and get really successful? But I have had to adjust what I steward because my job became my life.

Natalie: Well, and it's easy for that in anyone, married or single, but definitely more when you're single. For example, if you're in a marriage that is... you're not satisfied with it or you're unhappy, then you pour yourself into something that you think is going to bring you satisfaction. And nothing in life that's good comes for free except for

salvation. And even that you don't work, but you work out your own salvation. So you don't have to do works to be saved but it's the only free thing. Everything else, you have to actually put the work in if you want something successful out of it.

Annie: I mean, I'm probably borderline cynical when people are like, "Hey, those tickets are free." And I'm like, nothing's free. No. What are we gonna pay then?

Natalie: Nothing's free.

Annie: Yeah. What are we paying? Are we paying with our attendance or do they want us to post something?

Natalie: What do they want from me?

Annie: Nothing's free.

Natalie: What do they want? That's not cynic. That's just real.

Annie: Yeah, I know.

[00:15:19] <Music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our amazing partners, [Thrive Causemetics](#). The sun may be setting so early these days, but there's still plenty of ways to brighten up your makeup look with Thrive Causemetics. Maybe even try recreating the latest trends with their viral award-winning tubing mascara. You know the one I'm always raving about, the one that I am buying today because mine is running out. Those turquoise tubes that are all over your socials.

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Now back to our conversation with Natalie.

[00:18:16] <Music>

Annie: Earlier this year you went on a tour with a bunch of women and it was genuinely one of the most diverse tours I've ever seen go out. Y'all are from different streams of the church, from different record labels, right?

Natalie: Yes.

Annie: From different racial backgrounds, different ages, married, single. Talk to me about your experience of that tour. I was just blown away at the... we see tour posters and I go, I can tell what they care about, what they don't care about. And y'all tour posters said to me, we care about everyone being welcome here.

Natalie: Yes. Thank you for saying that actually. Because that was so intentional and we also wanted that strength. And I said, listen, this can borderline. We don't want diva. This is not we are divas. This is we are strong women of God who are soldiers on the front line and we are actually in battle together. It's not like a this person, then a this person, then a this person, then a this person. It's we're comrades and we're fighting the good fight together. I've never been a part of a tour like that in my life.

Annie: Really?

Natalie: And it's really funny because on the front side I was skeptical. I mean, I'm gonna be honest. I was like, this has the potential to be a complete disaster.

Annie: Because it was like five headliners and you don't put five headliners on the same tour.

Natalie: And all women, you know what I mean?

Annie: The only lack of diversity was gender.

Natalie: Right. And you have the stereotype of, oh, this is gonna turn... not only was there none of that, but there was this instant under... we got on a Zoom right from the beginning and we said, you know, what is it that we are hoping to accomplish? And I think that we were so in one accord from the beginning.

And I think that when you realize that you can be from completely different backgrounds, different life experiences, especially the racial piece, where there's supercharged issues here and there's supercharged opinions here. And all of that, it is possible as followers of Christ to actually not just lay those things aside, but walk through those things together even when you might not agree or see eye to eye on everything. But you have the commonality of Christ. It sounds like I'm oversimplifying complicated issues. That's actually because we are always busy complicating issues.

Annie: Yeah. Right.

Natalie: Jesus is actually a simple solution. Like He's made it pretty plain and clear what to do. We just don't like to do it. And that tour, there was a power every night. Annie,

I have never... every night was a transformational... Like, we would stand on the stage, we would look out. It was not just women in the audience. It was fully men and women.

And I would look out and see a 68-year-old white Woman next to a 40-year-old Black man. That man might have just come from a Black Lives Matter march and that White woman may have voted a very different way in the last election and somehow we were looking out and they were worshiping with their whole hearts and fully engaged in a moment. And you were like, this is actually what the body of Christ is supposed to look like. Like, this is what it's supposed to look like.

So I was not just pleasantly surprised. I think I felt like it was one of the most worthwhile investments. It took a toll. Oh, good grief, it took a toll. There was so many dates and hard travel but it was one of the more worthwhile investments of my life.

Annie: Yeah. I mean, I feel like when one of those... when you've said I'm not gonna travel as much in 2023, and then that one either pops up in your brain or pops up on your calendar and you go, I don't know how we say no to...

Natalie: We can't.

Annie: Me and the Lord had this long conversation last week, Natalie, where the Lord was like, Hey, you've said two really hard nos that I didn't say. And I was like, Oh, oh, okay. Yeah, you're right.

Natalie: Oooh.

Annie: And it was almost like Lord was like, I'm not saying I'm not saying no. I'm just saying you said no before I did.

Natalie: You know what? That's really good though, because I'm usually thinking I didn't say no when He told me to. Because I think that no matter what field you're in, if you're especially in something like what we do or in full-time ministry or full-time, you know, whatever your pursuit is, there's this idea that if you say no that the opportunity isn't gonna present itself again.

Annie: Oh, right.

Natalie: And if you say no, then they're gonna find somebody else to do it and that means the next time they're gonna go back to that somebody because that somebody showed up and did it and now they're not gonna come back to me. And there's this

constant perpetual fear. And that like, okay, did God grace me to do it or didn't he grace me to do it in this season is always like the question of my life.

But then when I'm oftentimes like, okay, am I just tired because I'm doing what God's called me to do? Or am I soul-exhausted? Because those are two different things. Because when God's told us to run a race, I've never run anything in my life where I'm not tired.

Annie: Yes.

Natalie: Like, we're gonna be tired. This idea that when we're doing what God's called us to do, that we're just supposed to like be like-

Annie: I've never worked a day in my life that...When you have your dream job, you never work a day in your life. I'm like-

Natalie: That's not real. That's not real.

Annie: ...who says that? They lied to us.

Natalie: He said, we are running a race. Running a race means, Ooh, Lord, that's going to take work-

Annie: That's good.

Natalie: ...and training and you're gonna be tired. But am I soul exhausted? Am I fried? And I can know, like, that's a different thing than being tired. I feel like we're in a moment where people don't wanna be tired because they don't wanna work.

Annie: Say it. Say it. You're exactly right.

Natalie: But I'm like, You gotta work.

Annie: That's exactly it. That "run the race" is such a good reminder for me, Natalie, because when I go to run, it is so tiring.

Natalie: I hate running.

Annie: It's so tiring. But it's the right thing to do to stay as healthy as you wanna stay. For me. That's not true for everybody's body. You don't have to run. Running is not the only form of exercise before you tweet at us. But it is that like, oh yeah, when I'm running the race marked out for me, my feet are gonna be sore and I'm gonna be exhausted. And that's okay. So how do you identify... Talk to our friends. I mean,

it's November, people are tired this year, and we're going into holidays. How do you identify soul exhaustion versus tired running the race?

Natalie: That's a really good question that I'm still trying to figure out in my own life in this current season. But I think one of the ways that I know if I'm soul exhausted is if I can no longer... Okay, being tired and going, Oh, I don't wanna pack my bag again. I don't wanna do this. I don't wanna get on the bus. I don't wanna have to get up tomorrow. I don't wanna have to get on stage. I don't... That's just being tired of complaining. And then I do it and I get on stage and God moves and then I get off it and I'm like, "I'm so glad I did that." You know?

Annie: Yeah.

Natalie: So soul exhaustion for me-

Annie: How people feel about small group every time they're hosting it. An hour before, you're like, why do I host small group?

Natalie: We host this disciple group every... and I'm like, why am I doing this? Can I get a kidney stone? I'm sick. I think I am. I think I have a fever. I might have covid.

Annie: Can I get a kidney stone? But then as soon as it's over, you're like, I love doing this.

Natalie: This is why I do this.

Annie: And that's just tired while you're running.

Natalie: That's just tired while you're running.

Annie: Okay.

Natalie: For me, soul exhaustion is when I feel like I can no longer sense the voice of God in my life. Now, when I say that I've never heard God speak out loud. I really haven't. I've heard some people say they have and I'm like, How special for you? But I've never heard a voice say, like, you know. And I'm like-

Annie: Me neither.

Natalie: ...I don't know that that was actually Him. But I'm not here to debate that.

Annie: Sure.

Natalie: You do you and Him. But I do recognize the still small voice of the Holy Spirit in my gut. And when I feel like I can no longer hear that, I can no longer sense, God, what are you saying? Like, I feel completely at a loss as far as where are you leading me tonight. What am I supposed to be doing? Or sometimes when I am really soul exhausted, I'm sorry if this makes me a terrible Christian, but I can't read the word.

Annie: Yeah, I know.

Natalie: I can't. I try and it's almost like it's agitating, which then lets me know my soul is exhausted. And the very thing I need is the very thing I'm like, Oh. So then I have to go, okay. You have to let the agitation happen. You have to get through and you have to actually quiet yourself before the Lord. And learn how to say no to certain things that you said yes to. And then it's good for me to now go, Yeah. But then you're saying no to certain things just because you're tired and you've become lazy because you want comfortable when God actually told you to say yes.

Annie: It's also why we have themes.

Natalie: This is why you gotta be walking with Jesus because that discernment too is-

Annie: That's right.

Natalie: The discernment piece is really, really, really important. And that only I think for me comes from walking closely with the Lord and surrounding myself with people who will tell me the truth.

Annie: Have to.

Natalie: And that's the Lord.

Annie: Yes. That's it. That's it. I want as much discernment as Jesus will give me and also I trust the people around me who go, "Hey, you're saying no because you're tired. And between now and next July you'll have a break.

Natalie: You're gonna regret this.

Annie: So we're gonna say yes to next July-

Natalie: Exactly.

Annie: Because you're making a decision right now of tired. Or my team going, Hey, I think I've... I don't know if I've told you this story, but I know I've said this out loud

before. After my nephew died last year, I just kept working. I thought, "What am I gonna do? Lay at home and watch television? That won't feel any better."

Annie: Right. Right.

Annie: And I was showing up the best I could, it was not a good version of me showing up. And finally my manager, Kelly, pulls me in her office and says, "I don't think we're experiencing you the way you think that we are." So that's someone else saying your soul tiredness is exposing itself.

Natalie: It's exposing itself. And I think that's too a really good way to look at... Like, when I know that I'm toxic. Like, do you know what I mean?

Annie: Yes.

Natalie: I'm no longer just tired and kind of irritable, but I'm actually at a toxic level where everything and everyone and all of it. Then I'm like, no. I need to have a little check-in with the Lord.

Annie: So I'm in a hotel bathroom getting ready a couple of weekends ago and we had had like six weekends on the road but it's all one-offs. So you're just flying, speaking, flying home. So it's not doing the bus.

Natalie: Which is hard.

Annie: Yes, it's different kind of hard than busting. And I listened to *Seasons* while I was getting ready in the bathroom. And I have to tell you, because so many of the songs are faith songs I grew up with, I was just crying as I'm listening to this album. I think I might have texted you when it was happening. But like *In Christ Alone*, I was like, ahh. It's not the regular *In Christ Alone*. It's the one of like-

Natalie: Michael English.

Annie: Michael English. Where you're like it changes keys. I mean, I was losing it, Natalie. I was losing it. How did you put together this album? Is it songs that were in your heart?

Natalie: Well, okay, so in 2020, when my husband and I started doing those Song in Days Keep the Crazy's Away and we were putting them on Instagram and Facebook and whatever, I actually noticed that I wasn't going to my own songs and singing my own songs in that moment where everything was uncertain. Everybody was kind of like, you know, we're all like, what's happening in the world? Is the world ending? Like, are we ever gonna get out of our houses? You know what I mean?

In the thick of just the... we've never been through anything like this ever collectively as a nation and as a world. And I found myself going back to those songs that were foundational songs for me.

Annie: Wow.

Natalie: A hymn or my tribute. Like my tribute from Andraé Crouch, like I was, you know, sitting in front of my parents' vinyl player as a four and five-year-old child. And I can remember the smell of dinner while my mom was cooking and singing to God Be the Glory at the top of her lungs.

There's this nostalgic thing to these songs that I picked that were all from different seasons. And I go *In Christ Alone* my first year of college. And I remember being so lost, being in a terrible dating relationship, not knowing what I wanted to do. And that song came out and I went, "I don't know what I wanna do or where I'm going, but I know who I wanna do it for. I know who I wanna build my life on." And it became this foundational song for me.

Or *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. Like there's so many songs that I go... like Dick Clark, right, he said, music is the soundtrack of our lives. But for me, Jesus Music was the soundtrack of my life.

Like before I ever did this for my job, I've been a fan of Christian gospel music my whole life. So that's really where the concept came from was, okay, these songs... Russ Taff. I remember... I'm the youngest of five kids, so all my older siblings were obsessed with Russ Taff. So I wanted to be like them. So I would listen to what they... and I'm like, you can do rock and roll in Christian music.

Like in the 80s, you know, White Heart, Russ Taft, like they were showing us, wait, you can do rock and roll and still do Christian music. You can do this and still do Christian music. You can do... And I think that for my kids. There's certain songs that have been put on a shelf that you're like, these songs never belonged on a shelf. They're the songs that stand the test of time.

And I know that God is always doing a new thing. Like always. But sometimes to move forward it actually helps to look back and to see what God has done and to see the faithfulness through somebody else's life, somebody else's gift, somebody else's encounter. And to go, Oh my goodness. So that's really where the concept of the record came from.

And a lot of people have asked like, did you come up with a list of people you wanted to sing with first? Did you come up with songs first?

- Annie:** Yeah. Because they're all like duet kind of things.
- Natalie:** They're all collabs. But I had the songs I wanted to do and I had the people instantly I wanted to do them with.
- Annie:** Really?
- Natalie:** And Annie, every last person I asked said yes.
- Annie:** Of course, they did, Natalie Grant.
- Natalie:** It was a God kiss. No, it was a God kiss. I felt like the Lord said I'm about... You have been faithful and you've done some things through the years that, you know, I'm about to blow your mind. Because if you would've ever told me that these people... Like Mary Mary, they've never remade Shackles. Other people have remade Shackles.
- Annie:** This is the only time they sang on it?
- Natalie:** Ever. Outside of their own.
- Annie:** Natalie. That is awesome.
- Natalie:** So it was just these moments. The only one that I did not actually pick because it was too big for my mind to be able to comprehend that it would ever happen was Dolly Parton. Like that was-
- Annie:** To be sure. I mean, I don't know if you drove up to Dollywood and she was standing there. I don't know how you did it. I don't know how you did it. But you and her singing *Step by Step*, I was like, "What is life? What is life that I'm one degree from Dolly singing *Step by Step*?"
- Natalie:** That kind of was a "what is life"? Because I don't know how many of your listeners listening right now know that song. But if you ever watch *The Preacher's Wife*, which Whitney... I mean, Whitney is the end all be all forever voice for me. Whitney and Cece.

So on *The Preacher's wife*, they had this song *Step by Step*. And I moved to Nashville in 1996. I moved here and I was like, "I'm gonna get a record deal. It's gonna be amazing. Everybody's like da da." And I had to get a job and I worked at Medicare doing accounts payable.

Annie: Wow.

Natalie: And I think that that even right now is a word for a generation that is actually so fixated on the dream that they don't want the in-between. Like just do the work. Even if it doesn't look like what you want it to be yet, do the work. Be faithful in something and then God will trust you with something else.

Annie: That's right. So I'm going to this job. I despised driving down on highway 24 in Nashville from my hole-in-the-wall apartment in Antioch. And I remember going to this job in Metro Center Boulevard and every day in my beat-up Volkswagen Golf that could not go over 55 without shaking-

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Natalie: I had a cassette player and I would listen to Whitney Houston singing *Step by Step*. And she would get to the end of the song and she would always say, "Come on baby, got to keep moving. Come on baby, got to keep moving. And I was like, that's right. Just come on baby, got to keep... I would give myself the pep talk every day.

And when I think back to that girl driving to that job, going, Come on baby, just take it one step at a time. Don't try to take a leap. Don't try to jump over some of the steps you have to take. If you would've told that girl that, however many years later, Dolly Parton would be singing that very song with me on it. My mind probably would've exploded at that time.

But then even Dolly covering a Whitney song, like, there's just so many after Whitney did. *I Will Always Love You*. There's so many beautiful things about that whole moment that's just too much.

Annie: I know that there are times where the best way to do a song like that is you are in my studio, you do your part, five days later you call me, I come and do my part five days later and then they put them together. So of all these collabs, how often are y'all in the same room? Or how often are you there when they're recording? And how often was it separate?

Natalie: Well, some part of it was really hard because my hero in life is CeCe Winans.

Annie: Yes, of course.

Natalie: I was on the It's Time Tour when she recorded her vocal. So I FaceTimed in. And was a part of it because I was like, I have to be part of this somehow. So it was about half and half where we were in the room together and half where we weren't.

You know, like Tasha Cobbs Leonard and I did *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. That one we actually went, Okay, this was written in 1969, released in 1970. How would they have recorded this? It was Simon and Garfunkel first, then it was Aretha. We're like, how would they have done it? They would've done it live in a studio. And they would've done a full take. And if they didn't like the way it turned out, they would've done another take. So what you hear on that record is one full take in a studio live.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Natalie: Tasha and I and all the instruments are in one room. Tasha and I are looking at one another. And we just did it live like it would've been done in 1969.

Annie: Oh my gosh. I cannot wait to listen again knowing y'all are like staring at each other's faces.

Natalie: Like literally staring each other's faces, working off of one another, not knowing what we're about to do. And all of it was literally in the moment. I mean, Tasha is actually from another planet. She-

Annie: I haven't gotten to be friends with her yet.

Natalie: She levels everybody else.

Annie: Will you help me be friends with her?

Natalie: Yes. Because honestly you would love her.

Annie: That's what I've heard. That's what I've heard.

Natalie: Her.

Annie: I know.

Natalie: Oh my gosh. You need her on your podcast. You need her on it.

Annie: I know, I know. That's why I'm asking for your help. I'm publicly requesting you to make us be friends.

Natalie: Yes, Actually, I'm going to connect you.

Annie: Great. I would love it.

Natalie: But I have to tell you this story about Dolly because it's so mind-blowing. So you know this story?

Annie: No.

Natalie: Annie. Annie. Annie. Annie. Annie.

Annie: I can't wait.

Natalie: Oh my gosh. So I was asked to do the opening night of the season opener of Dollywood. So I was already like, "Oh my gosh, I'm so honored. I get to open Dollywood this season. That's cool." A week before I'm gonna do the concert, my manager gets an email from Dolly's manager. Like I just want you to think like Dolly Parton is freaking Dolly Parton. And this is what it says. "Dolly is actually going to be at Dollywood for Natalie's concert. And if it wouldn't trouble Natalie too greatly, she was wondering if she could sing a song with her." And I'm like, "Your name is on the park, ma'am. It's Dollywood." Whatever Dollywood like to do, Dolly can do.

Annie: That's right.

Natalie: So I'm literally like, "Oh my gosh, we're gonna sing a song together." So I'm already peeing my pants. I'm like, I don't even... like what do we sing? So I said, what would she like to sing? So she picked a hymn. This *Just a Little Talk With Jesus*. And I was like, Well I don't know that song. Can you ask her what version she'd like to do? And she literally said, "Tell Natalie it's the one in the red hymnal."

Annie: Oh my gosh, Dolly. She's exactly who I want her to be. That's exactly what I want her to say.

Natalie: She is.

Annie: Oh.

Natalie: So we go to the Red hymnal, learn the thing. We have this moment, like we hit it off. Like only Dolly makes everybody feel like they're her best friend. Side note. I just want to say this because I think it's a life lesson for all of us. She walked into Dollywood because she wanted to do a sound check, she knew every employee's name. She knew the guy backstage that was the stagehand. She asked about his son.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Natalie: She asked about this other person, how's your mama doing? Is her health... you know, I know she's been having..." She knew everything about everybody. She greeted everybody by name.

Annie: Wow.

Natalie: I was like, Dolly, Dolly... if people wanna know about longevity-

Annie: Real deal.

Natalie: Yeah, real deal. Okay. So I'm fast-forwarding because I know this is a long story.

Annie: No, I'm having a great time.

Natalie: Okay. Did that, I thought, that's just a life moment. Check it off the bucket list. Like that's the sum total of it all, right?

Annie: Yeah.

Natalie: Well, I have no idea that because of that my manager sent *Step by Step*. Because that's the one song I was like, Who are we gonna have do the song with me? Maybe we should get a group of girls. Maybe it should be like Girl Power. Like let's have it be like, you know... So we're trying to think through that.

Well, Mitchell, my manager, send the song to Dolly's team and I didn't even know it. So he comes back to me like a week after Dollywood and goes, "Well, Dolly passed." And I said, Passed on what? And he goes, "Oh, I had sent her *Step by Step*." And I said, "Well, I didn't even know to be disappointed because I didn't even know you asked."

Annie: Keep it to yourself, Mitchell.

Natalie: I'm like, "Why are you telling me that now?" Two weeks later, I get off stage, there is 17 missed phone calls from... Seventeen. One-seven. I thought someone had died.

Annie: Certainly.

Natalie: I'm like, "Something has happened. It is tragic. Get ahold of yourself, Natalie. Call him up." And he goes... Do you know, Mitchell?

Annie: Yes, yes, yes. I love him.

Natalie: My manager is a character. And he was like, "Look at your emails." I'm like, What? I open my email and there is a letter from Dolly Parton. It is on Dolly letterhead. It says, Hot pink Dolly right across the top.

Annie: No.

Natalie: Oh yes. And she says, "Natalie, I hope it's not too late for me to sing on *Step by Step*. Have you found somebody to do that with you yet? Because that song just keeps ringing and calling me back." I'm like, "Honestly, I love you."

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Natalie: And she said, "Even if it's too late for me, honey, I just want you to know that that is a great song for you and a great song for the world. Love Dolly." And I'm like-

Annie: Did they scan the letter in?

Natalie: I scanned the letter in which I will now frame and it will be in my entryway. I want you to know when you come-

Annie: This is what I heard is that the only way to talk to her is fax is what Reba said. Reba said she has her fax number.

Natalie: It's real. No, it's real. It's a letter and she's like, Okay, you have to scan this letter and send it in. And I am like, "She just asked." So she asked to be on the song after she had said no. So, then, of course, I'm like, "Oh, it's Dolly. Like there's nothing else happening. And she gave her heart and soul to that song. Like you would think at 70... She's 76 I think, at that age after long she's been doing it, she might do a couple of lines and put a few little things.

She sang the tar outta that song. But she arranged the end. She said, "I think we should do this at the end and have it..." So she arranged. She was so invested. Anyway, that's my Dolly story. I can retire now because I don't really know where to go from here. I sang with Dolly and Cece Winans and I literally was like, You guys, this must be my swan song because I don't really know where to go from here.

Annie: Yes. Yes. Well, I hope there's many more albums coming from you, but the fact that they are on there. This may be your like swan song as far as having collaborators.

Natalie: Right? I know. And I already was like, "I know, but I think I loved doing this record so much that I think I'm already thinking about Season 2."

[00:45:05] <Music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about another amazing partner, Caraway. Okay, the holidays are approaching and you know what that means? Lots of meals with family and friends. And I'm telling you, the beautiful Caraway pans can be a topic of conversation.

Hosting this season just got easier with their square wear set from roasting your first ever Turkey to making pancakes for 10 at a brunch. Caraway has you covered. Caraway's internet-famous kitchenware is a staple for any home and comes in various modern shades to fit with any design aesthetic. If you've been thinking about replacing your cookware or you're moving into a new place and need to stock the kitchen, now is the time.

Caraway Home's non-toxic kitchenware features a chemical-free ceramic coating so food can be prepared with peace of mind that no hard-to-pronounce chemicals will get into your healthy ingredients. The ceramic's naturally sleek surface means minimal oil or butter for slide-off-the-pan eggs and easy cleaning. And over 50,000 people have raved about their Caraway kitchen. Now it's time to try it for yourself.

Visit Carawayhome.com/tsf to take advantage of this limited-time offer for up to 20% off your next purchase. This deal is exclusive for our listeners. It will not last forever. So visit Carawayhome.com/tsf. Caraway, non-toxic cookware made modern.

Annie: Friends, have you gotten your copies of So Happy to Know You!? It's the book I wanted to write for my MiniBFFs to remind them God made each of them on purpose. It's a kids' book-size reminder that we need them just as they are. Their voice, their heart, their talents, their unique selves that no one else has. Jennie Poh beautifully brought it to life with her illustrations, and So Happy to Know You! is just the encouragement your kids need today to live confidently, and honestly, probably a message we all need no matter our age.

And you know when this book started rolling around in my brain? When I started telling you always Annie stories, things I would do that were a little and a lot. I realize the stories that make me me are your favorite ones and mine too. So this book hopefully helps your kiddos and you see yourself as perfectly unique. And we are so happy to know you. So get your copies of So Happy To Know You! wherever books are sold. Available right now.

Okay, now back to finish up our conversation with Natalie.

[00:47:25] <Music>

Annie: So, Natalie, the thing that happens when people stay in their lane and stay in their career for a long time is at some point you turn around and start raising other people up, which is... I mean, Dolly, you raised her up, but also, I mean, a lot of these artists you're giving space for to an audience that may not know them. You know?

Natalie: Right. And I love that.

Annie: So doing Seasons 2 is a great idea.

Natalie: Well, I've already have my whole list of other songs. I'm like, Oh, why didn't I do that one? Why didn't I do that one? And why didn't I do that one? So I've got my list going.

Annie: I mean, so now you and Bernie are out. And then do you have a Christmas tour coming?

Natalie: Yeah. So I've been doing this Christmas tour with Danny Gokey for the last... so this year is our eighth year of doing it together.

Annie: Oh my gosh. He's wonderful.

Natalie: And we love it. Yeah. Our Christmas tour just works like it. I often said we must be related because our voices were meant to sing together. Like, it just works. So I'm like, he's like a little brother.

Annie: He's wonderful. I mean his episode on our podcast was very life-changing for me. He talked about faith to believe what you can't actually hold. And I was-

Natalie: Come... ooh.

Annie: It messed me up.

Natalie: Come on.

Annie: It messed me up.

Natalie: Come on, Danny.

Annie: So everybody can go find all that. If they go to nataliegrant.com, they can find all the tickets to all the things.

Natalie: Yes. All the things. You can find all the information you need and probably some you don't.

Annie: Read the whole thing. You need all of it. Okay, Nat, what do we not talk about that you wanna make sure we talk about?

Natalie: I think we have it covered.

Annie: You've really done it. You've really done a thing today.

Natalie: No, you're the best.

Annie: Meanwhile my landlord comes through and turns on my heaters for me. So welcome to New York, Natalie.

Annie: That is a "welcome to New York". Honestly, can we just say, because you know what a football fan I am and the fact... this is sideline that has nothing to do with anything. But you know, I'm a diehard football fan and you know that I'm a Seahawks girl forever. But I also love Russell Wilson and he has been so trashed unnecessarily. It's like he just became the guy that everybody loved to hate.

Annie: I know.

Natalie: And then he went to Denver, but then he just played the game of his freaking life and took out Patrick Mahomes and beat the Chiefs.

Annie: Beat the Chiefs outta nowhere.

Natalie: Did you see that at the end of that Broncos game in Denver, as soon as the clock went to zero, they blasted Shake It Off by Taylor Swift because of Travis Kelce?

Annie: Fantastic. Fantastic.

Natalie: I don't know who made the decision but I love them so much more.

Annie: Have you ever seen a thing like Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift and what it's like culturally?

Natalie: Like what? Well, and I kind of wanna go-

Annie: It's kind of interesting.

Natalie: ...you guys, I want it to be... don't get so caught up in this moment. I hope it's something real.

Annie: Yeah, me too. I do too.

Natalie: I hope it's something real.

Annie: I kind of wanna be like, if anybody with half of a public life needs proof of why you wanna keep your dating life private, watch this. Watch Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift.

Natalie: Kind of like they're wanting it because you're like-

Annie: Yeah, they seem okay with it.

Natalie: She's owning the new football girlfriend role.

Annie: Yeah, she's doing it. Good on her. I wish them both well.

Natalie: Go on T Swift. Go on.

Annie: Wish them both. Well, may the Lord provide for both of them and for all of us in such a manner. If there's any football player out there waiting on me, interesting.

Natalie: You're Like, Hey, come on. Come On.

Annie: Yeah. Yeah. If they're still playing and they're in my age bracket, I'm impressed. Now, I'm looking more at the coaching lineup than the player lineup at this point.

Natalie: Come on, take it, take it. Take it.

Annie: Okay. Nat, you know the last question we always ask. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, besides resting your voice for the rest of the day, what sounds fun to you today?

Natalie: What sounds so fun that I'm starting to plan is my kids aren't gonna hear this hopefully, because we haven't surprised them yet, but I've just started planning our trip to Europe. My kids have never been to France and they've never been to Italy.

Annie: I'm so glad.

Natalie: And my daughters are juniors in high school and they're graduating next year and I'm just like the time is now for us to go as a family and make these memories. The

other thing that sounds really fun today is I'm gonna turn on my fireplace for the first time.

Annie: Yeah, right. Me too, I guess.

Natalie: And if you could only just see around that corner, you would see that my Christmas tree just went up yesterday.

Annie: Bless the Lord. As it should be.

Natalie: I have to decorate it.

Annie: I know you're also friends with Russell and Kailey Dickerson. Did you see Kailey said that she went ahead and put her tree up and she said this is the pre-game, this is not the Super Bowl?

Natalie: Yeah.

Annie: It's just the pre-game.

Natalie: Exactly.

Annie: It's preseason. Let it be. Let it be.

Natalie: That's exactly where I'm at. It's just a tree. All the things aren't here yet. I just want the lights.

Annie: I'm with you. I'm absolutely with you on that. Okay, I'll tell you, my parents, we did not do a lot of vacations. It wasn't the priority of our family. Because what my parents would do is every five years we'd do a really cool vacation. And we went to Europe when I was a senior and it was so special.

Natalie: See?

Annie: So what a special thing for you to do for the girls.

Natalie: I feel like we're gonna make core memories for.

Annie: Is it next summer?

Natalie: Summer.

Annie: Yeah. Great. Well done. That's what we did too, is we did the summer after my senior year or between my junior and senior and it was great. It was so special.

Natalie: I'm so excited.

Annie: That's awesome.

Natalie: I'm ready for it. We're ready for a family trip.

Annie: Pizza. Just pizza. So much pizza.

Natalie: Just eat all the bread and cheese. Just eat all of it.

Annie: The summer of Bread and Cheese is what we're having next year.

Natalie: I'm here for it.

Annie: Me too. So interesting.

Natalie: Yes, '24. I'm here for it.

Annie: Oh, I Love it. Oh, Natalie, thanks for making time to do this. I love you.

Natalie: I love you. Thank you so much for giving your time to me.

Annie: Oh, of course.

Natalie: And wave at Central Park and the beautiful fall trees for me. I love New York. I love New York.

Annie: New York is the best.

[00:53:15] <Music>

Outro: Oh you guys, isn't she the best? I know. She's just the best. Okay, if you have not streamed *Seasons* yet, please go and do that. You are going to love it. You know I've added one of those songs to our AFD Friday Faves playlist on Spotify. We'll link to that in the show notes as well. But every Friday I'm adding new songs that our friends are releasing and it is such a fun playlist and y'all went nuts over what I added from *Seasons*. I get it.

This album is so good. So make sure you're listening to it. And go follow Natalie on social media. Tell her thanks so much for being on the show and grab a ticket to

see her and Danny Gokey this Christmas. Listen, if you have not been to a Natalie Grant show, please go. They are so good.

If you have any questions from this episode, just drop them in the Q&A box in your Spotify app if you're a Spotify listener or of course, you can send them to us on Instagram @thatsoundsfunpodcast. And we answer those there in the story.

So if you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, the streets of New York. Wherever you need me, that is how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me... What am I gonna do today? You know, the leaves are really actively changing. So I think a little walk in Central Park before it gets dark today is on my to-do list. That sounds fun to me.

Y'all have a great week. We'll see you back here on Thursday with my dear friend, Faith Eury Cho. Will see y'all then.