

[00:00:00] <music>

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.

[00:00:52] <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 as we kick off our holiday shows. Oh, y'all just get ready for this month. December is always a favorite of mine, and you know, that counts today.

And just as a reminder, we started our advent plan yesterday for the Advent series. If you still want to jump in, listen, it is not too late, you have not missed a lot. Just go to anniefdowns.com/advent, and there you can jump in with us, print out the updated guidebook, if you did it with us last year, get the new guidebook. We also have the guidebook in Spanish so it is available to all of our Spanish-speaking friends. And that is all again at anniefdowns.com/advent.

Advent is short this year because it is usually four Sundays before Christmas Eve and Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday. So while Advent officially starts this coming Sunday, we started our plan yesterday. So jump in with us. I think you're gonna love it. Anniefdowns.com/advent.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors. This show is sponsored by [BetterHelp](#). This time of year can bring up all kinds of weird emotions, y'all, and you and me both, and you definitely don't have time to carry all that by yourself. It's completely natural to feel some kind of sadness or anxiety around the holidays and the end of the year.

And I'm telling you, this is where therapy is such a helpful tool in my life. Because on top of all that, I'm also going back to Nashville and leaving New York, and there's a lot of feelings. There's a lot of feelings. Find a place to process all of that so that the end of 2023 is marked by the emotions and marked by growth. Therapy can help you feel grounded and give you the tools to manage everything going on.

If you're thinking of starting therapy, give BetterHelp a try. It's entirely online, designed to be convenient, flexible, and suited to your schedule. When you're already on the go so much, you don't have to worry about one more place to go because your session can be done right from home. Just fill out a brief questionnaire, we love a quiz, and get matched with a licensed therapist, and switch therapists anytime for no additional charge.

Find a bright spot this season with BetterHelp. Visit [betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun](https://www.betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun) today to get 10% off your first month. That's [betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun](https://www.betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun).

Intro: Today on the show, I get to talk with my new friend, Chris Brown, from Elevation Worship. Chris lives in Charlotte with his wife and two kids, and it's part of the Grammy-winning Elevation Worship. You're probably already singing a lot of their hits in your car or at your church. They've included songs like *Graves in the Gardens*, *Jireh*, and *Same God*.

They just put out their first ever full-length Christmas album called *Echo the Angels*. Y'all, it is so good. Cue the Christmas music. Let's go. Y'all are just gonna love this guy's some really important thoughts for church staff members, for worship leaders, how to serve your local church. So it's a really beautiful, helpful conversation.

So here is my conversation with Chris Brown.

[00:03:49] <Music>

Annie: Chris, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Chris: Thanks. Appreciate you having me. This is fun being on for the first time.

Annie: I hope so. It is such a huge honor. Thank you. You are the voice and the words and the thoughts behind so much of the worship that we all get to experience. So it's a super honor to meet you.

Chris: Well, for real, thank you for having me. I'm looking forward to us chatting and having a good conversation.

Annie: I need you to know there are two rules of the guests that I'll have on That Sounds Fun.

Chris: Okay. All right.

Annie: So one of the rules is it's somebody I'm already friends with, which is not us. And the second rule is it's someone I want to be friends with. Because I think it's hard to talk to strangers, that's really bizarre. So just know that this is also like the first day of our friendship.

Chris: Okay.

Annie: Okay, great.

Chris: From here on out, we're friends. That's settled. We can move on.

Annie: That's it. That's it. Whenever you need anything, you just go like, Well, I can ask Annie because I was on her podcast. So clearly.

Chris: Perfect.

Annie: Okay. How much younger are you than I? I am 43.

Chris: I'm 41.

Annie: Okay.

Chris: We're right there.

Annie: We're right there. So I have this incredibly clear memory in high school at a retreat the first time someone had worship music on a CD that I could purchase. And I was like, "What? I can listen to this at my house?" I knew I could listen to Michael W. Smith and Amy Grant but it was a new world that worship music was a part of like what I could put in my ears. Do you remember the start of having worship outside of the church for you?

Chris: *Passion One Day*, that album.

Annie: Really?

- Chris:** That was mine. It was... I mean never heard anything like it. I grew up in the church. So I was exposed to-
- Annie:** Did you grow up in Charlotte?
- Chris:** No, I grew up in a small town in the bottom of South Carolina.
- Annie:** Oh, okay.
- Chris:** My dad was a help pastor at that church for 27 years.
- Annie:** Wow.
- Chris:** There was like 120 people there.
- Annie:** Beautiful.
- Chris:** Town of 3,000 people. I mean, I was around, I guess, CCM music, you know?
- Annie:** Yeah.
- Chris:** Like you said, Michael W, Amy, whatever. And *Passion One Day*, that was the album for me. I was like, "These are worship choruses, they're full songs, but what is it?" It changed everything for me.
- Annie:** I feel like you and I are of the last generation of being able to delineate when worship music left the church. Because now it's the top genre of CCM, I think. Wouldn't that be true?
- Chris:** I don't know. I really don't know. I'll say it's clearly very blended now. It's all kind of one and the same. But yeah, I don't know if it's top but it has been an interesting, whatever, last 20 years, 25 years seeing it kind of surface in the way it has.
- Annie:** What's your "why" behind that? What do you think's going on that that has happened? Like, if you were looking with your spiritual goggles on. Let's get pathetic, let's go.
- Chris:** Yeah. I think I would say obviously *Passion* had, and Pastor Louis had so much to do with helping, at least here domestically in the States, usher in a new movement altogether. And then probably the second album that I remember hearing before hearing any Hillsong Worship, I heard United's first youth album.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Chris: And I was like, "What in the world? Like these big electric guitars. And it was like, oh, this is the sound of youth and worship. So a lot was happening for me just being exposed to corporate worship, different styles, Chris Tomlin to this energetic wild sound that was kind of coming from Sydney. And then everything in between. So, yeah. I don't know, the last 20-plus years it has been interesting. I will say Elevation started in 2006 as a church. 2007 we put out our first album.

Annie: Wow.

Chris: And we've been writing and recording since then.

Annie: I mean, that is almost 20 years, Chris.

Chris: Yeah, you're right.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Chris: Yeah, exactly. But I'll say it has been interesting for me. I mentioned I grew up in the church. When I was 17 I just felt like God called me to local church ministry. So when I moved here to Charlotte with my wife in the end of 2007, the church was meeting in a high school. It was loading in as church plants do, for anybody who might be familiar.

Annie: Trailers. Trailers for days.

Chris: Trailers. You know, you're in at 5:30 a.m., you're out at 2:30 p.m.. That was why we moved here. But Pastor Steven had this vision for worship music and writing songs and releasing music. So my context going from, okay, I've got this context and category for what's happened with Passion and then Matt Redman and all these songs that had kind of come up.

But what really sounds exciting to me, because those were kind of movements, what really sounds exciting to me is this idea of worship music coming from our church that we moved to Charlotte to help load in from trailers. And not in an opportunistic way. Simply like, that's a thing. Of course, I mentioned Hillsong, but that was another world away for me. Sydney Australia was on another planet.

Annie: Same. I remember the *Shout to the Lord* album feeling like, way somewhere else they make this.

Chris: Right. Yeah, yeah. Exactly. So anyway, it's been a really beautiful thing over the last 17 years that we've been here seeing songs that God's given our church, given our writers here, and it feeling truly a part of our church. I just had a conversation last week about if we're going deep... I'll just kind of tiptoe and then I'll get right back up.

Annie: No, come on.

Chris: But I just had a conversation last week about the complicated nature of what being a part of a church, and even me still in my 17-year-old self-feeling called to local church ministry and still being in that place. At the end of the day, like, that's what I know I'm here to do is just serve the church. But what a complicated thing as God's given our church influence, the songs have gained their influence. Complicated on so many levels.

Back to your original question or point, then the blending of worship music and CCM and I guess making a lot of it mainstream, I don't think, you know, it's bad by any means. I'm not saying that. It certainly has been an interesting couple decades watching it all unfold.

And at the end of the day, I'll say, I love that my first love and our family's first love is still like, if it's... you know, this next year, 2024 or 24 years from now, we're still just gonna be planted in the church. And if that means our church is releasing songs, that'd be the greatest gift. If we're serving God's kingdom and God's global church or this city in another function or capacity, that'd be the best gift.

Annie: I'd love for you to speak to that for just a second because one thing I've observed is there are times where... in the complicated part of this-

Chris: Sure.

Annie: There are times where it feels like worship bands at churches are trying to get famous and there are times where it feels like, and this is true of y'all, this part, that worship bands are serving their local church and then God uses that music to serve other churches as well. But the heart behind it can get really complicated because I saw this at a church that I'm up close to where I was like, who are y'all making that for? Are you making it for the people you serve that come every Sunday or are you trying to make something big for why?

So how do y'all keep that heart of hey... I saw a video of Pastor Steven, y'all are doing a prophetic kind of spontaneous worship moment, and he has the lyrics in his mind and he goes and sings them to the worship leader. And then the worship

leader just goes into this chorus that just had me crying in my bed, Chris because it was just beautiful. Someday that could become a song that y'all released for all of us. But that was a moment that was for your church.

So when you are training up worship leaders in your system, help teach us, what are you teaching them about like, how do we serve this church and see if God will take it versus, Hey, we've gotta write a worship song that everybody sings?

Chris: Sure. Well, I'll start by saying, here it is all built on worship, is in the DNA and bloodstream and live stream of Pastor Steven. So you don't have this-

Annie: He's like a poet, ain't he?

Chris: Oh, 100%. He's a writer from the inside out. We've known each other since we were teenagers. And as long as I've known him, I've just watched him as a wordsmith get crazier and crazier and better and better. But I will say, for our church as a starting place, you don't have this potential tension or rub or going in two different directions between, well, the pastor is setting a course for a certain vision, and worship leader or worship ministry has another idea of what they'd really like to do, and it involves writing, and it involves releasing albums.

I personally don't know anybody that's doing that. I just know from the jump us putting out songs was in his heart. And I had never written a worship song when I came here. Never. I had written songs since I was 13, 14. A worship song, no, I never even tried. But I think that is the starting place.

And to your point, what you saw online and him having words that he gave someone on the spot and then us singing that, that happens all the time because it's in him. But I'll say, this is not meant to sound noble at all because it truly isn't for me. But I am not wired to... I don't know why, when I was 16, 17, I did not have this dream and vision to be in front of a lot of people and to make a big album and to, you know, become whatever. So the goal for me is... so it's interesting.

Annie: Yeah, because we didn't see that model in front of us either, right? There weren't worship leaders who were famous.

Chris: Also that. Also that. But the goal for me isn't to be an artist. And the goal for me isn't to create or be on an album. The goal isn't singing in an arena. The goal isn't winning an award. This is what we talk about here. You ask like, how do you raise up a worship leader or a worship culture?

For me, what we talk about, the goal is to be faithful. So that's faithful to our Father, faithful to what God's given me and not to get it mistaken with what He's given someone else. Some of my closest friends are called to be artists, in the sense of like... you know, we've now titled it worship artists. But just in the sense of like, they're called to do something different than what I'm called to do.

But anybody who's coming through here, one of the, I think, ways we cultivate and try to protect the heart and vision of being a local church ministry that also puts out songs and records songs. And how do we keep the main thing the main thing? I think it's important to just stress faithfulness.

I thank God that He's placed me under visionary leaders because I never have been somebody who felt like, all right, five years from now I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna have this 10 years from now. I wished for many, many years that I actually had that gear. And for many years I thought I was broken somehow that I didn't have this.

Whether it was really being intent on goals for our marriage and our family, or certainly just in this ministry, I'm driven. I'm very driven. I'm a three on the Enneagram. I'm an achiever. I have to get things done. I don't mistake and I never did mistake, like, well, I've got drive. So it's not that I don't have that. It's just why don't I have this?

But I do feel, for me, season after season, has just been me saying yes to whatever that season was. And whether that was, you know, one album to the next, one year to the next, it was just saying yes. And I finally got comfortable going, well, that's all right. Like I don't feel the need to map out the next five years, 15 years, 30 years.

I have many ways I feel like I'm stewarding what God has given me and taking good care of. I don't mean I'm reckless by any means by not planning. But I do feel like what has served us well culturally here as a local church with this type of worship ministry has been cultivating, like, just at the end of the day, faithfulness. That may look this way in one season, and faithfulness may look another way in another season.

Annie: That's right. It's like faithfulness to the open doors and the closed doors.

Chris: Exactly. I mean, what we all struggle with. Again, you know, not thinking faithfulness looks like what someone else being faithful looks like.

Annie: That's it.

Chris: You know, and trying to have my success try to match their accomplishments. It's like, well, that's not what even I'm here to do or what God's given me. I'm barking up the wrong tree.

Annie: That's it.

Chris: I have to regularly step back and ask myself, why am I doing this? Why do I feel motivated to do this? Who am I doing it for? Do I feel a need to impress someone? And that's my motivation. Because I honestly believe this is me making the most of what God has given me.

[00:20:12] <Music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our amazing partners, [Reliefband](#). Listen, this just might be the Christmas gift someone in your family actually truly needs. When it comes to fighting nausea, Reliefband is where it's at.

Reliefband is the number one anti-nausea wristband that quickly relieves and effectively prevents nausea and vomiting associated with air sickness, car sickness, anxiety, migraines, morning sickness, and so much more. Reliefband is natural, fast-acting, and will last as long as you need it.

It's a hundred percent drug-free, non-drowsy, and has zero side effects. You just wear a Reliefband on your wrist to give you relief from nausea, and you can adjust the intensity as you need it. Plus Reliefband treats and prevents nausea so you can help avoid nausea from becoming a problem in the first place.

Reliefband has an A+ Better Business Bureau rating and over 100,000 satisfied customers. So they are a brand you can trust. Right now Reliefband is running their biggest sale of the year. Our first Cyber Monday, y'all, that is today. So head over to [reliefband.com](#) to receive 30% off your purchase plus free shipping. That's [reliefband.com](#) for 30% off plus free shipping.

Remember that link and pretty much every other link you could ever hope for are in the show notes. But we also will send them to you Friday with a lot of other fun stuff in Friday's AFD Week in Review. You can sign up for that in the show notes as well. So be sure you check that out.

Sponsor: And one more amazing partner to tell you about, [Athletic Greens](#). Listen, while we're eating our Thanksgiving food and our holiday treats, I want to get all my nutritional ducks in a row as well. And AG1 by Athletic Greens always helps me

do that. Supplements are great, but it's hard to keep up with a bunch of different products. So AG1 makes it way easier.

Their all-in-one formula makes it simple for me to cover my nutritional bases, which is one scoop that's packed with 75 vitamins, minerals, and whole food-sourced ingredients. And listen to the list of things it helps you with. It gives me major benefits like gut and mood support, boosted energy, and even healthier-looking skin, hair, and nails. All I have to do is mix one scoop of powder in cold water once a day.

AG1 was designed with ease in mind. My AG1 is delivered to me every month, so it's been super easy to make it a daily habit. I also get the single-serving travel pack, so I never have to miss a day. If you're looking for an easier way to take supplements, Athletic Greens is giving you a free one year supply of vitamin D and five free travel packs with your first purchase. Just go to athleticgreens.com/soundsfun. That's athleticgreens.com/soundsfun. Y'all check it out.

Now back to our conversation with Chris.

[00:22:46] <Music>

Annie: I drank my own Kool-Aid pretty bad in like 2013, 2014, and really had a great run-in with my own pride and how that doesn't serve you at all in the long run. I started this career in 2011-ish, so it was like two or three years in. So on the other side of that, I get to have this much better, healthier perspective. And you're an incredibly healthy, from my observation, from what our mutual friends say about you, and from these 20 minutes, you're an incredibly healthy Enneagram 3. You don't have to spill your guts but did you have to trip over yourself at any point in those 17 years in order to be as healthy as you are now? Or has it been a gradual grace of God that has always kept you healthy?

Chris: I've tripped so many times.

Annie: Me too.

Chris: And have had such unlearning to do in different ways or being like, it's okay. Most of it revolved around my relentless pace and just feeling the need to... this is how I'm validated, this is how I'm valuable, this is what brings me worth as an individual, work, work, work. So I never really tripped up over trying to get to a certain status place. That was never my trip up as much as wherever I'm gonna end

up, I'm gonna be okay with that. But how I get there is going to be nuts because I'm-

Annie: It's gonna be fast. However I get there, it'll be fast.

Chris: It will be. I have hit some bad walls as a result of not understanding... you know, I would be on my day off for the week, and for years sometimes I'd get to a day off and not understanding myself early on, I would just feel like, okay, blah, I'm just gonna completely veg out. I'm gonna completely... like, I just can't think about anything.

And then I learned like, okay, for a three like myself, there's actually a part of me that needs to feel somewhat productive even on a day off. So then I kind of flipped a... I maybe went to the opposite extreme. Then I would fill my days off with things as I learned that type of wiring about myself. And then I finally came to a healthier place, a little bit more in the middle, it's like, you know what? I can feel productive by going outside on our back patio and picking some weeds that are growing in between the travertine and I can be done in 20 minutes and it ticks the box for me of I accomplished something today.

So my wiring as a three just got relieved and got filled. Now I'm freed up to not feel like a lazy bum the rest of the day because I chose to just sit around. Or I don't need to tick that box by running hard for nine hours on a day off.

Annie: Matt Chandler shared this quote with me. And it's someone else's quote, I'm sorry to say but I always give it to Matt. So this is a Matt Chandler quote where he says, if you work with your mind, Sabbath with your hands; and if you work with your hands, Sabbath with your mind.

So I bet you are also really clicking into as much brain work as it takes to lead at church, to lead on Sundays, to lead your team, and to write and record music, your hands have to do something to really rest.

Chris: Yeah. That's true. I've never thought about it like that, but I bet that's exactly right. I'm not great at building things. I'm not great with my hands. Funny enough, we have chickens now we have coop, and it's more my wife and my kids' passion. My wife literally built the chicken run and coop by herself.

Annie: That's impressive.

Chris: It is impressive. I became perfectly fine years ago not being a husband or a man that was going to build things around our home. And she has this gear. She just

loves to do that. But you're not gonna find me outside building that. I'll go and enjoy it, and I'll certainly enjoy the eggs we get. But no, that's an interesting way to look at it, that quote.

Annie: I end up doing a lot on my sabbaths because this is my job, talking, right?

Chris: Yeah.

Annie: And writing. I will do puzzles or I'll do... like I've just always like, don't just make me sit here. If I just have to sit here, I'm gonna go nuts. So just gimme something to do.

Chris: So in New York this fall, what are your days off look like since it's just the pace and everything? Can you go do a puzzle in the middle of craziness and it feels good?

Annie: You would be so unimpressed with how much I'm doing. I am playing all the time. I'm playing all the time. I'm forever finding something. There is always something to do here. So when you're like, what should I do right now? And then you open Instagram and there's like 75 things you could do on a Saturday, and I go try to do 73 of them.

Chris: Oh my gosh.

Annie: So to me it has been getting around art and getting around nature has kind of been my resting things here. So yesterday, speaking of, I was sitting with my friend Amanda Jane, who was a Glinda on Broadway in *Wicked the Musical*.

Chris: Oh, wow.

Annie: Yeah. And we were talking about... she was saying to me, what if the last book you wrote was your last book? And I was saying, what if the last stage was your last stage? So with y'all just releasing this Christmas album, *Echo the Angels*, when you're thinking about the doors God's opened and the things we were just talking about, what if this was your... I know it won't be. What if this was your last album? What if a Christmas album was Elevation's last album? What would that mean to you?

Chris: What a morbid question!

Annie: Right. Nothing's gonna happen to you, but what if y'all just like, feel called to something else? You're not going anywhere, Chris.

Chris: Oh my gosh.

Annie: Let me rephrase. You're not going anywhere. Let me give you a fuller story. We were talking about what if God calls you to a different career and you give up your public life? So our conversation was around, could you walk away from a public life if God invited you to something else? So if God invited you-

Chris: I got you.

Annie: ...and the worship team at Elevation to quit doing public worship and to only do it in-house, what would it mean to you that Christmas was your last public album, that *Echo the Angels* was the last one y'all released publicly? Is that better?

Chris: Sure.

Annie: Sorry.

Chris: No. I was joking, but it was morbid for me to think about it.

Annie: It was super morbid. Yeah, Merry Christmas, everybody.

Chris: Well, I would say on one hand I would be so proud because I really am proud of this album. I felt like we accomplished even more than what we set out to accomplish. I'm in love with the album. I would say, on the other hand, we've never made a Christmas album. So that would feel really weird. Maybe possibly disappointing if this was the last project. Simply because it fits a category that people listen to for six weeks out of the year. And that's about it. Maybe six weeks?

Annie: What did you set out to accomplish? If you exceeded your own team's expectations and your own expectations with this album, which it is very good. I mean, I've spun it multiple times.

Chris: Thank you.

Annie: What were you setting out to do that you overshot?

Chris: Well, I went into it not wanting to aim for a blend of Christmas songs, meet worship songs that we as a church can play on Sunday at Elevation. Because that's a different part of my brain.

Annie: Sure.

Chris: And then it requires a different skillset of writing and the whole approach. Your starting place is a live mentality, it needs to be adapted into a live setting, which is what we do with every live album. So that's not-

Annie: That is crazy that you have to think about all that.

Chris: That's not foreign. That's very much in our DNA. But what sounded the most fun was, well, let's do something we don't often get the chance to do. Let's create a studio album that isn't built to necessarily live on Sunday morning, but is hopefully just an enjoyable listening experience sonically speaking. Just let's have fun in the studio sonically with different instruments.

But I love Christmas music. I love the way it makes me feel. Our family go strong from, you know, right about this time through Christmas. And I love all the classics. I especially love Christmas hymns that we grew up singing. I mean, I can tell you in the Baptist hymnal in that church we grew up in that from about hymn 76 to hymn 120 lives the Christmas songs in that hymnal. I love it all.

Some of my favorite memories are when Christmas time hit in that congregation in this small sanctuary. And honestly learning to harmonize with those Christmas songs as a part of the congregation. Surprisingly, we haven't actually done this with as deeply embedded as my love for Christmas music is, in general. But I just thought like, man, wouldn't it be awesome to put out something that, and be excited to work on an album that of course announces the birth of Jesus and celebrates and reflects the incarnation and this act of love that is senseless that our creator sending His Son Jesus to-

Annie: That's beautiful.

Chris: There's a lyric on one of those songs that Chris Rice wrote. He was an artist back in the 90s. He wrote this song *Welcome to Our World*. And he says to breathe our air and walk our sod. I just think it's senseless that that actually happened.

So there's always this reason I think that we can find to experience wonder at Christmas, you know. Whether it's in a Hallmark movie and it's like built around snowflakes and you know, there's the wonder is... and there's like a romanticizing about it, which is fine. It comes easy as a kid. But I think that's obviously largely what we're trying to regain or get back as adults is that wonder.

But wonder is truly just based in, I think, that... I'll say it again. That utterly senseless act that God became one of us. Like, it doesn't make sense. That's what I'm trying to say. And it's so normalized at Christmas, like every manger scene in

the stores that you see or manger scenes in our homes. But it's the most unusual and most miraculous plot in our stories when we actually stop to think about it and ponder and take in how wonderful it is.

So I think my ultimate hope, and what I meant was in saying I kind of think it exceeded our expectations. I do love how it sounds, but I think listening to it... I do feel like it kind of captured some wonder. And I kind of hope it ushers in a sense of wonder into homes when people... Because wonder is gonna lead to worship. So it's not like, here's just a project that I feel is, I don't know, niche or something and we tried hard to make it sound... No, I really wanted it to sound inspiring.

If you're walking around the city and you see lights and that happens to be in your headphones, I would want something to kind of catch you and inspire you as you look at it and saw, you know, something.

Annie: That is 100% what happened yesterday. I mean, it is such a beautiful... Brooke Ligertwood does this really beautifully as well where she's like, yeah, you can listen to the songs, but listen to the whole thing. Like, this is one piece of art. In book writing, I don't go like, Read chapter three and eight and you're gonna love it. You're like, no, read the book. It's one thing. I was thinking about the whole thing.

Chris: Right.

Annie: I feel like y'all were really intentional about that with this too. There feels like a flow to the album.

Chris: I mean, that's a fun part of the process on the back end when you're like constructing what has now come together in the form of individual songs, and then you have the work of constructing how are these going to fit together? Because you just can't do a tracklist early as something is not even, you know, materialized. So that's not part of the equation until it is, until after you've done all the songs.

Annie: Until you have all the songs. How many Christmas songs? I mean, this is real in your business. How many Christmas songs did y'all record versus the 10 that we have?

Chris: That's it. No, I did know-

Annie: Oh my gosh, those are 10.

Chris: Yeah. Yeah, Yeah.

Annie: Dude.

Chris: Like, no, I want all these songs on the album.

Annie: Wow.

Chris: I just didn't know how they would flow together until afterward. But I enjoy that part of the process too, like making it a cohesive thing and hopefully a holistically enjoyable experience.

Annie: I mean, I know you're brilliant, but I am like all the way knowing you're brilliant if y'all only did these 10 songs and they ended up like this. I mean, that is really... because usually and rightly so, when people write books, you throw away chapters all the time... You don't throw them all the way away. You put them somewhere else and hope that you can use them in the future.

And people do that with albums all the time. "We wrote 65 songs and you're hearing 13 of them," which is very normal. So for you to go, No, we had the vision for what 10 songs made up our first Christmas album, it was just a matter of what order they needed to be in, bro, that's brilliant.

Chris: Or now that you bring it up and I haven't thought about it, maybe we left a lot on the table that we never explored.

Annie: Let's do 10 more albums. Let's do 10 more Christmas. Let's go.

Chris: Okay. We'll keep that in mind.

Annie: I love it.

[00:38:39] <Music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about another amazing partner, [Earth Breeze](#). Okay, have you wondered why laundry detergent comes in massive plastic jugs? Ugh, they're heavy, messy, and hard to store. Worst of all, 91% of plastic doesn't get recycled, yikes, leaving laundry jugs to sit in landfills.

Fortunately, I found a solution: Earth breeze. Okay, imagine something that looks like a dryer sheet. In fact, I have to really be thoughtful that I'm not throwing a dryer sheet in my washing machine and make sure I grab my earth breeze sheets.

It's a premeasured liquidless laundry detergent sheet that dissolves in all wash cycles, hot or cold.

Earth Breeze is my new favorite detergent. Listen, when I get home next week and I have to start doing my laundry again, I am really glad Earth Breeze is waiting on me. The packaging is a cardboard envelope that saves so much space. I can literally fit 720 loads of sheets where I used to fit one 60-load detergent jug. I also have full control to adjust, pause, or cancel the subscription without hidden fees or penalties. Most importantly, I still get a really powerful clean on my clothes.

Earth Breeze is tough on stains, fights odors, and my clothes come out clean every time. This is what I also love. With every purchase, Earth Breeze donates 10 loads of detergent to a charitable cause of your choice. Trust me, there is no reason not to switch. Right now. My friends can subscribe to Earth Breeze and save 40%. So go to earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun to get started. That's earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun for 40% off.

Sponsor: And one more amazing partner to tell you about, [Hatch](#). Y'all remember me and Eddie going on about Hatch in Annie and Eddie Keeps Talking, right? I love putting my phone in another room when I go to bed and using Hatch as my alarm clock so I can A) stay off my phone and b) have a way more pleasant nighttime routine.

I have the Hatch Restore 2, and it's not just an alarm clock. Hatch Restore 2 is a device that helps you build a consistent bedtime and morning routine so you can prioritize rest and sleep better. It has a sound machine and also plays these really beautiful meditations and mindfulness exercises too.

And in the morning, Hatch wakes you up gently with a sunrise alarm. Y'all, it's so cool. You can set it so the light comes on first, and then your personalized alarm sound comes on like 15 to 30 minutes later. I like the combo of the Lilac Sunrise and the birds chirping. Great sleep can be learned with Hatch. 83% of customers, including me, report improved sleep. And they have a 60-night money-back guarantee, so you can try it for yourself risk-free.

Hatch is offering our friends \$20 off your purchase of a Hatch Restore 2 and free shipping at hatch.co/thatsoundsfun. But right now they are matching their Black Friday Cyber Monday sales, so you can get \$40 off in free shipping using my link hatch.co/thatsoundsfun. Y'all get these for Christmas. People love them and they are on sale. Hatch.co/thatsoundsfun.

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

[00:41:39] <Music>

Annie: So to me, *Breath of Heaven* is always a Christmas song that is like... will get you wherever you are. There's no like escaping the emotion of *Breath of Heaven*. Is there one off this album that you're like, man, that day when we recorded it, or the reason that one's on there...? Is there one that is really personal to you?

Chris: Well, I mentioned *Welcome to Our World*, that Chris Rice song. It's personal to me because it was the first solo I ever got in youth choir in that church I was talking about. I've never come across a Christmas album that put that one on there aside of course from... But it's always been a favorite for me since I was 12 and sang this little youth choir arrangement of it. And I just think it's amazingly written. It's stunning. I love that. I also love *Breath of Heaven*. I feel the same.

It was kind of a risk putting this song *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly*, and it's just a choir arrangement. It's our choir and it's just acapella. But also because I'm a lover of Christmas music as I've said. I will enjoy, you know, a choir album of just Christmas songs.

Honestly, it feels really good to hear you say it's cohesive as a whole. Because when I was putting this together, I was like, wait, am I really trying to put an acapella choir on one of our albums? Like that has no place. People are gonna be like, God, they tried to just throw everything at the kitchen sink.

Annie: No, no, no, no. I imagined this is the kind of Christmas album... A thing we talk about a lot around here is Sneaky Jesus, where can we do things that introduces Jesus to audiences in a way that may feel different than the way they could have experienced him before? And then the Holy Spirit does all the work anyway, we're just humans that are messed up.

So I pictured this as a sneaky Jesus album that you like put on at your Christmas party that everybody thinks they're just vibing to Christmas music and this is just like good Christmas music in the background. And then they're like, "Is that guy crying?" Like suddenly people are having these really profound experiences with the Lord because this album's in the background. So that's what I pictured as I was listening. So I was like, Chris Brown built us a Christmas album that we can play around our friends who don't believe everything we believe and expose them to worship music that they don't realize is worship music.

Chris: That is wonderful to hear. I like it. Sneaky Jesus. Well, I hope it,-

Annie: Yeah, we talk about it.

Chris: ...finds its ways into Christmas parties everywhere.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. That's exactly right. I mean, that's the fun part, right? I can imagine... I don't know how this world works because I've never had a song ever, you don't want me to, but like Spotify and Apple Music, like there are all these playlists that people add these songs to, and that's kind of a big deal, right? It's a big deal when people put your Christmas music on their playlist, right?

Chris: Yeah. I mean, I guess we've never had one added until this project. But it is cool to see... We have one song on Apple's playlist that is we're the only Christian artist.

Annie: See, that's it. Sneaky Jesus stuff.

Chris: That's cool.

Annie: Yeah.

Chris: Sneaky Jesus. There you go.

Annie: That's awesome.

Chris: There you go.

Annie: Because then what happens, you know, but then what happens is somebody goes, man, I love that. I should go listen to that whole thing. And then suddenly they're hearing *Graves into Gardens* and they don't know but now they know. Right?

Chris: But now they know.

Annie: That's it.

Chris: That would be the hope.

Annie: That's so good.

Chris: That would be the hope.

Annie: Talk for just a minute about the rhythms of church people on Christmas Eve. Like just talk to our church employees and having to work. They work Christmas Eve. I

mean, give a little encouragement to our friends who are on staff at churches about serving on Christmas Eve.

Chris: Well, I mean, we've always taken the perspective like we have Christmas Eve services most years, if not all that I can remember. They go December 22nd, 23rd, 24th. And it's all the same experience or service but we give people options. So go hard right up until, you know, the end of Christmas Eve. And we've always taken the perspective of like, man, you know, of course this is an opportunity where families are coming in town and those family members may not ever come to church any other time. But they're here for the holidays, so let's make it inviting and warm for people to experience church, maybe for the first time this year or second time this year, first time in a long time. But let's, of course, tell this story, present the gospel, obviously.

But beyond that, let's create a warm, inviting atmosphere as the church for all the things that people may have been experiencing through December and the chaos and the rush of everything else. Let this kind of feel like a respite, you know, like a place where people can just come and experience God's presence and maybe know what it is, recognize that it's His presence, maybe not. But they know they felt different there and they know they heard about Jesus. I encourage all those staff members who are listening, like, that's who you're doing it for. Like, well done to you for serving and serving hard through the holidays, but keep it up because it's worth it.

Annie: It's worth it. Someday we'll see an actual... I just have these hopes that God will pull up these charts and be like, this is what Annie's life would've been like if that worship album wouldn't have come into her life as a 19-year-old.

Chris: Wow.

Annie: But look at how different it was. And show that worship band like, you made a CD that she bought at a summer camp, you know? And for our church staff friends, like, you may get to see a chart where someone's life was drastically changed because they showed up on Christmas Eve.

Chris: Yeah. That's beautiful.

Annie: That's cool. Absolutely cool. We don't get to see it yet. We don't see it yet. Okay, two more questions then I'll let you live your life. For starters, we're asking everybody their favorite Christmas snack. What are y'all snacking on around the Brown house at Christmas?

Chris: Well, my wife, she makes some crazy homemade cinnamon donuts.

Annie: What? She home makes donuts and she builds things?

Chris: And she builds things.

Annie: I'm impressed.

Chris: And she makes this... do you know what a derby pie is?

Annie: Yes. I grew up in Georgia. So I'm with you.

Chris: Okay. Yeah. Yeah. You're southern. Pecan pie, for everybody who doesn't know, but with chocolate.

Annie: With chocolate.

Chris: It's not just a regular pecan pie.

Annie: It's so good. So honestly, if I could pull it up quick I would show you. But there's a picture I have... last year. These derby pies have... she messed up because she started baking them for a few friends at Christmas time and then it kind of grew and it grew. And last year, I have a picture, I am not lying, there were 56 derby pies out. And I'm like, "Babe, you can stop at any point. People... I know they're demanding these derby pies and I know it'll be-

Annie: Is she a two? What's her Enneagram number?

Chris: She's a nine.

Annie: Okay.

Chris: Yeah, exactly.

Annie: 56. How many is she making this year? Do you know?

Chris: I don't know the number.

Annie: God loves her.

Chris: Just the other day she was going over a list, she was like, "Are all these people still like... Do you think I should give all those?" Absolutely. You should still give out

pie. Well, now we have, you know, [inaudible 00:49:51]. She'll probably start, I don't know, tomorrow, making these pies. So Christmas snack, I mean, that's... we eat good around the holidays.

Annie: Those are good answers. Those are great answers. Is there anything we didn't talk about you want to make sure we cover? I gotta ask you what sounds fun, but I want to make sure we covered everything you wanted to.

Chris: No, that's great. I've loved it.

Annie: Okay. Yeah, me too. Thank you. It was really fun. Except me asking you about, you know, your last album because you're gonna get scooped up by pterodactyl. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun... This is always our last question, Chris Brown. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what you do for fun.

Chris: Okay, I am the worst at having a hobby. This is gonna be a long answer, but I'll try to make it succinct. Last week the first time in my life, I'm 41, I stepped foot on a golf course because my buddy is like, "Dude, just try to get a hobby. Just do it." And I'll say he was like, "I do it for the social aspect. I do it so I can go golfing with buddies." He was like, "Other people do it because they get obsessed with trying to perfect the game."

I went out, I enjoyed it, I had a good time. It was fun. I woke up the next morning thinking, "Oh, I should have done this. That's what Vinny was saying. I was stepping back on my right foot and then I... oh, that's what he was trying to point out about the swing. I wouldn't do it for the social aspect. I would do it because I would become obsessed with perfecting. But as far as I understand, that doesn't happen in golf. You don't perfect that game. You just get frustrated.

Annie: That's it.

Chris: I hang out with our family. I mean, we're homebodies. So we do pizza and a movie night on Friday nights. That's like sacred in our home. Like pizza oven. We have a pizza oven.

Annie: Oh, you like make them?

Chris: Yeah.

Annie: That's impressive.

Chris: We do both, but we had to move into new ways if we're gonna commit to this as a family every Friday night. Yeah, just different... We love exploring together. I'm kind of hesitant-

Annie: How many kids are you?

Chris: Two.

Annie: Okay.

Chris: My son is 13. So he got into shooting sporting clays when he was to. You know what this is?

Annie: They're like shh and they go in the air. Yeah.

Chris: Yeah, yeah. So he joined a sporting clays team last year. Like a competitive team.

Annie: Oh.

Chris: I didn't know what this was. I didn't grow up around guns. I grew up in the south, but I didn't grow up around shotguns or skeet or anything. This has been a long time coming that we have been like, "Is this a thing? Like should we cultivate this, like help him?" Anyway, it's been years in the making. But that's kind of fun because I have learned with him as he's been learning. And so now we have a membership to this club close to our house where he and I can go with our shotguns and shoot skeet.

Annie: I always picture duck hunt except with little clay things.

Chris: Exactly.

Annie: That's what I picture.

Chris: That's what it is.

Annie: Brilliant. Man, good list of fun things. Well done. Chris, thanks for making time to do this, and thank you for the new Christmas album, Echo the Angel. It's just so good. I cannot wait for everybody to-

Chris: I'm glad you like it.

Annie: ...just keep listening to it. Glad.

Chris: Thanks, Annie. Appreciate it.

[00:53:38] <Music>

Outro: Guys, isn't he brilliant? Oh my gosh, I like him so much. I'm so glad he's our new friend of the show. We'll see if we can get him on five times, get him in that Hall of Fun. He's just the best. And man, how much do you love his thoughts and conversation around the church and leading worship and how to serve the church globally while you're serving locally? I just really respect that.

Add Elevation's new Christmas album, *Echo the Angels*, to your Christmas playlist, just like we talked about. And go follow Chris on social media, tell him thank you for being on the show.

And if you have any questions from this episode, drop them in the Q&A box on your Spotify app if you're a Spotify listener, or send them to us on Instagram @thatsoundsfunpodcast, and we'll try to answer them there.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, New York City for this week. And anywhere you may need me, that is how you can find me.

I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you, and I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is going on a walk in Central Park. I'm so grateful that I can.

Y'all have a great week. We will see you back here on Thursday with one of my favorite preachers, theologians, experts on the gospel, and on Israel, my friend Kristi McLelland. Oh, y'all get ready. It's gonna be good talking to Kristy on Thursday. We'll see y'all then.