

[00:00:00] <music>

**Annie:** Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun, a highly requested and a Christmas episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today. Hey, don't forget to stick around. Our That Sounds Fun Network hosts are gonna tell you their favorite Christmas snack. So stick around for that.

Before we dive into today's conversation I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors. This show is sponsored by [BetterHelp](#). In a busy season where we're shopping and giving and doing a lot for others, don't forget to give yourself a little time for you too. It could just be an afternoon to rest or being kind to yourself in a hard moment, or maybe it's trying out therapy for the first time.

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**Intro:** Today on the show is a guest you've been asking for a long time. Oh y'all, I pushed that wowie zowie button three times in this conversation. That is a lot. It is so good, y'all.

Matt has become a staple in the artistic and songwriting community. He's a nine-time Grammy nominee, five-time GMA Dove Award winner, which is just incredible. And you probably know his hit songs like *Lord I Need You* that we talk about and *Your Grace is Enough* that we talk about.

Plus, if you're looking for another Christmas song to add to your playlist, I've added it to mine, you can go check out his latest single *Go Tell It*, which also features my worship pastor at CrossPoint, Dwan Hill, and The Choir Room. This is an

incredible conversation. I think you're gonna love it. I think it is a note-taking episode, so prepare yourselves.

Here's my conversation with Matt Maher.

[00:02:07] <Music>

**Annie:** Matt Maher, welcome to That Sounds Fun. You are one of our most highly requested guests ever.

**Matt:** Oh, wow.

**Annie:** Oh, every time we ask, it is you and Chip and Joanna. That's who they want. So-

**Matt:** Great.

**Annie:** Tell me why. Tell me why it's you and Chip and Joanna.

**Matt:** I have no idea. I was gonna say I renovated my house couple of years ago. When I did demo day, all I thought was like I get to be Chip Gaines.

**Annie:** You renovated it yourself? You did a lot of the work?

**Matt:** No. I did none of it.

**Annie:** Just demo.

**Matt:** Just demo.

**Annie:** Great.

**Matt:** Demo. It was like, oh, would you like get to take a sledgehammer and just out all your inner aggression? Yes, I'll gladly do that.

**Annie:** Certainly. I have never owned a house that I did any renovation on, and I don't watch any of those shows. It's just not my vibe. I've just never been into it.

**Matt:** It's because it's not fun.

**Annie:** Okay, that's why. That's it. That's gotta be it. It's just because it's not fun.

**Matt:** It sounds fun but it's not fun.

**Annie:** It's not. I have a friend who's doing renovation in his house now, and he's doing a lot of it himself. And when you go over there, you're like, everything is dirty.

**Matt:** Out.

**Annie:** Everything.

**Matt:** Everything's out.

**Annie:** Yeah. It's gonna be beautiful, but it just takes so much time. I'm not patient enough for a reno, Matt Maher.

**Matt:** It always takes longer than anticipated. It always goes over budget. I mean, God bless contractors. But a lot of them get into contracting, I'm convinced, because they're introverts and they don't have the best communication skills. Which is hilarious because I feel like those are the two most important things that you need is communicating and managing people's expectations.

**Annie:** But they just want to be alone building.

**Matt:** Literally. It's like, I wire stuff so I can just do this by myself and not talk to anybody and listen to something and then-

**Annie:** In a world where you wouldn't have done this with your life, what would you have done? Something like that? Would you have done something where you're making things? Would you have...?

**Matt:** No. I think I've always loved storytelling. I was drawn to probably movies.

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Matt:** Probably, I might've tried to go into directing or being a writer maybe. When you're a kid, it's like I want to be the guy who discovers the cure for cancer. I want to be an astronaut or a Jedi. And then-

**Annie:** Same picture.

**Matt:** And then you see like a politician or like a president on TV and you're like, Oh, that'd be kind of fun.

**Annie:** "I'll be a president."

**Matt:** Except you realize it's a four-year job, but you have to be in charge of everything on the planet. Everything.

**Annie:** I mean, you grew up in Canada, right?

**Matt:** I did.

**Annie:** When you were growing up, did you have the like, I'm gonna move to America? Or was it like, I'm gonna be in Canada forever?

**Matt:** Up until when I decided to move, it was like, hey, I'm pretty happy here.

**Annie:** How old were You?

**Matt:** I was 20.

**Annie:** Oh, okay. So you were like, I'm gonna be an adult in Canada. And it was like, oh, maybe I'll go try.

**Matt:** Yeah. I mean, I don't know if I thought I'm gonna be an adult. I probably should have thought I'm gonna be an adult-

**Annie:** Hey, listen, me at 20 should have thought more about being an adult too.

**Matt:** I wanted to do film scoring.

**Annie:** Oh, cool.

**Matt:** I had an American mother, Canadian father. They got divorced and I moved with my mom to Phoenix because I was thinking, I'm gonna stick around here for a year, and then I want to go to LA and I want to go to UCLA or USC, study film scoring. I was a very barely functional music college student theory and composition major, but not very well applied, I guess I should say.

I was drawn to the idea of soundtracks, the idea of music serving something, or music accompanying something that it creates another level of dimension. And that was the thing I loved about film. Then I had a cousin who invited me to go to church and all of a sudden-

**Annie:** In Phoenix?

**Matt:** Yeah. In Phoenix.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Matt:** All of her friends were part of a charismatic community. That was 98% Catholic. So they're really the people who I hung out with the first year I was moving. So while I was getting acclimated to living in the States and then got a scholarship in the jazz department at Arizona State, I was going to church with all these-

**Annie:** Charismatic Catholics.

**Matt:** Charismatic, yeah.

**Annie:** I have only known those two words went together for four months. I'm so into it.

**Matt:** You're like, "We've never seen one in the wild before."

**Annie:** That's how I feel. I'm like, They're what? A friend of mine was speaking, she's like, "Well, in September I'm at a Charismatic Catholic Conference." And I was like, "What can I pay to go? Because I think that might be what I want the most is charismatic Catholic."

**Matt:** Oh my goodness.

**Annie:** But I realized God, in a way, honored my request because I realized that the music I was making, the more I got involved in ministry, I was still making soundtracks but it was more like the soundtracks of people's lives. So, working at a church, you know, particularly a Catholic church, there's the three things. You know, baptisms, weddings and funerals. We call it hatch, match, and dispatch.

**Annie:** Fantastic. I've never heard that. This is great.

**Matt:** But when you're doing those things, those are massive touchpoints in the lives of people where God shows up in an incredibly profound, tangible way. Those are make-it-or-break-it moments. And they usually both. They usually break you, then make you. You know what I mean? So being involved in that, I graduated from college and ended up in local church ministry on and off for 13 years. And out of that I started writing songs.

**Annie:** Did you and your wife get married out there? Did you meet her in that window?

- Matt:** Yeah. We met in 2008. We were sort of part of the same friend group. And I finally worked up the nerve a year and a half after I'd met her to ask her out to dinner. Went on one date and was like, oh my goodness, this woman's incredible. Apparently, I was so nervous I just talked about ex-girlfriends the whole time.
- Annie:** Great. Well done. Well done.
- Matt:** Good job there, [Sporto?].
- Annie:** The Lord handles it, doesn't He? This is just proof the Lord handles it.
- Matt:** This is why I don't give relational advice.
- Annie:** That was gonna be my next topic. I was gonna tell you to teach me how to do what you've done.
- Matt:** You know, a friend of mine used to always say, because by this point most of the work I was doing was ecumenical. And he say, "You love Protestants so much, you're probably gonna marry one." Which I did because my wife's not Catholic. And so then we moved to Nashville and we've been here now 11 years.
- Annie:** Okay, teach me about this. About one Catholic spouse and one Protestant spouse. Do y'all go to separate churches?
- Matt:** No, we go to the same churches. We've been involved in two church communities ever since we moved here almost.
- Annie:** That's so cool.
- Matt:** There's the Church of the City, which is in Franklin in downtown. Darren Whitehead's been a longtime friend.
- Annie:** I love Darren. He's coming on the show next year.
- Matt:** Oh, amazing.
- Annie:** He hadn't been on yet. He's like, "Annie, ever? Come on." I'm like, "Darren, ever make time for me?"
- Matt:** You're like, "Listen, I have an Aussie quota, there's so many Australian accents for you."

**Annie:** That's right.

**Matt:** When they first planted the church, we had newborns so we were struggling to make it every week. I saw this meme once. It was a picture of a newborn child that says, "You will not hear a sermon for the next three years."

**Annie:** And it's true.

**Matt:** Which is very true. But yeah, the rhythm that we're in now is that we're involved with Church of the City downtown. But also our kids go to St Joseph's, which is in Madison. And that's our parish. So every Sunday night for five years... four years now, I've been one of probably three or four musicians that's rotated. It's just piano and voice usually. But playing at a Sunday night Catholic mass that has contemporary music just for young families.

**Annie:** That's so cool. I think that is such a... You know, I've just been a couple of months in New York and trying to figure out what happens next because I loved it, but I live here and whatever. The thing the Lord keeps kind of inviting me to is the other option. It's not the A or the B, it's the other option.

And there seems to be something about Him and my very recent experience, so correct me if I'm wrong, there seems to be something about the Lord that is very, like, what if I'm doing something you actually don't understand? What if there's another way? If you're trying to decide A and B, and I'm telling you R. So that feels like a little bit of y'all's experiences. It doesn't have to be Catholic or Protestant, it can be this other path that meets everybody's spiritual needs.

**Matt:** Yeah. I mean, He says, "See, I'm doing a new thing. Do you not perceive it?"

**Annie:** Yeah. It's a point.

**Matt:** In 2005, that was a seminal year in my life. I'd been to a Passion conference for the first time and was, as a young adult, immensely shaped by that movement. Living in Phoenix, listening to CDs and watching video conversations that had to load for a really long time on bad internet-

**Annie:** So long. Oh, man.

**Matt:** So long.

**Annie:** I'm 43. Are we about the same?

**Matt:** I just turned 49.

**Annie:** Okay. So we are exactly the same age bracket of like, Passion was telling me things and I didn't have CDs of worship music-

**Matt:** No.

**Annie:** ...until that stuff came along.

**Matt:** But I stood in Bridgestone Arena in 2005 listening to 11,000 mostly Baptist College students, sing a song I wrote on a friend's back porch, *Your Grace is Enough*. I remember going, "This was not on my bingo card of things that I thought God would do in and through and with my life." And it was pretty life-changing.

Later that spring I was doing a Bible study with the college ministry of my church and I sort of stumbled onto kind of the last major prayers of Jesus before the cross. So it's just kind of like a Lenten reflection. And I had never really camped out in the 17th chapter of John's gospel.

If you're talking about Christians of differing opinions or differing fellowships or differing confessions of faith, if you're gonna have a mature conversation about it, that's the starting point because it's the longest prayer Jesus Himself prays in the Bible. It's literally in between the Last Supper and Him entering His passion, the Garden of Gethsemane. And all He prays for is that His followers would be as close to each other as He is with His own father.

And I was dumbstruck convicted. I felt ashamed. It's like I've been following Jesus at that point for about a decade, and I've never really contended for this prayer in my own heart and in my own life.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Matt:** So I was just kind of walking feeling like a burden was being placed in my life and going, Oh, what do I do with this? Like, who am I? A couple of months later I read about a reformed monk, which I didn't even know they had those. His name was Brother Roger. Brother Roger was one of the founders of a community in France called Taizé. Taizé goes all the way back to the end of the second World War.

And in the Second World War, a bunch of monks basically wanted to go to France because of the war. They wanted to pray for the land and the spirit of the land and the people to be healed because of the amount of conflict this country has faced.



So they start this community, and a big part of the sort of the gift or the charism of their community is they sing. So they write these songs that are all based on scripture, and it's repetitive. It's like folk songs, but it's kind of like... it's very reminiscent of modern worship music.

So when he died in 2005, I found this quote that he read. So this is the point where he says... he said this in the Vatican in St. Peter's Cathedral. He said, "I have managed to reconcile the faith of my origins with that of the Catholic church without breaking fellowship with anyone."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Matt:** And when I read that quote, what I felt the Holy Spirit say to me was, "I want you to do the same thing in reverse."

**Annie:** Oh, Wow.

**Matt:** Which is I don't want you to stop being who you are. It's that I'm a European mut... you know, I have Irish heritage on my dad's side, Dutch heritage on my mom's side. My mom grew up Methodist. My grandmother was Baptist. Her husband was Jack Mormon, which means they don't practice their faith at all. But my grandmother, who was Baptist, her grandparents were Baptist ministers.

So what I felt God inviting me to was, Hey, your story is a story of be who you are but learn to be reconciled with these other people. I'm doing what I'm doing because of like... I always say I'm a worship leader, you know, because of people like Martin Smith and Delirious and Chris Tomlin, and Paul Blosch and Matt Redman.

So I was inspired to do what I do by them. But the greatest thing has been in 20 years... it's almost been 20 years of doing this, is that I've never felt once from anyone, "Hey, we don't want you to be something other than who you are." So I think that that's, you know-

**Annie:** But do you feel like your Catholicism is more public than it used to be?

**Matt:** I mean, well, what I would say is the state of mainline Christianity 20 years ago was considerably different. Like you think about everything that's happened in mainline Christianity in America in 20 years, like we've almost systematically watched a lot of structures of influence and power being... I wouldn't even say dismantled. A lot of them have kind of just fallen apart.

And that's the thing. Being a Catholic, you know, you look at all the history of abuse and everything in the church, and the abuse of power and the abuse of privilege and the abuse of trust. But then in recent years, how that's happened also in other denominations there's a great humbling about it, you know?

And people say, "Oh, well, God's humbling his church. And I'm like, well, I think that you can be humbled out of this. You're learning from the experience. God didn't want any of that stuff to happen. You know what I mean?"

**Annie:** He went like, you know what'll fix the church? If I start making this stuff happen? No. No. No.

**Matt:** No. The lesson is this didn't have to happen. It did, so how are you gonna learn from it? So I would say one of the things that happened when I first came on in the Christian music industry, there was a thing of like going, Hey, just don't talk too much. I think it was just that... a lot of it is semantics. When you talk about a communism and the differences between Catholics and Protestants, like when you're part of a denomination that essentially is a 2,000-year-old church plant.

So I tell people, like, when you look at Catholicism, first of all, you have to think if you planted a church in the middle of the Roman Empire, and then that fell apart, and then another empire rose, and then that fell apart, and then another empire rose and then that fell apart, what would it look like today? How would the culture around you, how would your efforts to reach people in every language, every tribe, every tongue, every custom? How would that inform the decisions you made, obviously along with the word of God and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

But that's the thing. Churches don't grow in vacuums. I mean, there's a reason why megachurches are the way they are today. And it's because of business, you know? Have you ever heard about there was this fabled meeting apparently that happened in the 70s in Orange County?

**Annie:** No.

**Matt:** Apparently it was a bunch of business leaders and they got together with all of these young pastors and they said, "Hey, we think we're all believers. We love what you do. We think if you ran your churches more like businesses you would grow."

**Annie:** Was that good or bad?

**Matt:** Once again, it's like these are... that's a level of discernment, right?

**Annie:** Right?

**Matt:** Which I think to the point of what you're saying of asking, you know, well, these are all decisions we can make, and they could have positive outcomes. But discernment isn't always about the material end result. When it comes to discernment, sometimes the greater goal is John the Baptist saying, I must decrease so that He can increase.

[00:20:35] <Music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our amazing partners, [Nutrafol](#). Okay, I know you've probably seen Nutrafol everywhere but there is a reason. It's the number one dermatologist-recommended hair growth supplement clinically shown to improve visible thickness and strength. So if you're tired of dealing with thinning hair, Nutrafol is here to help.

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And just a reminder, that link and every other link you could ever hope for are in the show notes or we will send it to you in Friday's AFD Week in Review email. You can sign up to get that as well in the show notes.

**Sponsor:** And one more incredible partner to tell you about, [Thrive Causemetics](#). Okay, the girls in the office were talking at lunch the other day about going to a favorite things gift exchange. And someone brought Thrive Causemetics Liquid Lash Extensions Mascara as their favorite thing. I'm telling you, it was not me, but it is my favorite thing too.

It doesn't smudge or run. It makes your lashes look fuller and longer and it's easy to take off at the end of the day. It's also available in limited edition holiday

packaging, which makes such a fun stocking stuffer. Moms, you deserve to have a stuffed stocking as well, so get you some mascara.

Thrive Causemetics is certified 100% vegan and cruelty-free. Plus their products are made with clean skin-loving ingredients. And with thousands of five-star reviews, it is no wonder the turquoise tubes of makeup you see all over Instagram are trending.

You can save extra on pre-made sets that include bestselling products like the Liquid Lash Extensions Mascara, Infinity Waterproof Eyeliner, and their Luminous Brilliant Eye Brightener. These would make great Christmas gifts or stocking sufferers.

So give the gift of Thrive Causemetics luxury beauty that gives back. Right now you can get an exclusive 20% off your first order at [thrivecausemetics.com/tsf](https://thrivecausemetics.com/tsf). That's [thrivecausemetics.com/tsf](https://thrivecausemetics.com/tsf) for 20% off your first order.

**Sponsor:** And I've got one more amazing partner to tell you about, [Masterclass](https://www.masterclass.com). Okay, if you're still looking for a gift idea for someone, I respect it, and you should seriously consider Masterclass. You can find classes on everything, from gardening to cooking to design, business, sports, and so much more. I've tried a cooking class with Gordon Ramsey, and it was very fun and helpful.

Masterclass makes such a meaningful gift this season for yourself or anyone on your list because both of you can learn from the best. There are over 180 classes to choose from, with new ones being added every month. I mean, you can take a writing class from Malcolm Gladwell or a tennis class from Serena Williams or learn about country music from our girl Reba McEntire. Y'all, what? It's amazing.

And it's like the masterclass instructors are your own personal mentors. I like to think that Reba's my own personal mentor. It would easily be thousands of dollars to take one-on-one classes from the best. But with Masterclass annual membership, it's only \$10 a month.

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Okay, now back to our conversation with Matt.

[00:24:24] <Music>

**Annie:** I've been thinking about this with you and I both have too many friends to count who have stopped pastoring for one reason or another. A lot of times in a very explosive, everybody saw it on the internet way. My mentor and I on Sunday were talking about a friend of mine and about this and saying... I said, the thing I'm having to reckon is what is the system we've built that is doing this? Because there has to be something to the system that is causing.

And yet you're right. Catholicism and Protestantism are both very old, and this has happened for a long time. Do we just know more because of the internet or has the...? Do we just know more?

**Matt:** I think some of it is that we know more. Some of it's that we know too much.

**Annie:** Hey, say that.

**Matt:** But I do think... like, this is why I tell people, because people are always like, "Well, you're Catholic. Don't you know the Pope or something?"

**Annie:** Technically you do though.

**Matt:** I'm like, "I don't."

**Annie:** But you've met a lot of popes. How many popes?

**Matt:** They meet a lot of people. It's just-

**Annie:** But to be fair, you know, the Pope. Go ahead.

**Matt:** No, no. What I would say is power is a deceptive thing because you can look at one person and say, that person has a tremendous amount of power, and they could realize it. And that realization that they have it could be the thing that corrupts them. Or what I always say is that the difference... What Christian leadership should look like is that people who have power immediately divert it. They just get rid of it. You find a way to disperse it.

So the thing I love about this particular Pope I don't remember the name of it, but prior to the Protestant Reformation, it was like in 1517 when Luther, you know, and the whole died of worms and nailed treatises to the door. There was-

**Annie:** And we didn't get to read the apocryphal anymore.

**Matt:** Yeah. There was a brief council, and one of the things that was discussed amongst the bishops was, Should we decentralize the power in the church more? Because I would say that Christian community, the leadership structure is actually supposed to be incredibly flat. Because it's Christ at the head and then it's us holding each other accountable.

And there are people who need to be in a position where they can make a decision. That's just how organizations work. But the ability of other people to speak into that and to have a level of transparency to be able to hold leaders accountable, it's really, really important.

So I always tell people, the Catholic church, for all of its flaws that we've experienced, you know, which are ultimately it's people using their power. So in a seminary system, you've got a priest abusing their power and taking advantage of young seminarians and then them getting power in a church, but also being isolated, inheriting a position of cultural detachment where it's like, "We can't talk to you. You wear a collar around your neck, like you're perfect."

What ends up happening is that at some point the structure got corrupted because we're human. So someone said, I'm gonna put way too much emphasis on the leadership you have. Like, everyone has leadership by virtue of following Jesus. But as a Catholic I do believe that priests have a unique leadership role to play, and I respect it. But at the same time, like with the pastor of my parish, we always just kind of check in each other.

And there's a level of respect there where I understand the authority he has. But also I don't want to give him too much. Because to give him too much is to create a dynamic that could become very, very unhealthy.

**Annie:** Right. That's true in me too.

**Matt:** It has to be the same thing in all of our churches.

**Annie:** It's true with me.

**Matt:** Like what a pastor's really gifted or a worship leader and it's like, you have so much talent, you're so great. And it's like it's great to affirm the gifts in other people but to also look at them and be able to say, "You're just a human being like I am. So as much as I'm gonna admire the gifts that God has given you, I'm also gonna make a conscious effort."

I think it's great to be taken a little bit for granted in a church community where... I always say like, in the kingdom of God, maybe there's no celebrities. Maybe we just celebrate everybody.

**Annie:** That's beautiful. I had the neatest experience when I was in New York. We were eating at an Italian place on the Upper East Side, and a priest was at the table next to us and a younger man from his congregation, maybe his son... Well, not his son. Nope. But maybe his...

The waiter walks up, greets him, walks over, and gets the man at the table next to him. And it's when my family was in town for Thanksgiving. So it's all seven of us around the table. And the other man gets up and he walks to the priest and he says... and he's 70. And he says, "My daughter is dying at the hospital." And the priest says, "Can I pray now?"

And then all these men in the middle of an Italian restaurant... I mean, I'm gonna cry telling you the story. All these men in the middle of a Friday night Italian restaurant, stand up and pray together. And afterwards my dad said, "Would you have done that?" He was like, "What's the Protestant version of that?" How would a waiter know? Because the priest had his call.

I think it was also his priest because he knew him really well. But his priest had his caller on. So everybody knew they could ask him for prayer. And I just thought, there's power there too.

**Matt:** But it is.

**Annie:** It's beautiful.

**Matt:** What I would say is that's actually a really good example of what it looks like I think when it's done right in the sense that... The most amazing thing to think of is that there would be a group of people who would be so dedicated to serving Christ in a specific way. Not that it would diminish the role that lay people have to function.

Like my pastor is the difference. He'll get a call, he'll get a page, or he'll get a text now, it's not a page anymore, at one in the morning. And it will say, "There's someone dying at a hospital," and he'll get up and go and administer last rights. And that level of availability is really, really hard. It's really, really hard.

**Annie:** That could happen every night.

**Matt:** It could happen every night. So it's really, really hard, but it's really, really important. And they know it. So that's why I always say like that the role was never... you know, it's a whole other philosophical conversation of like, how big is a church community supposed to be? You know, the thing I love when you go to Rome is that there's a church in every corner. And maybe that was at the early Christians were like, we can't let this thing too big... I mean, they had the Coliseum.

**Annie:** If they wanted a mega church.

**Matt:** We can get 60,000 people in this thing. Like, we can just get them all baptized. You know what I mean? But there was something about the intentionality of saying, actually we're gonna try to keep this small so that everybody is known and everybody is seen. It also helps with transparency when it comes to leadership. If a community is small, it's actually harder... it might be not as easy for leaders to become distanced. And then in that distance then, you know, they could fall victim in a million different ways. Or just make bad decisions. You know what I mean?

**Annie:** Right, Right. It's a beautiful thing to think through... The power is actually beautiful to think through, particularly at Christmas because all Jesus did was came and be like, No, that's not who has power, this is who has power. That's not who has the power, this is who has the power." From His birth.

**Matt:** Yes. The great thing about the whole story of the incarnation this time of year and Advent is reflecting on the fact that we're waiting... Advent is this dual message of waiting for Christ to come back, which people think of he's coming on the clouds. You know what I mean?

**Annie:** That's a good song. *Days of Elijah*.

**Matt:** 100%. But I like that there's a song, *The Lion and the Lamb*. It was a more recent one Leeland Mooring wrote and Kings and Kingdoms will bow down, every chain will break. And it's just all that image. And then he shows up and it's a baby. And I love the last Pope-

**Annie:** And it still panics Herod, by the way.

**Matt:** Oh, 100%.

**Annie:** Sorry. The last Pope.

**Matt:** Well, Pope Benedict, he said, "God becomes a baby at Christmas so you can no longer fear Him, you can only love Him."



**Annie:** Wow. Wow.

**Matt:** But that shows you what Jesus does with power. He literally just could have come down and just literally took Herod's throne and just established His kingdom right here and there. But he assumes the position of the lowest and the most vulnerable. In some ways, He gets 12 disciples and He says, "Go out in my name."

So there's this sense of empowerment that I think is inherent in following Jesus that's part of healthy community structures where people are being empowered to offer up whatever meager talents they have. And it's not about them. It's about building the kingdom of God. And it's not built around a personality and it's not built around, you know, but it's just sort of built around... it's built around Jesus in, in a way, you know?

**Annie:** Yes. When you're writing the soundtracks for people's lives like you're doing, is this in the back somewhere? Is all of this like... Because you seem like a theologian hidden behind a worship leader. A little bit.

**Matt:** I mean, I would say every personality's different and everybody in their call to sanctity and into following Christ has a different kind of leaning towards when it comes to the spiritual life that... And this is one of the things that I learned very quickly when I came back from my faith as a Catholic, was there's all these different religious communities, right? Like, there's Franciscans and Dominicans and poor Clares and Sisters of Mercy. And like, what's the deal with all that? And each one in some ways is a particular charism or a focus on a particular aspect of spirituality.

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Matt:** Everyone's called to prayer, everyone's called to read scripture. Everyone's called to sort of be in the lifecycle of the church, which is like the lectionary, the liturgical calendar. But as you're following God, you start to have a particular gravity towards whether it's something that's more charismatic or something that's more contemplative, or something that's more focused on, you know, Franciscan spirituality, which is like, you know, the environment and creation and Dominican spirituality, which is very much like focused on teaching and philosophy and sort of like more of a cerebral thing. For me, it is a bit of a crazy mishmash.

**Annie:** That's great.

- Matt:** I think because of my path. So I came back to God through the charismatic renewal. So I never walked into a room and heard a bunch of suburban people singing in tongues before. And then I did, and I just started crying because I've studied classical music, I've studied jazz, I've studied modern contemporary music, and it was like this was like a whole other category.
- I'd never experienced anything like it before. It was literally like a brand-new sound the first time I heard it. And I realize now it was because number one, I'd never heard that done that way before. And I've been in chamber choirs where there's like modern composition and people are singing in weird syllables and all sorts of stuff. But this was different because faith was being transmitted alongside it.
- Annie:** Oh, wow.
- Matt:** There's an aspect to music that I don't understand, which is how does God take the faith of a person and put it in a sound wave?
- Annie:** It happens though.
- Matt:** You can have two people sing the same song both really well, both technically proficient but one person is thinking of... they're singing out of a particular situation or circumstance or context, and you can feel it. It's tangibly different.
- Annie:** And I think that happens when y'all record it too.
- Matt:** 100%.
- Annie:** I mean, Brooke Ligertwood's new album, when it plays in my house, it shifts something. Something shifts. Y'all do that to us. I don't know that books do that the way music does that.
- Matt:** But see, I think they could. I think if you were writing a moment, if you're writing a section and something and you are in a creative flow and either was really uplifting or it was deeply emotional.
- Annie:** Yeah. I mean, book writers say, if I cry they cry.
- Matt:** Yes.
- Annie:** And if I'm writing and crying, readers tell me they cry when they read it.
- Matt:** 100%.

**Annie:** So that is the same thing.

**Matt:** I think that... this is just mine. This is Matt's personal theory.

**Annie:** I'm so into this. We're just two charismatic Catholics over here. That's what we are.

**Matt:** I have no way to prove this, but I think 50% of what people are experiencing is what you experience.

**Annie:** It's supernatural.

**Matt:** It's supernatural, but it's quantum physics.

**Annie:** Ah.

**Matt:** So it's quantum entanglement. There's a whole theory called superposition.

**Annie:** I'm so into this.

**Matt:** I know.

**Annie:** Where's my button? I need you to know I have a button. Lillian, will you bring...? Craig, will y'all bring me the button? I have a mind-blown emoji. It's coming. Okay, keep going. What are we experiencing? So theoretical physics say that two things could exist at the same time, or there's lots of theories about time and that,, you know, heaven is outside time.

I wonder if time is actually something that human being's experience because of the fall. So in the Garden of Eden, there was the day... We know that there was ordered day. There was day and night. So we know that. So we know that the planets are moving and the sun's like...

**Annie:** And some sort of season because of growth.

**Matt:** All that. Yeah, that stuff's happening. But how we process time with God, was it fundamentally different? Because I heard someone once say that heaven is only now because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So in Christ, there is only the present moment. Which makes so much sense when He's like, you know, the kingdom of God is at hand. It's literally... it's here. This is where the kingdom...

And the activity of God is here and now. He's doing stuff. He's ahead of us. We can't experience... you know, you're before and behind me, above and below me. Like, there's dimensionality and time and I can't experience it in my mortal frame, but God's there working all things together for His good.

And I often wonder if human creativity and human spirituality and when we do things in communion with God, if we're somehow tapping into this oneness so that when people... and this is a very Catholic idea, because it goes into the notion of eucharistic spirituality or spirituality of communion and Hebrew spirituality.

When Jesus is at the last supper, do this in remembrance of me, He's not saying, Hey, think fondly of me when you have your communion. It's that to remember someone in Hebrew spirituality is to pull them into the present.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Matt:** So the idea of communion is that we are in communion, we are in union with Christ and with everyone who's ever followed Him for time memorial. S0-

**Annie:** Cool. Every time we take communion.

**Matt:** ...we're with heaven. And it's the one place where heaven and earth... like the veil's lifted, the space is gone. So then all that to say human creativity and the idea that you wrote something and it moved you. I feel like half of what sometimes people are experiencing is definitively God. It's only the work of God. But it's God working collaborative... or it's us working collaboratively with Him. So people are experiencing the moment that you had with the Lord when you wrote that.

Like when we wrote, *Lord I Need You*, I remember sitting around a picnic table with five other songwriters and the moments of revelation when we were writing that song and when I recorded that song, I had sung it a bunch on the road. It's one of the only times I've ever played guitar and sang at the same time in the studio.

**Annie:** Because normally you would record everything separate.

**Matt:** Yeah, you do it separate. Because there's bleed and stuff like that.

**Annie:** Right.

**Matt:** So it was this experience where I feel like when we have these moments encountering someone else's creativity, we're 100% encountering God, but we're also encountering that person in that moment when they experience the Lord.

**Annie:** And that's why it changes things like it does.

**Matt:** Yeah. Because I think it's... The only offering I have is vulnerability. It's like silver and gold. I don't have anything. I have nothing to give to this moment except this vulnerability. And then that becomes part of the thing that God then turns around. And then He does what only He can do.

**Annie:** Sorry, you have to hear the button. It says wowie zowie. It's my three-year-old nephew because it was our whole team and he erased it and I made him fix it. But it says wowie zowie because you are blowing my mind. Because what that's making me think is next time I sit down and write a book, one of my highest callings is who am I with Jesus as I'm writing. Because that is going to be the experience of the reader when they read.

**Matt:** And I think that that's-

**Annie:** I'm trying so hard not to call you dude because I'm trying to be more respectful. But I'm thinking, dude.

**Matt:** You can call me dude.

**Annie:** Oh my Gosh.

**Matt:** There's so many cliches when it comes to worshiping. You can't take people where you haven't been yourself and you can't do this. It's like, no. It's like who you are and you actually... that's great. I've been carrying around this thought and you just put it succinctly because you're a book writer. Who you are when you do the thing is who you will be when people experience it.

**Annie:** Yes, Yes. Also, *Lord I Need You* feels like a song that has been a hymn since the 1800s.

**Matt:** Well, it technically was. I mean, there's aspects of that song that were... "I need thee o I need thee" we kind of took part of that and sort of like put it into the melody.

**Annie:** I mean, your literals... I'm like you... I mean, I know you wrote that, but how long... What year? Do you remember what year you wrote it?

**Matt:** It was 2010.

- Annie:** That is nuts that that song has only existed 13 years and I feel like it is in the basement of my life. I feel like I sang it in middle school and I didn't... I mean, that song is so... the thing y'all did around the picnic table we experience every time.
- Matt:** And I think that that song's an example too, particularly when you're talking about Christmas and Christmas music, music has a singular ability to tap into memory. I mean, there's music therapy degrees now where people use music as a way to help patients who are struggling with dementia or Alzheimer's. There's a video going viral literally right now about a woman, her husband had dementia. He's on a flight and he's-
- Annie:** Everybody sings.
- Matt:** And everybody starts singing You Are My Sunshine.
- Annie:** You think that's real, that video? Yes. Right?
- Matt:** Oh yeah.
- Annie:** Okay, good. Because I couldn't tell if it was one of those of people making up something on a plane.
- Matt:** No, no, no, no, no. Because his reaction is genuine.
- Annie:** I mean, everybody starts singing. I would've bawled like a 2-year-old on that plane if I'd been a part of that.
- Matt:** There's the theologian who's become a new friend named John Swinton.
- Annie:** Oh, I don't know him yet.
- Matt:** You're gonna know him soon.
- Annie:** Okay.
- Matt:** He wrote this book on dementia and he basically talks about how the... and once again, this goes back to what we're talking about, about Christian community, about people being known. It could be that part of the purpose of a Christian community in a person's life who has dementia, is that when they can no longer hold their memory, everybody else can hold it for them.
- Annie:** That's it. Yeah, that's right.

**Matt:** So music has a way of helping hold people's memories. So you play a song and immediately... I always tell people, in worship, every time you sing a song, as much as you'll have old memories, make new memories.

**Annie:** Oh wow. Memorize where you are, what you're doing.

**Matt:** Yeah. Yeah. Make a new moment with a song when you're singing at a church, don't just go back to the one that you had. Because if you find yourself in a position where you've been disenfranchised or you've been hurt by the church, then all of a sudden a song, it's like, I can't sing that song anymore because it reminds me of this, or it reminds me of this person or whatever.

**Annie:** Totally.

**Matt:** And I'm like, forge ahead. Make a new memory. So I think with Christmas music, it's the same thing. There's so much memory in this music. It's been around for so long. And that it's always the challenge every time when the season comes back around to, you know, how do we celebrate this thing and remember what we should remember and hold onto what we should hold onto but also how do we make new memories?

**Annie:** What's coming to my mind is even the idea of our African American friends and the spirituals that their ancestors sang and how they are still so connected, how that music for that community is still so important. It's because all of that is right in the middle of it still.

**Matt:** 100%.

**Annie:** Wow. That is wild. Hand to heaven I bet. I've asked 50 musicians, why does music do to us what it does to us? And you're giving me the answer that I didn't know I needed. That's it. Is that what happens when y'all write it and make it, is what happens to us when we... but it's also why some songs are dangerous. Why we have to be careful.

**Matt:** 100%.

**Annie:** Fascinating. Wowie zowie. Wowie zowie. You got three. That is a lot for an episode. You gotta know Matt Maher that is a lot.

[00:49:21] <Music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to share about one of our amazing partners, [Ritual](#). It is time to talk about taking our vitamins. Ritual's Essential for Women 18+ multivitamin is my pick, and they've seen proven data behind the effectiveness of it.

They conducted a university-led clinical trial for it to see how well it worked. And the results showed it increased vitamin D levels by 43% and Omega-3 DHA levels by 41% in just 12 weeks. So I love the idea that that data speaks for itself.

Ritual's Essential for Women 18+ has this minty essence in every bottle. You know I love that. It keeps things fresh. And it helps taking multivitamins every day actually enjoyable. It's made with high quality ingredients and nine traceable key nutrients. So you just take two capsules a day and their capsule has a delayed release designed to help make it gentle on an empty stomach.

Essential for Women 18+ is also soy-free, gluten-free, vegan-friendly, and formulated without GMOs. Yes, and thank you. Ritual is all about hot data. Stone cold facts. Get to know your nutrients on a deeper level with 30% off during your first month. Visit [ritual.com/thatsoundsfun](http://ritual.com/thatsoundsfun) to start Ritual or add Essentials for Women 18+ to your subscription today.

**Sponsor:** Okay, friends, if you're looking for something fun to listen to with your kids during this Christmas season, or if you just want some good entertainment for yourself, for your family, for the kids while you're traveling during the holidays or cleaning out a closet, listen, you've got to check out Scrooge: A Christmas Carol podcast presented by Hope Media Group and Compassion International.

I'm telling you, I loved listening to this story. I know my mini BFFs are gonna love it too. It's not just one person reading the story, it's a full audio experience where you hear all these different characters and sounds. And it's available wherever you're listening to this podcast. I think you're gonna love it.

You may know the Christmas Carol story, but you've never heard it like this. You wanna hear what I'm talking about? Here's the trailer. Scrooge, a Christmas carol. Ah, Bob Cratchit, you are late. Jacob Marley, is that you? You will be visited by three Spirits on this very eve. Or are they the shadows of things that have been? I am the Spirit of Christmas Present. Come with me and Merry Christmas. Scrooge: A Christmas Carol whenever you hear podcasts.

And now back to finish up our conversation, I mean, mind-blowing conversation with Matt Maher.



[00:51:52] <Music>

**Annie:** So when we're singing our Christmas, I mean, that's so beautiful. Because as we're hearing the songs on the radio as we're going to Christmas Eve services, as we're singing, *O Come Let Us Adore Him* on Sunday mornings, like make a new memory right now with that song that will help move you forward from any of the painful parts.

**Matt:** Yeah. You know, if you need to remember some of those because you can't move forward unless you process it, then do it, please. I always tell people don't just go back 10 years. Go back to the first advent. Go back to the story of Mary, the story of Joseph. Go back to a people waiting 500 years-

**Annie:** Oh gosh.

**Matt:** ...Ffr God to say something.

**Annie:** To know what he said nothing.

**Matt:** Said nothing.

**Annie:** That part. That one sliver page in our Bible is not... it is for closets. I think it's longer for y'all. I think there's more pages between Malachi and Matthew for you than there is for me. But I mean, the idea that we are lucky enough that we can sit down this morning and read scripture and experience the Holy Spirit and the Lord, and they did not hear anything for hundreds of years. I can't imagine.

**Matt:** I mean, 500 years, I mean, it's a long, long time

**Annie:** Older than our country.

**Matt:** Yeah, for sure. So going back that far and then... And then I think also as you kind of... the whole purpose of advent I think in some ways is that I always say human... I think if you took Christianity and you put it in a vacuum, left it alone to develop, I think people would form rituals because I think that's inherently who we are. So I say-

**Annie:** As humans.

**Matt:** I think Christianity is inherently liturgical.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Matt:** Part of it being because it's tied to the gospel. So the word "liturgy" is a Greek word, which was two words which meant basically a public work—the work of the people. And, you know, the work of the people in a Christian sense is really just declaring the work of Christ. But how we declare that work and the intentionality behind it is basically why there's things like candles and stained glass windows and smells and bells as I like, say, and seasons.

When you asked me what's changed, you know, 20 years ago there weren't a ton of advent resources. And now all of a sudden advent's like the new pumpkin spice latte.

**Annie:** Truly. Advent and Lent. All the Protestants are getting on board on that calendar. Yeah, that's exactly right. You are not wrong.

**Matt:** Which is great because that's my... I think my point would be because I think it's inherently part of who we are. And I think the incarnation of Jesus has a lot to say not just about our future, but about how we're living our present. Jesus said, I came that you might have life and have it abundantly. So what would the, what would the calendar of our life, what would the order of our lives look like if Christ was involved in all of it? Not just on a Sunday but... I mean, that's the thing. You know, there's nobody...

I heard a recent song from a new younger worship collective, and they called it Monday Morning Faith. And I'm like, that's it. That's an expression saying, I want my life to be ordered in a way that isn't just an hour on Sunday. But it's going from Sunday to Sunday to the next one.

And that's what the season of advent... We always joke and say we do... As Christians if we're not gonna be intentional about how we journey towards Christmas our... I mean, secular society has developed a journey towards Christmas.

**Annie:** That's exactly right.

**Matt:** Which is incredibly materialistic.

**Annie:** And it is scheduled out.

**Matt:** But it's 100% scheduled out.

**Annie:** Yeah, you're right.

**Matt:** Tomorrow afternoon... I'm touring right now, and so we're gonna go get our tree. And it's funny I kind of wrestle with it, because to me it still feels too early to decorate a tree.

**Annie:** Oh, okay.

**Matt:** As a Catholic.

**Annie:** Even though it's already December.

**Matt:** It's December. But as a Catholic, I would go like... growing up, we didn't put up a tree till like December the 20th.

**Annie:** Really?

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Oh wow.

**Matt:** So you were really just kind of like hankering for... you know?

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Matt:** But my kids would just... they would turn and feather. It'd be bad.

**Annie:** That's right. That's right. I'll tell you what I want the church to do, both your church and my church. I love Advent and Lent. I want us to get on board that Christmastide, Easter tide tray.

**Matt:** I tell my kids Christmas is not a day, it's a season.

**Annie:** All the way till epiphany. And I love epiphany.

**Matt:** All the way. So I keep playing Christmas music. We keep the tree up until epiphany. I mean, there's been some years where my wife's like, look, if you turn on a light near this thing, it's gonna catch on fire. We had a bag of sugar at the start of... it's all gone. We gave it to the tree.

**Annie:** You're like, tell it to Lord. It's the three wise men's fault.

**Matt:** 100%.

**Annie:** It's their timing. I love. I'm doing the same thing. Epiphany this year falls on a Saturday. It's our first podcast episode of the year.

**Matt:** Oh, amazing.

**Annie:** I always do like an essay and talk about what's happening in the year. And I'm taking my tree down on Epiphany.

**Matt:** I love it.

**Annie:** It's gonna be a good Sabbath Saturday to take our tree down.

**Matt:** That is really good.

**Annie:** So keep it up to epiphany. This is the last question I'm gonna ask you. There's so much we didn't cover on my list. Well, my first question would be will you please just come back sometime?

**Matt:** Of course. You let me know.

**Annie:** I mean, what an honor! What an honor to get to chat with you. I've learned so much today. We are asking everyone who's coming on at Christmas, what are the snacks around your house? What are your holiday snacks?

**Matt:** Oh, holiday snacks. I would say nuts.

**Annie:** Just any kind?

**Matt:** Cashews, almonds.

**Annie:** Oh wow. You thought we were divided on Catholicism Protestantism.

**Matt:** Cashews and almonds.

**Annie:** Cashews is I'm out with you. I'm in on Mary. I'm learning a lot. Cashews, I cannot get on board.

**Matt:** Growing up in Newfoundland, I did not... That's the only time I ever saw cashews on Christmas.

**Annie:** Oh, okay.

**Matt:** I got in my stocking. I got a giant orange.

**Annie:** Aw.

**Matt:** Because it's the dead of winter. Nothing grows. So it was like, how'd this even get here? And then a can of cashews.

**Annie:** So that's like the Christmas treat?

**Matt:** I only ate them at Christmas. Now the problem is, is I don't drink dairy. So now it's just like another nut that someone's trying to milk for me.

**Annie:** That's right. That's right. It's just another option at Starbucks.

**Matt:** 100%. It's ruined the mystique of cashews.

**Annie:** Oh, I just think they're too soft. It kind of ruined my life. The softness of it I'm like, ew. Are you rotten? No. This is just you. I'm out. I'm out. Matt, so you'll be on tour next year? There's a Christmas song out this year called *Go Tell It* with our friend Dwan, my worship pastor at Cross Point. Dwan Hill.

**Matt:** Oh yeah. Wonderful.

**Annie:** And the choir room. So, everybody, we'll make sure we link to all that. I have a Christmas playlist. It's on.

**Matt:** The cool thing about that, because we were talking about spirituals, that's that song, *Go Tell It On The Mountain* was published in Nashville.

**Annie:** Really?

**Matt:** By the Work brothers at Fisk University.

**Annie:** Oh my gosh. I mean a hundred years ago? How long do you think?

**Matt:** It was Volume Two of new Jubilee songs, I think it was. And it was 1906. But some people say it was first discovered right at the end of the Civil War.

**Annie:** Wow. Well, I'm so glad y'all recorded. Dwan Hill is one of my favorite people.

**Matt:** He's incredible.

**Annie:** He's amazing.

**Matt:** And what he's doing with The Choir Room I think is really, really profound. You know, a lot of people who have kind of drifted away from church are sort of finding their way back in at least to a choir room and sort of experiencing that gift.

I mean, the thing about Christianity is we're probably the only one of the few groups, if not the only group of people in Western Civilization that every seven days we get together, and a big part of what we do is we sing. Which is why it's so important if you're listening to this podcast that you sing on Christmas at your church. I don't care how bad your voice is. If you're willing to make a fool of yourself, you're giving other people permission around you to do the same thing.

**Annie:** Yeah, that's right. Okay. Merry Christmas my friend.

**Matt:** You too.

**Annie:** Thank you for doing this.

**Matt:** Thanks for having me.

**Annie:** So grateful.

**[01:01:03] <Music>**

**Outro:** You guys, isn't he amazing? Oh my gosh, I learned so much. I talked about that conversation all night last night. I mean, everyone I saw at this Christmas party, I talked about some of what Matt said to us. I just loved it. So smart. So helpful.

Hey, make sure you go check out Matt's new Christmas single, *Go Tell It*. Add it to your favorite Christmas playlist just like I did. And check him out when he is on the road. He's traveling now. He'll be out on the road in 2024. Make sure you're following him on social media, tell him thank you so much for being on this show and how much we got to learn today.

And if you have any questions from this episode, just drop them in the Q&A box on your Spotify app. If you're a Spotify listener, or send them to us on Instagram @thatoundsfunpodcast. We'll try to answer them there. Make sure you're following over there too because there is a lot of fun stuff happening on that Instagram account.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, back in Nashville. Anywhere you need me, that's where 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. I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is going on a walk at Radnor Park. It is cold, but it is sunny. I'm heading to Radner.

Y'all have a great week. We'll see you back here on Thursday. We are talking gift-giving and how to shop for others and ourselves from one of my favorite influencers and Instagram follows, Sabrina Chazen. We'll see y'all on Thursday.

**Bianca:** Hi, my name is Bianca Olthoff. I'm host of We're Going There podcast and my favorite holiday treat, some people might not know what this is, but bear with me, it's called a tamale. It's a Mexican wrap. You can actually eat it as an entire meal. It's delicious. Most people will call it like a tamale, but it's a corn, like corn dough if you will, and then you fill it with a bunch of different types of meats and sauces, you wrap it back up, you steam it. And oh my goodness, it is divine.