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**Michael** : So today I have with me Andrew Peterson, singer, songwriter, author, producer of multi-million dollar animated series. Do you have the label “producer”?

**Andrew** : Yeah.

**Michael** : Illustrator of trees. For those listeners who don't know you, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?

**Andrew** : I have been married for 28 years now to Jamie, who is wonderful. She's the mother of our three children who are not children anymore. My oldest son, Aedan, is married and has a baby, my first granddaughter, and he and his wife are both professional illustrators and work on the animation team for Wingfeather and a bunch of other stuff. And then my son, Asher and his wife Olivia, also live in Nashville, and he's a record producer and tour manager. And my daughter Skye is a singer songwriter. She just got engaged, so hopefully she'll be married off by the end of the year. So I was just talking to somebody yesterday. More than ever, I think of myself in terms of my relationship with first, obviously Jesus, but second of all, my wife and my kids. The other stuff has come and gone over the years, but they have been the consistent, steady voices of love in my life. So they more than anybody else have shaped who I am now. But as far as work goes, I do love to make stuff, so I do like to draw a lot and am trying to get better at it.

I have written a lot of songs over the years. I've written several books and yeah, this whole executive producer thing is a new thing that I'm learning about.

I founded the Rabbit Room and am the founder and President of the Rabbit Room Board, which is a non-profit here in Nashville and am a member of my church here in town. And yeah, I don't know what else to say.

**Michael** : I was going to say you're a busy bee, but you also keep bees.

**Andrew** : I do, yes, I do actually keep bees. They're much busier than I am, but yes, I do keep bees. They're right outside my window as we speak.

**Michael** : It is amazing that you have time for all of that, but let's dive into the songs and the stories. So what started you writing songs and stories?

**Andrew**: I think in the very, very beginning it was just because I was in High School and felt like I was drawn to music and drawn to books and stories, but it was all very, I didn't really have anything to say when I was in High School. I was a nominal Christian. I was growing up in the American South, which is very “culturally Christian”. Flannery O'Connor, called it “the Christ-haunted South”. There may not be a lot of Christians here, but Christ definitely haunts the place. And so I grew up in that culture, which came with a lot of real blessings and a lot of real non blessings. But yeah, songs were like an escape for me. I was drawn to the way they made me feel. Same thing with the books that I read. They produced a flutter in my stomach or a quickening in my heart that I was curious about.

And so I leaned into it to try to understand what was going on here. And it's always self-expression and songs about your girlfriend dumping you or whatever. And then when I became a Christian, when I was about 18 or 19 years old, I realized that the stories were all true that I'd been growing up reading and that Jesus was real and I couldn't escape Him anymore. And the real thing that happened was that I

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realized that He wasn't always mad at me. I actually encountered Jesus through the music of Rich Mullins, and it helped me realize that He was kind and wanted good things for me. And so that has shaped my whole life. And so the fact that I encountered Jesus through music kind of gave me a way to imagine a thing that I could do to thank Him. If I didn't know how good He was and a song was what helped me understand it, then maybe I could write songs to help other people understand how good He is. Does that make sense?

And then the same thing happened with books. I grew up reading fantasy novels and thrillers and adventure stories, and then through *The Lord of the Rings* and the Narnia books and a bunch of other books that were written by Christians, those books woke something up in me and helped me understand who Jesus really was in a way that other things didn't. And so I tried my hand at writing those kinds of stories too. So yeah, that's what brought me to it. I know a little of how English culture works and the church over there, and it's not terribly different than things were over here 20 or 30 years ago. I was growing up in a context where if you wanted to go into the ministry, that meant you had to be a pastor or a missionary.

No one would've really had the language to say, "Oh, if you want to go into the ministry, you could be a songwriter or you could write adventure stories for kids or where you could take care of your garden and share it with people as a way of ministering". So all of these things, as a very artistic person growing up, I just never realized that those things could be integrated with the gospel and that a really beautiful and faithful expression of a life in Christ could be writing a fantasy novel or drawing a picture or shaping the world around you to be something beautiful. So those were not the kind of things that I understood as a boy, and I really believe them now. And that's part of the reason the Rabbit Room was born.

**Michael** : Yeah, that's interesting. And I think it's still the case largely that if you want to go into ministry, it's particular church work, so it's expanded to youth work and so on, but songwriting, gardening are a little bit strange.

And that kind of leads me onto the subject of the podcast as well about grief and hope. And I think that's possibly another area that the church is kind of a little bit squeamish about, which is slightly bizarre given that we're all about the death and resurrection of Jesus. So death is kind of right central to the gospel, but we still get a bit queasy when it comes to questions that maybe don't have obvious answers. And of course, grief and struggle particularly has that.

But you seem to have thrown yourself into that in spite of possibly other people maybe not wanting it. You've thrown yourself into addressing those questions of struggle. What is it that drew you to do that? What made you go, 'I've got to address these things, I've got to sing about this', rather than just going, 'let's just do happy songs'.

**Andrew** : Well, first of all, I'm an Enneagram four. I don't know if you guys do the Enneagram or talk about it over there, but I'm pretty drawn to melancholy. I enjoy the feeling of sadness in a weird way. The example I always think of is there's two kinds of people in this world. There's people who like the end of the movie, *La La Land*, and people who hate the ending of *La La Land*. And if you haven't seen the movie, you must, it's a great, great movie,

**Michael** : I know what you mean.

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**Andrew** : Yeah, the ending has this real bittersweet sadness to it. And I just was revelling. I was like, 'that's the greatest ending ever'. And a lot of the people that I was with were like, 'that is the worst ending ever. I hate that movie'. So I am drawn to that bittersweetness, and that's where a lot of good songs come from. There's a feeling of, for me anyway, it's harder to write happy songs, which also means that I love writing happy - when I'm excited, when I land on a song that is bright and hopeful and happy, it's a good feeling to be able to have those songs. But I think if I were to really sum up why in my mind, if you listen to my first label album that came out in 2000, there's a lot of shame songs in there, and also songs that are just story songs and kind of about whatever. There's not a ton of depth to it as far as the emotion in those songs.

And there's a song called 'The Chasing Song' that I get requested a lot and I won't play it. I don't like playing it because I don't like how it makes me feel. I just don't like the song very much. What I hear in that song is a guy who doesn't believe that Jesus loves him. I hear a guy who is just really legalistic and zealous and thinks the point of it all is being a good boy.

It's like Rich Mullins used to sign his CDs "Be God's". He wouldn't say "Be good". He would say "Be God's". The point is not 'try as hard as you can to be as good as you can'. The point is 'rest in the fact that you belong to Jesus, and that is the wellspring through which the goodness and the obedience and the joy of a life walking in paths of righteousness for His name's sake'. You know what I mean? I didn't know that back then. I was beginning to learn it. I barely know it now.

But anyway, I guess I'll say that, Rich Mullins, I got the sense that he was lonely in his music. There were songs where he wrote about his singleness, about his ache to be with Jesus. And I don't know, I didn't hear much of that language in a lot of other Christian music up to that point. There was a lot of joy and there was a lot of scripture in his songs, but he was very honest about his own struggle. And I was very drawn to that. And so when I sat down to write my own songs, I was like, well, I want to try to be as honest as he was about my own struggles and not wallow in it. Those things are grounded in the love of Jesus as the foundation, but the love of Jesus allows us to, with freedom, express the desolation. We sometimes feel we're safe to do that.

And then the second thing I would say was there's a writer named Frederick Buechner, which I don't know, I don't think he's very well known over in the UK, but it's spelled B U E C H N E R Frederick. And he died last year. I don't agree with everything that he wrote theologically, but he was an excellent memoirist and wrote some wonderful books. I mean, one of his novels, *Godric*, was the runner-up for the Pulitzer Prize. So in the mainstream world of publishing, he was very highly regarded, but he was a Christian and wrote quite a few books of essays and memoirs and stuff. One of them is called *Telling Secrets*, and it's in some ways a book written to pastors about being honest with your own story. So one of the key quotes from Frederick Buechner is he said, "the story of one of us in some measure is the story of us all". And so if you really pay attention to your story, pay attention to your life, and you write about it, you're going to see the evidence of God's hand moving in it. So listening to your life, realizing that your life may seem to you to be very mundane and uninteresting, but if you're paying close attention to it, it's just shot through with grace. God's presence is always there. He's always surprising us with these little moments. So for example, it's been a while since I've written a record. I don't usually write songs, I write albums.

I don't really get busy writing songs until I have this deadline and we're going to go into the studio and then I start really writing. But there's a definite change in the way I move through my days. Whenever

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I'm writing songs, I feel like I put on a different hat, and the songwriter hat means that I'm scanning the horizon for little moments of grace, little examples of God's presence with me, little evidences and trying to decipher what it is that He's doing in me. 'It's been three years since I've made an album. I'm going to make an album now. I wonder what He's been up to in me and around me in the last three years'. And so that's learning to pay attention to your life, learning to listen to your life as Frederick Buechner would say. And so that idea that you have something to offer to your brothers and sisters that can edify them and can be a little help on their journey, as George MacDonald would've put it, each of us has a way of making known the heart of the Father to each of our brothers and sisters. Like you, Michael, your relationship with God the Father is special and unique, and you are going to know things about His heart because of the way He uniquely loves you that I need to know about.

And so knowing that gives you the freedom as a writer to go, well, I'm going through hell right now and I need to write about it because the fact that I'm going through this thing means that maybe that'll be helpful to somebody else. So grief and hope end up becoming redeemed almost by the process of writing about them.

**Michael** : I think *The Burning Edge of Dawn*, so that was 2015 I think you brought that album out. I think this was the first album that I heard of yours. I might've heard the odd song here and there, but I think this was the first album. Now there's a lot of Christian music that's very twee, and I like to say it's like the Christian equivalent to 'Everything is Awesome' from the Lego Movie. And early on when I started songwriting, I said my two aims were to write a song that made people cry and to go on Jools Holland, (he does a TV series here). I haven't been on Jools Holland yet, but the thing I wanted was to write songs that moved people. And the thing about a lot of Christian music I found was just that it wasn't that moving because it didn't speak into those difficult things. And then hearing this album, it's like, 'oh, Christians can write songs that are moving, that speak to the struggle of life and don't skip to the end too quickly and yet are infused with hope'. But enough about me talking about the album. I wonder if you could say a little bit more about what was behind that album, why those themes are so strong, particularly there.

**Andrew** : So the album before *The Burning Edge of Dawn* is an album called *Light for the Lost Boy*. And I didn't know it, but that album was setting me up for a midlife crisis kind of total emotional breakdown. And like I said earlier, when I'm working on an album, I'm trying to interpret what it is that God's been up to, and I found myself with *Light for the Lost Boy* writing all these songs about the loss of innocence and childhood.

The opening song on the record is called 'Come Back Soon'. And it's a pretty desperate song. I had toured with Ben Shive and Andy Gullahorn for a decade, and our lives were changing and they were needing to stay home more. So I found myself at the end of that season out on the road again without my two best friends, and then I celebrated my 20th wedding anniversary, completed my record contract, completed *The Wingfeather Saga*. There were so many big life moments that all came to a cliff right then. And so it makes a lot of sense. I was watching my kids grow up and when they entered their teenage years, I began to remember things from my own teenage years that were sources of grief for me and my own brokenness. And I was just watching them grow up and realizing, 'oh man, you can't protect them forever. They're going to make their own mistakes'. So there was just a lot going on inside me, so I didn't know it, but I was writing this album about that.

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So by the time I'd finished the album, I realized *Light for The Lost Boy* seemed like an appropriate title because the image of a boy who was lost in the woods kept coming up, and there was a little boy inside of me that I was grieving the fact that he got lost and I can't go back, I can't be innocent again. I have to look forward to the day when Christ is going to ultimately completely heal and redeem all of this brokenness. And in the meantime, we're carrying both inside of us. And so that's what "Life for the Lost Boy" was about. So like an idiot, I went on the road and sang about it every night for two months with this band, and we had this wonderful video that some guys made for me where they interviewed a bunch of people and asked them to talk about the moment they knew the world was broken.

And so there were all these people going back to their childhoods and remembering seeing something happen or something that happened to them or seeing the destruction of creation and where they, as young boys and girls, realized the world is a broken place. 'This is not Eden anymore'. I'm watching that video every night. I'm then singing all these songs about it every night. And then at the end of it, I just completely had a meltdown and didn't know what to do. So there's a wonderful Christian Counselling place here in Nashville that I began going to to help sort out what was going on inside me, and I found myself in what turned out to be a two or three year depression. I mean, I don't know if it would technically be a depression. It was a two or three year season of real grieving and sadness.

And then the label was like, 'Hey, it's time to go in the studio and make another record'. And I was like, 'Oh my goodness, I'm in no state to make a new album, and if I do make an album, it's going to be the saddest album anybody has ever heard'. And so I was like, 'okay'. So I went into the studio with almost no songs and began writing the songs. And it just so happened that we went into the studio in February and it takes a couple of months. So between when we started the record, it was the mud season, dreary, rainy, gray, and by the time we finished the album, the daffodils were coming out of the ground. The world was waking up again, green was returning to the world, and it just was, it felt like this divine conspiracy that God had had me go into the studio at the end of this dark, sad season to show me that He was actually changing something.

And what I usually have told people before is I think there are two great lies that the enemy of our hearts tells us about depression or those seasons. One of them is that you're alone, that nobody knows what this feels like. And so there's an isolating tendency that happens, and you have to know when you're going through that season of grief or depression or whatever, that you are not alone. There are other people who can carry this burden with you. It's one of the great blessings of the church is that you can step into a room full of people who will help carry the burden with you. And the other great lie is 'that this is forever. This is the rest of your life'. When you're in it, you feel like 'this is not going to end. I guess I just need to make peace with the fact that I'm going to be sad forever and grief is going to go on forever', and the sun does come up! It does change. Things change.

Okay, so this is crazy, but this morning I was working to memorize a poem by Wendell Berry that I happened upon in a book, and it's about the resurrection of Jesus. And I'm going to try it. Can I try saying it to you? Wendell Berry is this Kentucky farmer in America, who evidently a friend gave him the gift of a trip to, I guess, Spain, Sansepolcro, wherever that is. I'm assuming it's Spain, maybe Italy. And it's about him seeing a painting of the resurrection of Jesus and describing what happened inside him when he saw this painting. And it goes:

*Early in the year by my friend's gift*

*I saw in Sansepolcro Piero's vision:*

*The soldiers who guard the dead from the living*

*themselves become as dead men, one*

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*tumbling dazedly backward. Awake, his wounds  
bleeding still, his foot upon the tomb, Christ  
who bore our life to its most wretched end,  
having thrust off like a blanket the heavy lid,  
stands. But for his face and countenance  
I have found no words: powerful beyond life  
and death, seeing beyond sight or light,  
beyond all triumph serene. All this Piero saw.  
And we who were sleeping, seeking the dead  
among the dead, dare to be awake. We who see  
see we are forever seen, by sight have been  
forever changed. The morning at last  
has come. The trees, once bare, are green.* (Sabbaths 2009, Wendell Berry)

In that poem, he's describing this amazing picture of Christ conquering death.

His foot is on the tomb, his wounds are bleeding still, the soldiers are falling back. And his Christ, I've seen the painting, he's looking right at you with this look of serenity on his face. As Wendell Berry puts it, "beyond all triumph serene". He is triumphed and He's not revelling, and He's just serene, and He's the Lord of, He's conquered death forever. And then he talks about how we who see this, we realize that we are forever seen, that we have been forever changed by being seen by Christ.

It begins with him saying "early in the year by my friend's gift". So in the winter, and at the end he says, "the morning at last has come. The trees once bare are green". So the resurrection comes, right? And it's just such a beautiful journey through this poem to this realization that the coming of spring is one of the testaments to Christ's conquering of death. He is woven into creation, this sermon that gets preached every year. And so all that to say *The Burning Edge of Dawn* was an album that I wrote unwittingly while that was happening. And so when I hear it, I was so shocked to realize that it isn't a sad sounding album. It's got heaviness to it, but to me, it's a joyful triumphant record because I was writing about the coming of Spring.

**Michael** : Well, and all the more so because of the honesty of where you are at and what you're battling with. And because the album is a journey, and I do love that you write albums rather than individual songs and stick them together, because then you get that progression. And I didn't realize that you had done it over those months as well. So that makes even more sense that there literally was this journey through it, not contrived, actually that you're going through. And yeah, those come up quite a lot of those themes, don't they, of planting seeds and life springing. There was a line in one of the songs, whichever it is, "the rains washed you clean"...

**Andrew** : At the end of 'Burning Edge of Dawn'.

**Michael** : Yes. Whereas, earlier, the storm is scary. The storm is so frightening. And so seeing the glimpses of grace and hope in all of these things, even the dark before the dawn, there's got to be a

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dawn if there's dark. So yeah, I love how that just comes up again and again. But there is a genuine struggle and you're happy, I say "happy", to sit there for a while and open that out.

And it's like The NeverEnding Story film. I avoided that as a kid because I knew the horse died, and I was like, 'because I do feel these things quite strongly, I thought I'm not going to put myself through it. That sounds awful'. But then I watched it with the kids a couple of years ago, and it was fascinating watching, particularly Jonathan, my son, how he watched it.

He was going, 'what is this thing? Everybody's dying. The Nothing is taking over', but then [turn off now if you've never watched The NeverEnding Story and you don't want a spoiler!] when everything gets renewed, it's just one of the best pictures of the New Creation. And the lad is racing through the sky, and it's like, yeah. And it's like the Nothing never was, but all of that hope feels so joyful because of all the darkness that went before it, but has now gone, but you've got to go through that to see it.

**Andrew** : Yeah, it's *eucaastrophe*. You just described *eucaastrophe* perfectly. Yeah. The Tolkien word, the more modern example of that is Avengers Endgame, the Marvel movie. At the end of Avengers Endgame. There's a great video online of somebody having a camera in the theatre filming the moment when, I don't want to spoil it, but when the "resurrection" happens...

**Michael** : [Turn off now, if you don't want a spoiler!]

**Andrew** : That, when the big eucaastrophe moment happens at the end of Avengers, the guy had the camera going in a full theatre and people are just cheering, people are in the audience going, "woo, yeah", clapping and shouting because it's like their bodies were responding to the story of eucaastrophe. I think Tolkien was always getting at the fact that there's something at the heart of the human story, the story of creation that is responding to that truth that when all hope seems lost, the author of the story brings joy.

**Michael** : And isn't it going to be ... *awesome* is going to be the right word for it when we get to the New Creation and we just see that in all its glory, everything transformed and changed and understood. The last song on the album that I've just done, the repeated refrain at the end is "It sends through me pure shivers of joy", and it's just going to be overwhelming and amazing.

One thing I'm quite interested in is how artists steward not only their stories, but also the stories of those around them. And so I've been asking a number of my guests this question and how they deal with that. Your song 'Always Good', if I remember the story correctly, is the story of somebody else. So I just wonder if you could talk about how you seek to do that faithfully in a way that's helpful to the person whose story it is. Yeah. Tell us about how you navigate that.

**Andrew** : Well, that's a good question. I'm not sure I've ever really answered that question. Let me think about it. I think, well, I'll just tell you that it is delicate, and I have been guilty in the past of maybe not being as careful with other people's stories as I probably should have been. Even the song 'Always Good', it is about such a really tragic ground zero painful moment that I wrote it not as a song to put on a record, but as a song to, I wrote it for the funeral of my friend's wife who died and really didn't, I don't think, expect to sing it outside of that. I just wanted to try my best to write a song in her honour and to mark something that was true in the middle of a lot of pain and sorrow. When I first wrote the song, I think I told the story about a little bit, and then I felt a weird conviction, this isn't my story to tell. My

friend knew about it, and he'd been in the audience when I'd sung the song before, but I did feel like I was trespassing a little bit. When you hop a fence and you're in someone else's property, you're like, 'it's probably fine that I'm here', but you don't ever feel totally at ease until you're back over the fence. So I think that I have since begun to be more careful with it and for sure would want to have the blessing of the person before I shared the story. You know what I mean? And I've always done that. I've never betrayed that confidence, I don't think. But I think that writing a song for someone is one of the great honours of songwriting. I've had a few songs written for me that aren't on records or whatever, that were gifts that were shared between me and this person. And it is one of the most profound blessings that there's an artifact in the world that was there because of someone's expression of love to you. And so, yeah, I think that it's a beautiful thing to write on someone else's behalf for them, but you also have to tread lightly to make sure that you're stewarding that gift well. So I think that's the best answer I have for that.

**Michael** : Thank you! Are there things you consciously think about when writing about the dark or more difficult areas of life, either that you want to embrace or that you want to avoid? Or do you have the subject or story in mind and you just let the song go where it's going to go? Do you have a filter or do you...?

**Andrew** : Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think I do have a filter. The filter for me is more of an aesthetic one than anything else. Is what I'm doing serving? Is it making it a good song or not? So in some ways, first draft I mean, I'm not thinking so much about is this perfectly theologically accurate? Is this self-expression or is this written out of love to love the listener? The first draft, you're just getting something out there and you're trying to make something that has something about its shape that is pleasing, right? There's something in it that you feel like, oh, it's a song with a capital 'S'. And then you go back and you begin to shape it. You ask yourself questions about, is this written just as a way of expressing my own self, or am I trying to love other people through this?

I think it's important that I think songwriting ought to be a way of loving not just self-expression. And then of course, as a Christian, I want to make sure that I'm not saying anything that's theologically incorrect. So I have people that I vet the songs with and make sure that, in terms of my use of Scripture if I have any question about it, I will ask somebody smarter than me. I just think it's really important that as a songwriter, you have a sense of what is a good song and what is not a good song. And you're a student of the craft. You're listening to the great songwriters, you're humble before them because you realize that you've got so far to go. You realize that you're working with a mysterious medium that you can't always figure out, but you do have this almost platonic form of the song in your mind or of a song, and you're always holding your feeble effort up against this true form of the thing. I think when I was younger, I was really audacious and opinionated about my songwriting and if I wrote anything, and I was like, 'man, this is good. I'm good at this'. And now I'm way less sure about it.

You can't ever be arrogant when you've written a good song. You can only be grateful. I can give you an example with Skye, my daughter, who is just a stunningly good songwriter. When she was young, she grew up in a house where there was music everywhere, where I was writing songs. She sang with me on tour. She went to church with a bunch of people who were really great songwriters. So she grew up in the water that she swam in. So then when she was 12 or 13 and she was really starting to write her own songs, she would be really frustrated that her songs weren't as good as so-and-so's. And I told her this many times, I was like, 'no, that's part of the gift'.

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When somebody says you're gifted at songwriting, part of what that means is you know what a good song is. You may not be able to write a good song yet, but you know what a good song is. And that discontent that you feel with your own work is one of the things, the thing that it's like the gadfly. When Socrates said he was the gadfly of the Republic, it's like the thing that's always going to be irritating the horse. And you're always going to be like, 'ah, this isn't right yet', but that's what's going to keep you alive and keep you moving forward. So having that sense of discernment about your own work. Is it pleasing to the ear? Is it fun to say, does it roll off the tongue in a pleasing way? It's really hard to explain.

**Michael** : Or the opposite. Yeah, the opposite is, is it actually twee? Did I just throw that out because it rhymed and it doesn't actually sound nice, or... Yeah. There's plenty of songs that have gone in the bin because, 'oh no, that's just cheap' ... start again!

**Andrew** : Same! I can hear myself trying too hard to be clever. That was one of the things that I remember learning from David Wilcox, who was a great songwriter. He talked about how, 'oh yeah, when I was a young songwriter, I was always trying to be clever'. And I remember as a young man thinking, 'what's wrong with being clever'? That's part of the fun of songwriting is the fun zinger line or the rhyme that surprises you. But there's this point at which those things are distracting from the song. And you've probably heard me talk about the whole analogy of the glasses falling off. Have I told you that Jason Gray, he's talking about how in America, I don't know if they do it in the UK, but there are these glass-bottom boats that go out into springs where there are pretty fish and you can look down and see the fish underneath your feet and the boat.

And this rider was describing how when he was a boy, he used to lie on his stomach and lose himself in the world of the fish. He would see all the seaweed floating around and the fish would swim, and he would imagine that he was there, but then sometimes his glasses would slip off of his nose and clatter on the glass and it would break the spell. And he would realize, 'oh, I'm just on a boat. I'm not underwater with the fish'. And so Jason was talking about how when you're writing a song, don't let the listener's glasses fall off. Don't break the spell that you're creating. You're casting this sort of spell with the song. The listener is lost in it, and then all of a sudden you put your clever line, or there's a moment in the song that breaks the spell and all of a sudden the person's on a boat, they're not swimming with the fish. Looking over your work with that critical eye and going, 'is there anything in here that's going to make the glasses fall off'? So yeah, that discerning process is a big part of it for me. So it's really, if you find yourself discontent with your work, that's a good place to be.

**Michael** : As you know, a lot of what I do is write kids songs. So I'd love to chat to you about how you deal with loss and grief in your storytelling for children. You mentioned *The Wingfeather Saga* earlier on, so people, if you've not read it yet, go out and buy it now. The story pretty much starts with a Black Carriage taking children away! Please still go out and buy the book. It's worth it. You start in a pretty dark place. So I guess why did you do that, and how do those themes of grief and loss work their way through the book, and why do you put them there? Why is it not all happy go lucky?

**Andrew** : Well, one of the reasons I started with the Black Carriage was that I, well, I mean I wanted there to be a good hook for the story. I wanted people to realize right out of the gate that this is not a safe world. And I also wanted it to be a little bit of a, it was fair warning to the reader, you know what I mean? So I've had parents say, well, I read the first chapter and my kid is not ready for the story yet. So I think it's a good litmus test. If the first chapter is too scary for your kid, then maybe you should wait

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because the story does go pretty, pretty heavy and pretty dark. But as a boy, I was far more drawn to the stories that felt like they were a little dangerous. They were trusting me to be tough enough to deal with that stuff. And I also really believe that kids already know the world is broken from a very young age. They know it. They've seen us lose our tempers. They've walked through the room when the news was on. They've experienced in their own hearts, their own selfishness, their own brokenness. And so it doesn't do them much of a service, I think, to pretend like those things don't exist. And so in order to not make a straw man out of the darkness, you make the darkness strong.

You make the darkness tough and scary so that when the goodness defeats it, it demonstrates that the goodness is stronger. And I think that's what the kids need to know. So when it comes to grief, I mean, my goodness, I think Kate DiCamillo, I don't know how popular she is in the UK, but she wrote *The Tale of Despereaux* and *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* and *Because of Winn-Dixie*. She's a celebrated children's author, and one of the main themes in her stories is sadness. There's this real beautiful treatment of sadness and acknowledgement of sadness in her stories. And I think that's why they resonate the way that they do. Katherine Paterson is that way, *The Bridge to Terabithia*, like she's dealing with death and big questions, and kids, they're humans. They don't need to be protected as much as they need to be strengthened and edified. Does that make sense?

**Michael** : Yeah. They need the armour putting on.

**Andrew** : I think so.

**Michael** : Rather than whisking away from the battle, because they're going to face it. They're in it.

Did you start out with an idea of those themes? I mean, you must've done if you thought, okay, Black Carriage is where I'm going to go. How much of that was in your head already as you started the book? How much of it took a life of its own as you wrote?

**Andrew** : It's kind of like with the songwriting thing, you don't sit down with an intention to, 'I'm going to write an album about *this*'. I kind of did with *Resurrection Letters*, but it was still, I had no idea how I was going to write about what I was writing about with that. But most of the time it was more like you're an archeologist and you're excavating a site and you're looking for clues and you're trying to understand what's already there. And so I think when I went back and reread the *Wingfeather* books during Covid on Facebook, I did the Facebook Live readings. It was the first time I had read the books in years. And so it was really interesting to have 10 years distance from it and to go back and read. One of the things that was interesting was that I could see that I wasn't a very good writer yet in places. The books get better as they go. I could see that happening.

But the other thing that I noticed, I was like, 'oh, I remember what was going on inside me when I was writing these things'. And one of the big things that got me into this story thematically was people have asked me about the names, the fact that naming is a big theme in *The Wingfeather* books, what your true name is and what you're being called. When the Fangs are fanged, they're given a new name by the Stone Keeper, and there's a lot about names in the books. The season when I was beginning *The Wingfeather Saga* was a season where my friend Ron Block, I remember I was pouring out my heart to him one time. I was struggling with some sin or other, and he was just reminding me that I have this new name in Christ and it's unchanging and unchangeable, and my name is written on His hand.

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And he sent me a list of identity verses so that I could remember who I was in Christ. And so there's this beautiful long list of verses. So he was just like, go through the nights when you're being attacked by the enemy and you don't believe that you are beloved, read these verses to remind yourself who you are in Christ. Kind of like the comforting words in the Anglican liturgy. So that was what was going on inside me. It was this desperate clinging to the truth of who I am in Christ, not who the enemy is saying that I am, because that was what I was struggling with, that very organically popped up in the story. You know what I mean? I didn't sit down thinking, I'm going to write a story about naming so kids will know that they're beloved in Christ. I was just telling a story about Fangs and Black Carriages and three kids who are up against it. And I looked back 10 years later and could see this is what was going on inside me when I was writing these stories.

**Michael** : So people can not only read *The Wingfeather Saga*, but they can also watch it because it is a TV series now. So do you want to tell people where they can watch it? They watch it for free, right?

**Andrew** : Yeah, it's free on Angel.com. So if you go to Angel.com, there's also an app on your phone and you can easily cast it to your TV there. Yeah, it's this really cool model that the Angel Studios has where they want to make their content free to anybody who can watch it. But then you have a way to pay it forward. If you like the show, you can tip basically. And that goes to help fund future seasons. And so we finished Season One earlier this year, and we are deep into Season Two. And we're actually about to start the writing process for Season Three because everything overlaps. So Season Two is being animated right now.

I don't know if you saw who's going to be in Season Two, but Billy Boyd, Billy Boyd, who is Pippin in *The Lord of the Rings*, who is just a lovely guy. We talked with him in an interview.

**Michael** : Hang on. Am I allowed to say that Billy Boyd is playing a bad guy? Is that right?

**Andrew** : It is. He's playing the Overseer who is this really villainous guy in the Fork Factory, and he's great at it. What's so funny, he's such a jolly hobbit. To hear him tap into this real dark, kind of Dickensian, bad guy is just awesome. So yeah, it's just been a blast to see the thing grow. So yeah, Angel.com, you can watch Season One now and Season Two, I'm not exactly sure when Season Two will be out, but we are hard at work on it. So yeah, hope you can check it out.

**Michael** : That is amazing. Cool. And we'd love to play out with one of your songs. I say play out but people stay tuned because there will be a giveaway at the end of the show, so stay tuned for that. But it'd be great to play a song of Andrew's at the end of the show. So which song should we go for?

**Andrew** : I think given what we've talked about in this episode, I think 'The Sower's Song' would be the one that I would pick. It's one of my favourite songs I've ever gotten to write. And it's the last song on *The Burning Edge of Dawn*. And it in many ways sums up what we've been talking about, but what that whole album is about, which is, it starts in John 14 and I think it's 14, maybe 15, where Jesus talks about, "I am the vine and you are the branches. Abide in me". And it is very agrarian, the whole song is. Then the end of the song is all imagery taken from Isaiah, mainly Isaiah 55. I mean, that passage is just this thundering reminder of what God is doing. He's growing a garden, and gardens take time, but when they're in their fullness, when they're ripe, there's nothing more beautiful. And so that's what He's doing

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in us and around us and with His new creation. And so yeah, that song is one of my favourite ones to sing.

**Michael** : Brilliant. Well, thank you so much for spending time with us. Thanks Andrew. And we'll play 'The Sower's Song'. Cheers.