

[Theme Music: upbeat smooth jazz bassline.]

Katie Axelson: Welcome to Have Hope; Will Travel, I'm your host Katie Axelson. I spent almost nine hours with my friend Nikki on Saturday. We hadn't really planned to get together all day, we had planned to get together for lunch. But when I got there around noon, her baby had finally fallen asleep for a nap, so we had a snack. Then we went for a walk, and then we went out to lunch at an outdoor patio, and then it started raining so we walked back to her house And we just kind of kept chatting. And of course there were lulls in the conversation at different points and stories were interrupted by flying baby toys. And there was a moment we didn't know if it was over or if we were going to figure out something for dinner. I didn't end up leaving until like nine o'clock.

And one of the fun things about spending so much time with someone is that you get to ask more questions. You get to hear more of the backstory. You get to not feel like you're hogging the conversation if you talk for a little while. So when she asked me about the podcast, she didn't get the short version. Did you know that the original vision for Have Hope; Will Travel wasn't to include different voices and different perspectives? The original vision when we started the show back in December of 2019 was to link arms with women and take one step closer to Jesus together. Starting with that show in December, we focused on Advent. And the plan was, I was going to teach scripture and unpacked practical tips, common questions, things like that. We had Anna R. Bolch come on and talk about spiritual disciplines. It was great! And we haven't lost that part of the vision, that's what I consider the solo episodes now. Sometimes guests contribute to the "Have Hope" section of the podcast, because no matter where you are, let's take one step closer to Jesus together. If you're already in love with Him, let me help you fall deeper in love with Him. If you're skeptical about Jesus, let me explain a little bit more about what Christians believe and why.

But early in that first December, some friends and I were having a conversation and I realized that I was the only Christian in a conversation amongst Jews. And they were honestly complaining to each other about the Christmas trees and the Christmas music and how December makes them feel. And I thought to myself, "Oh my gosh, if Christians knew how exclusive we were being, I think we'd be less offended by the term Happy Holidays." So I listened patiently, I wasn't offended by their perspective, and I thought "I'm lucky enough to have Jewish friends. How can I share this perspective with Christians? I feel like I need to tell the Christians how the Jews felt. How can I work that into a podcast? But do you all Jews feel this way?" And I don't know if they all do, but the ones that I talked to sure did. And that's when I realized, I wasn't the right voice to share their perspective.

So we had Sammi Sudit come on this show and share what it's like to be Jewish in December and the audio quality of that particular episode is terrible. And my Jewish friends teased that I should have played Jingle Bells to ease the audio a little bit. But it was a defining episode that turned Have Hope; Will Travel into what it is today. Because when we travel we get to know people who are different than we are. We hear their stories, we hear their perspectives, we learn to stand with people instead of just having an opinion on an issue. Since then we've had a lot of people of diverse perspectives share their stories. We've had a Muslim in Jordan educate us about Ramadan, episode {14}, we had a single mom talk about what it's like to return to the church pregnant {16}. We had a Nurse Practitioner in New York educated us on what she does even during a pandemic, episode {17}. And no, I did not forget episode {15}, that's been a family favorite—that was the first time we talked about Blackness in America, the second being episode {34}. Our only male guest so far talked about what it's like to have the Gospel shared with him. We had a lesbian friend share her story of coming out in the church. That was episodes {22} for Casey Manko and {26} for Karen Figg. More recently we had a woman with Cystic Fibrosis talk about life during

the pandemic, episode {41} and a pharmacist educate us on how natural products and pharmaceuticals can actually co-exist, episode {45}.

I can't in any way pretend that we've had every perspective represented. I'm very well aware that we've had a shortage of Asian voices on this show. I would love to hear from a woman who feels safe enough to share her abortion story. Or how about someone who's now an adult who was adopted. Or a cancer survivor. Someone who's Hindu, Buddhist. There are so many perspectives that we have yet to explore. If you meet one of those criteria or have a perspective you've not heard yet on the show, send me an email at Katie@KatieAxelson.com. Let's start planning. Or if there's a person perspective you really want to hear send me an email to the same place, I keep a list of perspectives that I would love to get into the show. Katie@KatieAxelson.com

So why am I giving you the history of the show? Well first because we've grown since many of those episodes were released and I want you to know that they're there. Obviously those are just some highlights not all forty-seven previous shows. Literally actual number forty-seven previous shows. It's hard to believe that. But people have also started asking me, especially on Instagram -- @KatieAxelson -- how I'm able to have conversations like the ones we have here on the show. And they say they wish we could have conversations like the one they had here because they learned so much from my guest and it changes their perspective. And first of all these comments bless me so hard because that's the goal of the show. Ever since the beginning, when I thought "Sammi needs to come share her story about what it's like to be Jewish at Christmas time," I love that people are learning from these guests and that they're hearing a different perspective and that it's challenging them a little bit. And I love that they want to start conversations with people in their own worlds. Because the world's really polarized right now. And if we're not hearing different perspectives, we're just kind of shut ourselves off somewhere and we're just going la la la la la la. That's not actually a good idea.

So I'm going to share some of my secrets in this episode. Not all my secrets, don't get too excited! Just some of them.

But the first secret is this: this has not always been easy for me. In fact it's still not always easy for me. Just this weekend when I was with Nikki, she asked about a mutual friend and I explained honestly it was one of those situations where I wanted to know more but I didn't know how to ask about it. Because I've lost a lot of really good, in-real-life conversations to that exact problem. I want to know more, but I don't know how to ask. Or maybe I don't know how to ask without being offensive. Because I have asked offensive questions. I was straight up shot down at a dinner table a few years ago for asking a question that I thought was appropriate. Nope, lesson learned: conversation over. But I've learned how to have hard conversations through failures and through successes. Through saying stupid things and through being disappointed that I didn't get the information that I wanted. But I know that if I can learn and I'm still learning, then you can too. So let me share a little bit about what I've learned so far and then you share a little bit about what you learned so far, because I think we can learn from each other.

I promise this isn't becoming a sports podcast, but at the risk of making a sports analogy for the third episode in a row, let me tell you about my second pickleball experience. If you haven't been following along I have played pickleball exactly twice now. So when I showed up the second time, I assumed everyone else was more experienced and better skilled than I was. You know, unless they said it was their first time, which no one actually saw that. So I learned that that's not actually entirely true, to assume that everyone's better than you just because it's your second time. Sure, they might be more experienced, but I'm a tennis player. I've been a tennis coach. I can get the lay of the land of a racket sport pretty quickly. I can pick up a racket sport faster than I can pick up any other sport, let's be real. And so my

partner and I were playing two of the best players who were out that day and I knew it. It was a father-and-son duo and they were crushing us. Yeah they were more skilled players than we were but that actually wasn't their strategy. Their strategy was backspin.

So I pulled my partner said, "Listen, this is what's going on: they're using backspin. So when the wiffle ball hits the ground, you have no idea where it's going to go." And she looked at me as if I had put words to her frustration, she's like, "I have no idea where it's going to go!" Exactly. "So here's what we're going to do: unless it has to bounce -- which, it has to bounce in pickleball -- if it has to bounce, expect it to drop and change directions; it's just going to happen every time. But if it doesn't have to bounce, hit it in the air. Don't let it bounce, because that's their strategy. When it bounces we can't respond to it." And she's like, "Oh my gosh I never thought of that." And my partner's a smart woman, like she's an ER nurse -- yes the front lines of the pandemic -- but she didn't see what I saw. Not because I'm an expert at pickleball, but because I'm observant even on a new field, or a new court as it were, the concepts were there. We didn't win the game, but we worked together and our confidence changed. We even have a little mini come back. So when we approach the topic of hard conversations, I'm acknowledging that I'm not an expert. I have played Pickleball twice. I have had a couple of hard conversations but not nearly as many as I'm going to have for the rest of my life. I've got some experience, both here on the show and in real life. So let me share what I've learned, and a lot of it I've learned the hard way.

Also, know all the suggestions that I'm sharing here are in the context of a relationship, where both people are comfortable entering into this type of conversation. These things aren't going to work if both parties don't feel safe. Just because you feel safe, doesn't mean the other person feels safe. That's the biggest piece of advice I got here. Read the room. When in doubt, don't. Okay?

First piece of advice: ask permission. The world is heavily polarized right now with so many different topics. A couple weeks ago I spent one day arguing about covid the entire day. And then the second day I spent arguing about racism the entire evening. I was exhausted. So if you had approached me the third day and asked if I would have wanted to talk about politics the answer would have been a hard no. Not because I don't like to talk about politics -- I mean I don't like to talk about politics -- but because I didn't have the emotional energy to go there. Our friends of color have spent a lot of time and a lot of energy discussing and living through racism and diversity. As a white woman, it's a concept for me to learn; for them, it's their everyday reality. So don't assume they have a capacity or the desire to have that conversation with you as well. Go in humbly, in the context of relationship, ask, "Would it be okay if I asked you about your experience? Is now an okay time, or should we schedule something later?" I've had people decline to come on the show. Don't assume that just because the conversation would be beneficial to you it's beneficial to them as well. For some people it's incredibly triggering to try to educate yet another white person about their experience. Treat them with respect, they owe you nothing. There are other ways you can learn. Listen to the podcast episodes we talked about, I think we said it was {15} and {34}. Read some books. Listen to some other shows, follow people on Instagram with diverse perspectives. Do your homework.

The second secret that I'm going to share is that there are parts of the show that you don't get to hear. Some of my early guests didn't necessarily have this luxury, but now all guests get questions in advance. Sure, some questions come up naturally in conversation. I think sometimes you can tell which ones those are. But they've got the basic outline of where the conversation is going to go before we even start. And that gives them the chance to say "No I don't want to talk about that." I've had guests say, "I'm not comfortable answering the third question on your list. Can we eliminate that one?" Absolutely! Because the show is pre-recorded and it's not a shared live, I also tell them if I ask a question that they're not going to call answering on the spot, they can just let me know. And we will cut the whole thing out, which I have

done. I also told them if I ask a question that's rude or insensitive and it's something we could all learn from, by all means educate me! And we'll leave it in and we'll all learn together, which I have also done. That's the biggest secret for having a hard conversation: go in willing to learn.

Even if you and the individual are talking, have similar backgrounds or perspectives, go in willing to learn. You want to actually hear what they have to say instead of listening to respond. I know, listening to respond is way easier because we're used to fast moving conversations. There's a lot of dead air that I cut out episodes. Sometimes it's a guest who needs a minute to formulate an answer. Sometimes it's me who forgot the follow-up question. Yes, that definitely happens. Be okay with a moment of silence. Be okay taking a minute to both formulate an answer and formulate the next question. I have a friend in real life who will pause conversations and say, "Hold on, give me a second to think about that before I answer." If you don't agree, say, "Huh, that was a really interesting perspective. I'm going to have to think some more about that." Maybe don't use the word "interesting" because here in Minnesota it means terrible. That's one I learned the hard way. One of my roommates who's not from Minnesota made some dinner that I said was interesting. I said, "I will continue to eat it 'cause I'm not going to throw it away, but I would not feed it to anybody." And she's like, "Yeah that's the safest assessment." And my other roommate later asked how the food was, because she was going to ask if she wanted to eat the leftovers and I said "Yeah it was interesting," and she decided she wanted some other leftovers. And she told the chef roommate quote, "Katie said your food was terrible." Thankfully they brought it to me and they're like, "What?" And I was like, "No no no no no no no no! That's not what I said!" And then we had a good conversation about it because apparently in Minnesota, "interesting" means terrible, where in a lot of other places in Wisconsin it means where I'm from, interesting means more "unique" or "different." It's a slightly negative word, but it's not a very negative word like terrible. Words don't always mean what you think they mean. And sometimes when I have a guest using a specific language or specific terms, we define terms at the beginning. We start the show explaining what we're talking about so that we are on the same page and so our listeners are following along. Because when you say "antivaxxer" do you mean people who are against vaccines pre-pandemic, or do you mean people spreading disinformation and misinformation about the covid-19 vaccine? When you say "here" do you mean in my house, do you mean in my city, do you mean in my state, do you mean in my country, do you mean in the world? When you say, "We won," do you mean Biden won the election? Do you mean the United States won gold? Do you mean the Packers beat the Vikings? Oh the sports analogies are starting to sound a whole lot more natural!

What are the terms that you're working with? That's how you're going to be able to move forward. Make sure that you understand and make sure that you're actually on the same page. Ask good questions. We're not going to unpack this one too much right now because I'm working on a resource that's going to be available for free on my website on how to ask good questions, and what are some good conversation starters. But I've already given you quite a few previews scattered throughout the episode. Things like: is it okay if I ask you about this? I heard somebody else say that, is that your experience as well? What are some good resources where I could learn more? Is now an okay time to talk? Can you tell me more about that? Pop over to KatieAxelson.com and send me your email address because I want you to be the first one to know when the resource is available.

And the last tip that I've got -- maybe the last tip, there might end up being more -- is to apologize when you get it wrong. Because here's the thing, you're going to get it wrong. I have gotten it wrong. I don't know if I've gotten it wrong on a show, but I know I've gotten it wrong many, many times in real life. And being able to say, "I'm sorry what I said was wrong, what I did was wrong, that wasn't respectful. I want to honor you. How can I make this right? Will you forgive me?" is what's going to build you credibility so you can continue to have hard conversations.

Because while we all keep thinking the world's going to calm down a little bit, have we realized that 2022 is a whole four months away? And a lot of us are still thinking it's still 2020 -- looking at me. I don't know how much more calm the world is going to get. And that feels really doomsday to say and I think that what we're all excited about -- "excited" as a negative term -- excited about is going to change. But I think that the world's going to stay pretty polarized for a while at least. And we have to navigate it, and so this is one way that we can navigate it while learning, is having conversation so that we can hear a different perspective, get to know someone whose views are different than ours. And figure out what does it look like to have relationship with them instead of just having an opinion on an issue.

Sometimes conversations aren't safe to have. I've had to shut down conversations with people and say "I'm not comfortable talking about this with you anymore. I don't think we're going to end up seeing eye-to-eye, I don't think this conversation is productive for either of us. I think we need to stop talking. You're not allowed to call names so I need you to stop." Sometimes you have to cut it off. So what does it look like to do that in the context of relationship? Where you're never going to end up agreeing. And it's hard. And in those conversations remember: ask permission, find the common ground, apologize, recognize you're not always going to do it right, but also realize sometimes you're never going to see eye-to-eye. And so be willing to cut it off in a healthy way. Don't let the fear of the negative conversations stop you from having all potentially controversial conversations. Just know your boundaries and figure out how to work with and do that.

[Transitional music interlude plays, an off-beat electric riff.]

Big thanks for listening, my friend. I'm so glad that you're here. I hope that you know that your voice and your perspective is valuable too. Even if you've never been on a podcast, even if no one has ever asked your opinion, even if you're not part of one of the controversial topics it's heated right now. Your voice matters. You matter. Your perspective is important so don't be afraid to share your perspective. For more tips on how to have a healthy conversation, especially with people whose perspectives are different than you are, pop over to KatieAxelson.com. I'm working on some resources, especially around how to ask good questions. They're going to be available to you first at KatieAxelson.com for anyone else to know about them, the friends at KatieAxelson.com find out first, that's my commitment. If the show has been helpful to you, please share it with a friend. Maybe use one of the episodes we've already talked about to start a conversation with someone in your world. Someone you've got a relationship with. Please leave a rating, leave a review, subscribe, it's how things make a difference, it's how we get to move forward. I'm so glad you're here, it means a lot to me that you're willing to learn even if I'm only a couple steps ahead of you. I love you and we'll see you again in two weeks. Bye!

[Theme Music: upbeat smooth jazz bassline.]