

(ACOUSTIC GUITAR THEME MUSIC)

**JONATHAN ROGERS, HOST:** Welcome to The Habit Podcast: Conversations with Writers about Writing. I'm Jonathan Rogers, your host.

(THEME MUSIC CONTINUES)

**JR:** Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher are co-authors of *Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women*. Here's what Emily Jensen and Laura Wifler have to say about the book: "In a world where womanhood is simultaneously worshipped and despised, Elyse and Eric explain a woman's worth, straight from Scripture. With chapters filled with compassion and hard questions, they challenge readers to develop a robust view of women in redemptive history."

(THEME MUSIC FADES OUT)

**JR:** Besides being an author, Elyse Fitzpatrick is co-host of the podcast Front Porch with the Fitzes. Eric is a pastor, a songwriter, and a Johnny Cash superfan.

Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher... thank you so much for taking time to be on The Habit podcast!

**ELYSE FITZPATRICK:** Thank you!

**ERIC SCHUMACHER:** Glad to be here!

**JR:** So you all co-wrote *Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women*... now did I get that — did I get that subtitle right?

**ES:** That's correct.

**JR:** Um, how did y'all end up teaming up on this project?

**ES:** Well, like most good things, it started with Twitter.

**JR and EF:** [laugh]

**ES:** And so, sometime in early 2018, I had tweeted out a string of women who were the first to do something significant in Scripture — the first person to do something. And Gospel Coalition asked me to turn that into an article, and so I turned it into an article. And Elyse and her family have a wild and crazy podcast called Front Porch with the Fitzes, and they asked if I would come on that to talk about, um, that article. And Elyse said, “This should be turned into a book.” And I said, “You should write it with me.”

**JR:** Uh huh.

**EF:** [chuckles]

**ES:** And uhh... a few months later we reconnected, and uh, wrote a proposal, and thats how it came to be.

**JR:** Uh huh! So y'all had not — y'all didn't know each other before you came on Elyse's podcast?

**ES:** We'd interacted a little bit over social media, but I think that's the first time we talked.

**JR:** Yeah.

**ES:** So... and I think we met face to face in person after maybe half of it was written?

**EF:** Yeah... yeah. We were... I was at a conference somewhere — Minneapolis? Somewhere like that.

**JR:** [laughs]

**EF:** Um, heh. Some Midwest sort of place. Ummm, and Eric drove in so we could meet. I think that was the first time we ever met! Yeah.

**ES:** Yeah.

**JR:** I try to keep this podcast on the subject of writing, and as I've been thinking about what, um... in other words, not just talking about the content of your book, but how does the experience of writing the book, um, what can we learn — what can other writers learn about that? And one thing I've been thinking about as I've been thinking about your book is the idea of how important it is to pay attention to what's actually in front of us? That as the great enemy — one of the great enemies of good writing is stereotype, categories.

It's so easy to sort of... in so much of our life, we simplify our life by thinking in terms of categories rather than thinking in terms of individuals, or thinking of what's literally in front of us. We've got these categories to kind of put people in little categories and then we can get on with our day. And the gift of the writer, I think, is to... is to make a stop and not do that. And I think that's relevant to what y'all have done in this book. To make a stop and say, "Let's actually pay attention to women in Scripture and women elsewhere, not as a category, or as people who have done important things. Can you talk about that a little bit?"

**EF:** I have, umm... I have a background in counseling, so I have probably 30 years of real humans, real persons, um, women, that I have spent time with, tired to counsel and get to know, tried to help. And so for me, a lot of what I was doing when I was writing this book was I was writing to those women that I know when I talk to them about a topic like this, they break out into tears.

**JR:** Yeah...

**EF:** That's what I was trying to do. And I don't know that that is necessarily

stereotypical, but there is a certain category of women that I have spent a lot of my professional life with, and I was trying to think, “What would — what do these women need to hear from me?”

**JR:** Yeah.

**EF:** What would they love to know about how God loves and uses even very broken people.

**JR:** Yeah. [pause] I love that, uh... the way you’re talking in terms of thinking of your audience, being so clear on who your audience is, and as you write to those people that you have in mind, you’re gonna have something to say to people beyond that little audience.

**EF:** Exactly. You know, my little audience, I think, is multiplied a thousand-fold.

**JR:** Sure.

**EF:** Around the country, around the world, of women who really need to hear that they’re valued by God. And so many of them don’t know that. I mean, they really don’t know it. And when they hear... for instance, a very dear friend of mine, when she first heard our little podcast that we did with Eric and read the “21 Ways that God Used Women in Redemption History,” she wept. She said, “I can’t believe this is true!” So that’s who I was trying to write to.

**JR:** Eric, I know just from following you on social media the last couple of years, you’ve been, uh... a real voice in talking about the truth about the um... about women and their place in the church and uh... how did you... what happened to put you in that [pause]... to put that top of mind for you?

**ES:** That’s a great question. [pause] I’ve been trying to trace that journey myself. I think part of it comes from being in places of personal burnout

and suffering where I didn't feel like I was listened to or cared about... or protected, that sort of thing. And maybe the Lord put me through some things where he helped me understand what it was like to be overlooked. And... at some point I started thinking about the issue of manhood and womanhood and just wondering — you know, it had been a long time since I'd looked at that issue theologically in the Scripture, really in-depth — and had been thinking this is probably something I should revisit.

And then with the, um... well, of course as a pastor, I've been a pastor 17 years, there's a lot of women that I've pastored. And heard feedback from them. Um, sometimes what has been helpful to them, sometimes ways I could be shepherding women better. And then, um... I think it was with Rachel Denhollander with her standing up to Larry Nassar and the gymnastics community, the abuse happening there. And I read the article — I think it was in Christianity Today — where she talked about how speaking up for sexual abuse victims cost her her church. And when I read her statement, I knew exactly what she meant. And I could see myself responding in those ways — though I hadn't been in that situation — and I could see the circles that I ran in responding in those ways. And I was heartbroken for her —

**JR:** I'm sorry, "responding in those ways"...

**ES:** Yeah, so uh...

**JR:** You mean rejecting the victim the way that she was?

**ES:** Yeah. Um... well, responding... the way the church responded to her. She was essentially told that she was hyper-concerned because she had been a victim when she was speaking out about— against situations where there were concerns about sexual abuse and that she couldn't see things clearly and she was doubted and those sorts of things.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**ES:** And I just realized in the midst of that, as #metoo and then #churchtoo were growing, I thought I really need to stop and just listen to this. And so to your point about seeing what's actually in front of us, just saying I'm gonna lay aside my sort of knee-jerk reactions to these social movements, and uh — I'm a natural conservative and sometimes these movements don't get listened to by conservatives — I just need to sit and listen. And then listening to those stories online, and then especially Beth Moore's "Letter to My Brothers" where she talked about how she'd been treated in the church and at Christian events as a woman. It just made me realize that there were things I was overlooking and not caring about.

And so, I felt like, um... you know, it's easy as a conservative Christian to sort of champion the theological and social issues that everyone expects you to. And no one's surprised when you speak out about traditional marriage or pro-life causes — and I think we should — but that's easy. And I decided that I wanted to be a man who was speaking out about things that I didn't hear other men, particularly pastors, speaking out on. And so I wanted to be a male voice for my sisters in these situations. And it's really become a passion of mine, especially as I begin to look in the Bible and see how God has used women.

**JR:** Mm. How did you... how did the two of you work together on this project? What was your actual, um... you know...

**EF:** Process? [laughs]

**JR:** Process. Thank you. You should host this, Elyse!

**EF:** [laughs] Nah! I really shouldn't!

**JR and ES:** [laugh]

**EF:** Uh, you know, basically... every book starts out one direction and then it ends up going different directions, um, but I think that we had decided fairly early on that we were going to split the writing duties, and then so

Eric would take the Genesis account of Creation / Fall / Redemption, and then he would take... um... Jesus. You know, Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection. And then I would take whatever was left.

**JR:** [laughs]

**EF:** [laughs] So, uh... and then along with that it sort of morphed, and we began to think okay, well then we need... we need appendices, and we need other people giving us their testimony, and... and so it morphed into... into really quite a *broad* look at women in Scripture, beginning at Genesis and ending with Revelation. But then, um... but then just going along point by point, and also having a bunch of appendices.

And so what we would do — I think our process was — we would write a chapter and send it to one another and make changes as we needed to. It was actually a very easy process. I've written a number of books with other people, and this has been the easiest of the processes, probably because I didn't — I wasn't the one who had to edit Eric. He edited himself. He did a good job.

**JR:** So we're recording this a week before the book comes out, and this will air a week after the book comes out. Um, so... have y'all experienced resistance from people who haven't been excited about your project?

**ES:** Yeah, definitely. We definitely have. Um, we've had, uh, endorsers, people we respect and love — or potential endorsers that we respect and love — decline to endorse it, including both a complementation scholar and an egalitarian scholar who both said I really like what you're doing here, there's a lot I can say "amen" to, but you make some strong statements that would confuse my audience if I endorse this book.

**JR:** Hmm.

**ES:** And um... we had... video, a spoken word piece. I don't know if you saw it.

**JR:** I did.

**ES:** By Quina Aragon. Yeah, so that was one of our promotional pieces. And there's been, uh... [pause] a lot of reaction to that.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**ES:** Mostly good. People who have loved it. And then some who have expressed strong concerns about what she is saying in that video. I think mishearing her? But... you know, particularly from conservatives, I think, uh... we've heard a lot — you know, everything goes back to I Timothy 2:12.

**EF:** Yeah.

**ES:** Paul saying, “I don't permit a woman to preach or exercise authority over a man.” And the first question a lot of complementarians ask is, “Are you saying women can be pastors? Are you saying women can preach?” And... I think we make a brief comment in our chapter on the church with some kind of snarky remark like, “We're sure some of you flipped to this chapter to see what we think of this issue.”

**JR:** [laughs]

**EF:** That was my snarky— that was my snarky remark!

**ES:** But I second it! I think that's been a challenge in writing. Because we know that there's going to be some readers who will have sort of pet issues that the whole book will hinge on what we say about their one thing. And we both feel like the value of women is so much more than where you come down on gender roles, so to speak?

And so we both think you can have a church where women are allowed to

be pastors, and you can have an environment that dishonors women. And likewise, you may have a church that has men only as pastors and is honoring to women. And vice versa. Sin doesn't necessarily know a theological camp. It shows up everywhere. And so to write in a way that... like Elyse did, thinking about who we want to reach with this book, and not always be writing on guard against a small group of people who we know are going to critique us, can be a challenge.

**JR:** So how did you deal with it?

**EF:** Well, um... at least for me I can say that it was very much — I'll tell you the temptation on both sides. The temptation on one side would be to all the time, going back, over and over again saying, "This is what I believe. Don't call me egalitarian." Whatever. That was a temptation on one side, where I was very much concerned about whether or not people are going to be able to hear what we're saying without automatically broad brushing us.

And then sort of on the other side of, you know— ignoring, or being afraid. Trying to protect my reputation. Being afraid of saying what needs to be said. You know, so all of the time I felt like, at least in my own heart, there was this guardedness because I know what a hot-button issue this is. And it's a concern to me.

I just last weekend had a conversation with someone, and I'm scheduled to speak on this topic in a few months for a woman at her organization. And she said that there are people on her board that are stepping off the board because of the spoken word piece by Quina. And they haven't even read the book yet! But there's this— there's this, um... knee-jerk reaction to if you say anything at all about the value of women — and Quina even says this in her spoken word video — you're automatically labeled as a liberal or a feminist. Or you know, there's that broad brush. And whereas what we're saying is women have value, and these are ways that they were used by God because he values and honors them, and we need to take a respectful look at this.

I think it's very difficult for people to get away from their hot buttons and to try to say okay, I wanna have a respectful conversation. That's what we're trying to do? But I find it difficult and the book hasn't even come out yet.

**JR:** Yeah. Um... we... it's interesting, you keep... [pause] I keep hearing these labels and categories in the way you talk about, you know, complementarianism, egalitarianism, feminism, liberalism, conservatism. You know, we have all these "isms" —

**ES:** Mmhm.

**JR:** I feel like they're really getting in the way of coming to grips with reality, with truth, with — I mean, you know, it's interesting that you're trying to say something that *seems* more or less unimpeachable, the idea that God values women.

**ES:** Yeah.

**JR:** [pause] And yet, for some reason we value our "isms" more than we value bald truth.

**ES:** It's been a lesson in... I think this whole issue is a lesson in conversation and civility in some ways. Because even as Elyse and I might have our own personal, theological opinion on how this gets fleshed out in the church and practice, we're both of the persuasion that there are people on all sides of those practical matters who take Scripture very seriously, and they're not throwing it out the window, and we want to learn from them. And the same way that we'd want to learn from people in different denominations, that sort of thing. And for some reason on *this* issue, um... that seems to almost be impossible. It's really hard to have a respectful conversation without categorizing people — which camp do you fall into?

And I get concerned even about saying — even having to affirm a

complementation stance in our book — that we somehow imply that egalitarians are unorthodox and evil, because we certainly don't think that at all! They're our friends in the Gospel. And... so it's really struck me, even as I share things on social media and glimpses of the book come out, to hear how people categorize us when they haven't heard what we're actually saying, and what we have said doesn't necessitate that interpretation.

**JR:** Yeah.

**ES:** It's... I think... [pause] This is in the book somewhere, but a friend of mine wrote to me as he was reading something in the book, and he wrote back and said, you know, some of these issues, he said, have become sort of a lazy litmus test for me. Rather than getting to know a person and hearing their heart and what they believe and actually say, it's a shortcut for me to say, "What do you think of *this* one issue?" And then I can embrace them or write them off entirely based on that. It's laziness.

**JR:** Yeah. You know, I've always... talked about writing, and the gift of the writer is giving people — helping people escape those kinds of categories. But as you're discovering, it's... people like their categories. And they um... [pause] As much as I in principle believe in the power of writing to sort of awaken people to you know, to something beyond their predisposed categories, stereotypes, whatever, um... [pause] Boy, there are a lot of forces arrayed against that kind of intellectual honesty.

**EF:** You know, there really are. And I think that we're living in a time where people really like being, um... aggravated.

**JR:** [laughs]

**EF:** You know? [laughs] I mean, it just seems like you can just say something like, "My goodness, isn't the sky blue!" And someone's gonna say something like, "Well what, you don't like clouds?"

**JR:** Yeah. [chuckles]

**EF:** It's, it's... we're living in this time where people, um... in some ways it's almost as though if you enter into— and I don't, golly, I don't want to say that everybody's this way. I don't think they are. But there are a lot people who don't even want to enter into a dialogue about whether or not... um... or even try to understand what we're saying!

And I had a very similar experience a few years ago when I began to read — and to my shame, I had never read Martin Luther King, his Letter from a Birmingham Jail.

**JR:** Yeah.

**EF:** Um, I had... and I read Ta-Nehisi Coates, and I read Bryan Stevenson. And then, in some ways, I began to understand, goodness gracious, I have been blind!

**JR:** Yeah.

**EF:** And I would not have gone there had not my daughter said, “Mom, you gotta start reading this stuff, cause you're not getting it.” And that was good for me. But I think I understand... people are terrified that we're somehow going to give up truth. That we're in this mega battle of the ages, and we're gonna give up truth by budging— by even listening to someone else who has a different opinion.

For me, it has been very, very helpful to read egalitarians who hold Scripture very highly, and to see how they are honestly doing business, without just saying, “Oh, you know, it's just Paul. He's just a... he's a misogynist!” They're not doing that. They're really doing good work, and it's been so good for me to read them. But you see, my — I had an openness of heart to even want to do that, and um, I don't know. It's very concerning to me how everybody wants to fuss. [laughs] You know? There's like this lack of shalom. There's this lack of peace. And people *love*

that!

**JR:** Yeah.

**EF:** You know, it's like they're drawn to — ooooooh, here's a juicy morsel? I don't know. That's kind of scary to me.

**JR:** And you mean that literally when you say it's scary?

**EF:** Yes! Yeah, I do! I do mean it. Because I can see that when you're like that... when you love to fuss, you're just two steps away from hitting somebody with your sign, or a bat, or something. Or tearing down someone's reputation, you know? Just... *savaging* someone's reputation that you have not even listened to.

For instance, the other day on Facebook, I posted that I had gone to see *Just Mercy*, which I think is a fabulous, fabulous film. And I said I—

**JR:** Great book. I haven't seen the film.

**EF:** Oh, the film is so good. And I have read the book. And so I was on Facebook, and I said, "I really want to encourage people to go see this movie. I think it'd be really great." And I was told that I was a wolf in sheep's clothing, and I ought to start reading the Bible?

**JR:** Ugh...

**EF:** If I ever had. That kind of thing —

**JR:** Really?

**EF:** Yeah! It was almost slanderous! And you know, I don't take social media seriously. This is not a person I know or respect. But that's what concerns me. That people are very interested in getting in a fight, and they

don't even want to *hear* what you have to say.

**JR:** [pause] Wow.

**ES:** And I think that's — I think what Elyse is saying is so right on, about not having peace, not having shalom. And I really do think there's a deep fear that is underneath our unwillingness to read and hear honestly what people are writing and saying. And I think it comes down to, um... what you think makes you right in the end with God. I think as a Christian, you know, I believe I have a Savior who lived for me and fulfilled God's righteousness for me, he died on the cross and bore my punishment for me, he's conquered the grave for me and been raised from the dead. And now I have a right standing with him based on *his* work, by the grace of God, and not my own.

But I think deep in our hearts we want to justify ourselves by being right. And we find a camp, and we find a teacher, and it tells us what's right and who's wrong, and... if someone suggests there's something wrong with that, it strikes fear in us that we might not be okay if we're a little bit off in what we think. And I think fear drives that because we're not resting in a grace that's greater than our works.

**JR:** Yeah. Wow, that's great. Those are great insights. Thank you for those. Alright, we're coming close to the end of our time, so I've gotta ask one more question, and that is who are the writers who make you want to write?

**EF:** [pause] Well, I don't *wanna* write, so... [laughs]

**JR:** Okay. [chuckles] Who are the writers who make it seem less painful?

**EF:** [laughs] You know, I really love Lewis, or course. So, C.S. Lewis and Luther. Um... I've read *Les Miserables* probably 5 or 6 times. But you know for me, I don't look at myself as a writer. I sort of look at myself as a counselor who writes. Um... and, and, so that's kind of... that's where I'm

at.

**JR:** [chuckles] Alright. Eric?

**ES:** Uh... you know this is... this book coming out is non-fiction, but all the people who make me want to write that come to the top of my mind are fiction writers. And uh, I... I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Flannery O'Connor on your podcast.

**JR:** That's the spirit! [laughs]

**ES:** [laughs] So taking your online course Writing with Flannery O'Connor – was that, is that what it was titled?

**JR:** Yeah.

**ES:** Yeah, that... first time I'd read her, and absolutely fell in love with her writing. She makes me want to write. Wendell Berry, Marilynne Robinson... I love the way that all of those authors, I feel like, give us true pictures of people.

**JR:** Yeah.

**EF:** Mmhm.

**ES:** And that builds a sympathy for the world.

**JR:** Yeah. I would've been very sad if the Iowa boy hadn't mentioned Marilynne Robinson.

**ES:** Yeah. As you should be.

**JR:** Are you an Iowa native?

**ES:** I am!

**JR:** Yeah, okay.

**ES:** Born and raised in a town that looks just like Gilead.

**JR and EF:** [laugh]

**JR:** Alright, y'all. Thank you so much for being on The Habit podcast. I wish y'all the best for this book, and I hope that you will, um... [pause] be committed to the truth. You know? That you will stand strong.

(THEME MUSIC FADES UP)

**JR:** And so, I hope the best for y'all, and pray the best for y'all.

**EF:** Thank you.

**JR:** And talk to you soon, I hope.

**ES:** Alright. Thank you.

(THEME MUSIC)

**DREW MILLER:** The Rabbit Room is partnered with Lipscomb University to make this podcast possible. Lipscomb has graciously given us access to their recording studio in the Center for Entertainment and Arts Building. We're so grateful for their sponsorship, their encouragement, and the good work they do in Nashville.

Special shout-out as well to Jess Ray for letting us use her song "Too Good" as part of this podcast. Visit [jessraymusic.com](http://jessraymusic.com) to hear more of her beautiful songs.

**JR:** The Habit Membership is a library of resources for writers by me, Jonathan Rogers. More importantly, The Habit is a hub of community where like-minded writers gather to discuss their work and give each other a little more courage. Find out more at [TheHabit.co](http://TheHabit.co).

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