(QUIET ELECTRIC GUITAR MUSIC FADES UP BRIEFLY) **DREW MILLER:** We call Hutchmoot “a conference for everyone,” so it follows that this is a podcast for everyone. This series features sessions recorded at The Rabbit Room’s annual conference, which celebrates art, music, story, and faith, and all their many intersections. Listen at rabbitroom.com/podcasts  
  
**JONATHAN ROGERS, HOST:** Hey friends, Jonathan Rogers here. I know a lot of you love Flannery O’Connor, and I think a lot of you love writing. So you’ll be glad to know that on June 4th I’m starting a six week online course called Writing with Flannery O’Connor. Each week, we’re gonna read one of O’Connor’s short stories and one of her essays on writing. On Thursdays I’ll give a live lecture. There’s gonna be writing exercises, online discussion, and lots of opportunities to connect with other writers. Find out more at thehabit.co/flannery  
  
(ACOUSTIC GUITAR THEME MUSIC FADES UP)  
  
**JR:** Welcome to The Habit Podcast: Conversations with Writers about Writing. I’m Jonathan Rogers, your host.  
  
(THEME MUSIC CONTINUES)  
  
**JR:** Scott Sauls and I go way back, as you’ll hear in a minute. In fact, the first time I ever had tiramisu was at Scott’s rehearsal dinner in an Italian restaurant in St. Louis. That’s just one of the many ways that Scott Sauls has enriched my life. He is senior pastor at Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville.  
  
(THEME MUSIC FADES OUT)  
  
**JR:** Before that, he was a pastor at Redeemer Pres in New York City. This week marks the release of his fifth book, *A Gentle Answer*. Scott’s gentleness and generosity of spirit come through in every word he speaks, and in every word he writes.  
  
Hey, Scott Sauls, I’m so glad you’re on The Habit Podcast. Thanks for making time for me.  
  
**SCOTT SAULS:** Thanks for having me, Jonathan. I appreciate you having me on.  
  
**JR:** And uh… we have known each other for a long time!  
  
**SS:** That’s right.  
  
**JR:** We went to college together, so I knew Scott Sauls when he was about, I don’t know, 19 years old or something.  
  
**SS:** That’s right. You actually, Jonathan, were instrumental in me becoming a follower of Christ. Uh, I don’t even know if you remember your instrumentality there, but you were a very, very key person in that process for me.  
  
**JR:** Well.  
  
**SS:** Back at Furman. Back in the Furman days.  
  
**JR:** Yeah, right.  
  
**SS:** I remember taking a trip to Warner Robins and you taking me to the creeks that became the inspiration for your trilogy.  
  
**JR:** Yeah!  
  
**SS:** Uhhh, smoked some Swisher Sweets together.  
  
**JR:** (laughs)  
  
**SS:** Can I tell your listeners that? (laughs) That was my first ever thing I ever smoked, and I think that was the last thing I ever smoked.  
  
**JR:** (laughs) Well.  
  
**SS:** And your mom was really proud that you had the highest SATs —  
  
**JR:** Oh, waitwaitwaitwaitwait —  
  
**SS:** — in the history of Warner Robins, Georgia.  
  
**JR:** Okay. Yeah. Alright. Moving on!  
  
**SS:** So, yeah. (laughs) I can say more! You married really well.  
  
**JR:** (laughs) Oh, I can say more about you!  
  
**SS:** You married up with Lou Alice, for sure.  
  
**JR:** What’s that? Oh, married up, yes.  
  
**SS:** We all did. But. (pause) Who’s interviewing who?  
  
**JR:** Yeah, right… that’s a —  
  
**SS:** Sorry. My bad.  
  
**JR:** — good question. Who’s interviewing who? I will say my one, um… uh, what do you call it? The one intramural championship T-shirt I own from Furman…  
  
**SS:** (chuckles)  
  
**JR:** … I own, because — not because I won an intramural championship, but because you had so many you gave me one of yours.  
  
**SS:** (laughs)  
  
**JR:** I think it was for ping pong.  
  
**SS:** Yeah, I was the reigning 4 year consecutive ping pong champion. It has not gotten me anywhere in life. So…  
  
**JR:** Well…  
  
**SS:** But it felt important back then.  
  
**JR:** Yeah, right. Well, moving on to more recent accomplishments, you have a book coming out, which I think is coming out the same week that this episode is gonna air, called *A Gentle Answer*.   
  
**SS:** Yes.  
  
**JR:** And this is, what, your fifth book. Is that right?  
  
**SS:** Yeah, it’s my fifth book. Which is pretty bizarre, because I never planned on writing books. It just sort of happened. But yeah, it’s number five.   
  
**JR:** Yeah. And so… I was actually — before we started recording — the covers look like it’s some kind of series, but you’re saying it’s not, properly speaking, a series, these books you have written.  
  
**SS:** No… no. I mean… *Befriend* and *Jesus Outside the Lines* were my first two books, and they kinda sorta could go together as a pair. And this latest book actually — and I actually inserted this remark in retrospect after writing *A Gentle Answer* — that it kind of shaped into a prequel of my first book, which I cite book that’s done— been read more than the others, *Jesus Outside the Lines: A Way Forward for Those Who Are Tired of Taking Sides*. It just sort of speaks into various issues — outrage culture, cancel culture, et cetera — and how Christians ought to walk in love in all of the different contested issues that we find ourselves in conversation about.  
  
But *A Gentle Answer* is more of the heart work. It turned out to be more of the heart work that prepares us to engage well? Cause like — as Tim Keller says, if we’re not breathing in our oxygen, then we’re gonna spew something ugly. Um, and so this book is more about breathing in the oxygen of the gentle and humble in heart nature of Christ, and then, you know, having our souls fortified and strengthens to be able to handle a climate of us against them and hostility and, you know, all of— kind of the partisan rancor that we see and experience every day, and hopefully engage well. So hopefully it’ll move the needle a little bit.  
  
**JR:** Yeah. I love — one thing I love that you talk about in this book is the idea of, whereas outrage culture is about what I’m against, it’s really important that I’m for something. That seems like very important advice for a writer. I mean, even if your writing requires that you speak out against something, it’s… super important that that grow out of what I’m for. And, I guess, I don’t know, I guess everybody claims the only reason they’re being outraged is because they’re really for something.  
  
**SS:** Yeah, I think there’s a country song — I can’t remember who the songwriter was, but I think I heard somebody play it at The Bluebird. But the lyric is, “You won’t have to ask what I’m against if you know what I’m for.” And I thought that was a really great line. Why be a Negative Nelly when we don’t have to? Why be a Negative Nelly when we can make the same point in a kindhearted um… endearing, persuasive way. I don’t know a lot of people who have been persuaded by being shouted down. I know a ton of people who have been persuaded by being lovingly reasoned with and walked with.  
  
**JR:** Yeah. Well, that brings up the question, are people really interested in persuading other people?  
  
**SS:** I hope so. I hope there are a few of them left. I think the Mr. Rogers — the other Mr. Rogers! Fred Rogers — I think the renewed interest in Fred Rogers answers that question. You know, wildly popular documentary about his life came out about two years ago, a year and half ago. And followed by a blockbuster film where Tom Hanks played Fred Rogers, and you know…   
  
I think there’s such a thirst, because maybe there’s such an absence, or been such an absence, at least publicly. The private stories are much different. I think there’s a lot of kindness and gentleness going on in private realities. But in the public space, gentleness, kindness — Mr. Rogers’ three favorite words, I like you — are very rare. And so I think that sort of kindled the thirst that we all have for kindness. So hopefully, there’ll be some momentum there.  
  
**JR:** Yeah, a minute ago you asked a question rhetorically that I think might be worth talking about non-rhetorically. And you said, “Why be a Negative Nellie?” (pause) But there are some reasons that people are a Negative Nellie that I think are worth…  
  
**SS:** Yeah! John the Baptist, et cetera, sure.  
  
**JR:** Well, I’m not talking about John the Baptist.  
  
**SS:** Oh.  
  
**JR:** I’m talking about the… I’m talking about what people get out of being negative.  
  
**SS:** Oh, you mean like the emotional reward? Or the growing tribe around you?  
  
**JR:** Yeah, I’m thinking more along those lines. You make the case that kindness and gentleness and being for something is a better way to go, and I certainly agree with that. But on the other hand, when it comes to moving the political needle, to manipulating people, to selling stuff… fear and anger really do sell. And it takes something special to resist the temptation to go that way.  
  
**SS:** Yeah, fear and anger get more clicks, for sure. Unless you’re talking about Mr. Rogers!  
  
**JR:** (laughs) Back to Mr. Rogers! Yeah! Sure!  
  
**SS:** You know? I mean it’s a… it’s a case study. I think it’s a compelling case study. But yeah, you’re right. And it is hard to resist, because I think, you know… kindness is contagious. Negativity is viral. You know, I think negativity spreads a lot. It spreads like COVID-19. Kindness spreads like the common cold. It spreads, but it’s harder to catch. Ummm… and I don’t know what that — I think — yeah I think maybe theologically we know why that is.   
  
It’s what somebody said, “The natural religion of the human heart unaided by Christ is self-righteousness.” We’re always looking for leverage. We’re always looking to be one up. You know, Luke 18:9, to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on others with contempt, Jesus told this parable. I think that’s a pretty good description of the human heart that has not allowed itself to be touched by the kindness of Christ, or maybe even by the kindness of other people.  
  
We all have wounds in our stories, right? And we’re all on guard in some way. And I think going on the offense is sometimes I default way to defend ourselves.  
  
**JR:** Yeah, sure. Yeah. So… as you know, this is a podcast about writing. So… the… it’s so important that we as human beings be instruments of peace. You’ve written five books, so you have quite a bit of experience writing, not to mention all the sermons you’ve written. Um… what are your thoughts on writers as an instrument of peace? Because you know, writers — they can be instruments of dissension if they wanna be. Um… (pause) Talk to me about writers as instruments of peace.  
  
**SS:** Ohhh… I mean, people who come to mind immediately when you… (pause) um… when you use that terminology are Eugene Peterson… Andrew Peterson for that matter. Ann Voskamp is another modern voice who I think is going for that tone and is very persuasive and effective.   
  
Um… and I think people who write in a healthy, prophetic voice are also a version of an instrument of peace. Speaking out, not in a ranting way, but in a convicted way about, you know, racism, classism, et cetera. Genderism, ageism. Um, so I think that the prophetic voice which can sometimes be interpreted as negative, if it’s a healthy prophetic voice, there’s a certain kind of anger that is healthy and godly. It attacks — hate evil and cling to what’s good — you know, in order to cling to what’s good, you’ve gotta attack what’s evil in some ways.  
  
And I think, you know, you look throughout the history of literature, and people like Dostoyevsky and plenty of others like him have made political statements with the power of the pen. King, um, Martin Luther King, Testament of Hope and other works he’s published. People like John Perkins, you know, just in terms of civil rights and racism. And… name your subject. *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* with Francis Schaeffer, I mean, and Everett Koop addressing justice issues for the unborn.  
  
So you know, the pen’s a powerful thing. Cause if somebody reads a book, it becomes shareable. It’s not over like a radio program. Um, you know? I mean, it’s like a podcast episode. If it grabs somebody, if it resonates, then it has the potential of being widely shared and growing in influence and so on. Words are powerful. Words brought creation into existence, right?  
  
**JR:** Yeah. How do we know the difference between a prophetic speaking out against something and just outrage?  
  
**SS:** Hmmmm… man. Sometimes they can look like exactly the same thing to the onlooker, right? I think a lot of it — only we can see what’s going on in our hearts, right? But… like John the Baptist and the Pharisees. In some ways, there was some pretty significant crossover in their message, right?  
  
**JR:** Yeah! Yeah.  
  
**SS:** But John was after something: that Christ would increase and that he would become less. And the Pharisees were after the opposite: that Christ would decrease and they would become more. And you know, both of them preached the Law. Both of them preached the message of warning, you know, repent or perish. But one of them was speaking for Christ’s sake, the other was speaking for his own sake.  
  
**JR:** Yeah. You quote John Perkins in the beginning of *A Gentle Answer* as saying, “We are the first generation to make hate into an asset.”  
  
**SS:** Mmhm.  
  
**JR:** Um… that’s such an interesting idea. The… I guess I want to… I’m trying to understand… (pause) What writers who care about gentleness, kindness… you know, fairness, you’re interested in telling a truer story, a truer story than outrage. I guess my question is what gives you hope that gentleness can survive in a world where hate is an asset. And you can’t answer “Mr. Rogers.”  
  
**SS:** (laughs) Okay. Oh, come on!   
  
**JR:** I know, but — hey listen —  
  
**SS:** That’s like the one card I have, the Mr. Rogers card.  
  
**JR:** No, because here’s what I’m —  
  
**SS:** I thought you’d like that, since you share a last name.  
  
**JR:** I do like it, except that so many of the people I see around me who are so mad all the time grew up on Mr. Rogers!  
  
**SS:** Yeah. Hey, good point. Um, I think the answer is there’s hope because it’s happened before.   
  
**JR:** Mmhmm.  
  
**SS:** Look at the story of redemption. Paul used the metaphor of, you know, being in the pains of childbirth — which I always wonder what women think of Paul using that metaphor. He didn’t even have a wife, let alone, you know, give birth.  
  
**JR:** (laughs) Right.  
  
**SS:** So what does he know? Why would he use that metaphor? But in all seriousness, I think childbirth, and the pains of it, and the groans, and, you know, the blood on the ground if I can get graphic about it, is a metaphor for the way that healing has come into the world since the beginning of time. Um, you know, you take a look at the Bible and there… I think is one book in the Bible, uh… maybe one and a half, we’ll say half of Proverbs also. Maybe another one, maybe Song of Solomon. Or Song of Songs, whatever you call it or wanna call it. But Ecclesiastes is really the only book written by a guy who has succeeded by every measure of the so-called American Dream, right? And he strikes us as the most miserable person in the Bible.   
  
All the other books of the Bible, virtually all the other books of the Bible — Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms, ummm… the Gospels, the Epistles — they’re all written in the contest of oppression by a person who’s under it. And um… you know, the Roman Empire into which the New Testament was born and written was… I mean… hyper-hostile. Talk about hostility being an asset. It’s the way that Rome crushed the world until Rome fell, and it was out of that context that Jesus emerged, and that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus emerged. And I think every story then that resonates with the metaphor of the pains of childbirth also resonates with the story fo redemption. That it always comes through a birthing experience that’s very disruptive and painful and hard.   
  
So it does give me hope, for writers who are passionate about the way of the One who is gentle and humble in heart, who’s a lamb as well as a lion. You know, he’s both. There’s a chapter in this book about anger and stewarding anger well. And so he’s both tough and tender at the same time. He flexes the muscles of conviction and compassion simultaneously. And so a book like this is less about sidelining convictions or fierceness or the will to fight against things that are unjust, and it’s more about bringing alongside that prophetic spirit the gentleness and humility of heart.   
  
Because we’re not in a position to be pompous. We’re not. And especially if we belong to Christ and we identify with Christ, we should know better. The only reason why we’re accepted and embraced in the beloved is because of his kindness, not because of ours. And what better reason to be tender than that he chose to be tender with us instead of what he could have been.  
  
**JR:** Yeah, I mean, I think it takes courage for a person — whether they call themselves a writer or not — it does take courage to say I know it looks like we’re in a world where only aggression and only the assertion of my rights and my power — that that’s the only thing that can possibly work in terms of getting me the life I want. I think it takes courage to speak up against that and tell a different story.  
  
And I say speaking out against it, but I also think that doesn’t just mean oppositional language. I mean, feasting is an act of war, to enjoy what’s good and true and beautiful. You know, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, when the witch sees people feasting, she’s just enraged because that is a… that’s a kind of hostility that um, well as you were saying earlier, as distinct from— that’s being for something. And obviously when you are for something, you are against something else. But to feast is to oppose the powers of wickedness.  
  
**SS:** It’s to confront the first negative word that God ever said into creation — it’s not good for a person to be alone.  
  
**JR:** (chuckles) Yeah.  
  
**SS:** It’s a defiance of the isolated state, which is what our enemy wants. He wants to isolate us.  
  
**JR:** Yeah. So there’s a kind of defiance that is affirmative.  
  
**SS:** Yeah. Absolutely.  
  
**JR:** And I think that seems pretty important to what you’re talking about in *A Gentle Answer*.  
  
**SS:** Yeah, I think a lot of people these days, the sort of missional types — I guess I’d put myself in that group — use the term counterculture for the common good. So you know, counterculture sounds oppositional, but the endgame is for the common good, to advance flourishing in the world and in the human community and in the church and so on. So you’re right. That’s a great insight. It’s a true insight. It resonates.  
  
**JR:** Flourishing. I love that word. I think it’s so relevant to… well, to so many things. But flourishing really is telling a truer story than the one the world is telling.  
  
**SS:** Yeah, it’s maybe a modern American Evangelical word that resonates with the old Hebrew word shalom. It’s more than a peaceful feeling. It’s more than peacing out on a situation that you’re uncomfortable with. Shalom is true, comprehensive peace. Uhhh, spiritually, relationally or socially, culturally or vocationally, the shalom that Scripture talks about, envisions, fights for and promises in the ultimate sense is a comprehensive kind of flourishing that we’ll only experience ultimately in the new heaven snd the new earth. But… it’s compelling. You know, if we can even believe it a little bit, that it’s coming, it changes things. It changes us.  
  
**JR:** Yeah. How has a belief that ultimately things are gonna be made right and shalom will reign… what are some ways that has changed how you think about the world.  
  
**SS:** (pause) (deep breath) Umm…  
  
**JR:** It’s almost too big of a question…  
  
**SS:** No, it’s a great question. And I— it never… N.T. Wright has been really helpful to me on that particular question, because he’s — I don’t wanna say he’s reframed anything. He’s just bringing to light things that have always been true that I didn’t see. And maybe a lot more Anglicans saw it than Presbyterians early on, but I didn’t see until really maybe — start seeing — until 8 to 10 years ago when I started engaging with his thought around how the Biblical vision of glory, the new heaven and earth, informs now.  
  
I think that the way he defines hope — I hope I don’t butcher it — I think he says something like, hope is imagining God’s future into the present and acting accordingly. And then he ties it to that phrase in the Lord’s Prayer where Jesus says, “Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” And the way that N.T. Wright has explained that is that prayer is asking for, essentially, God to send appetizers down into the present day for the feast that is to come.  
  
Russ Ramsey in one of his books — I can’t remember which one it is, I think it’s the one about Lent — but he talks about how when Jesus does the miracle of turning water into wine, and it’s the best wine, right? At the end of the party, which wasn’t customary to do it that way, but Russ words it beautifully. He says it’s as if Jesus pulled reserves, um, you know…  
  
**JR:** (laughs)  
  
**SS:** From the Wedding Feast of the Lamb down into that moment.  
  
**JR:** Yeah, yeah…  
  
**SS:** I mean, I’m getting chills as I say that.  
  
**JR:** Yeah, me too.  
  
**SS:** Such a beautiful way to picture what Christ was up to or could have been up to in that moment. Was hey, you haven’t seen nothin’ yet. No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no tastebuds have tasted what the Lord has in store. It should make us more hopeful in our writing and communicating.  
  
**JR:** Yeah, I was gonna say one thing I love about that idea of appetizers of the wedding feast of the lamb is… that’s something I can imagine being a part of. I mean, I can’t imag— you know, the ideas that I’m gonna somehow being the Kingdom of God to the present, that’s kind of a big ask and more than it’s my responsibility to do. But the idea of my part of being a waiter, so to speak, bringing an appetizer on a tray…  
  
**SS:** Yeah. It’s amazing. And getting to eat as well.   
  
**JR:** That’s right! Usually those guys that work the banquet don’t get to eat until the very end.  
  
**SS:** (laughs) Don’t you — yeah but they can eat as much as they want.  
  
**JR:** Yeah, that’s a good point. (laughs)  
  
**SS:** Don’t you think, Jonathan, that happily ever after story is so satisfying. I just think it’s really fascinating how that story is so satisfying, and the dystopian story is so dissatisfying. You know, *Brave New World*, *1984*— ugh! You kind of feel gross after it. And you feel gross, partly, because you feel that is actually how the world is supposed to work.   
  
And yet, we resonate so much with a happily ever after story. Why? Because that is the Story, capital S. Umm, you know that’s that hardwired into every human heart to long for. And of course, we lose that longing through cynicism and lies and other things, but the happily ever after story is not an escape from reality. Like, Camus called it an escape from reality. Woody Allen won’t— Woody Allen says he enjoys other people’s art, cause he won’t watch his own movies, cause he feels so much shame at the mistakes he made. He enjoys other people’s art as an escape from reality, but the best and most beautiful art is actually a reintroduction into reality.  
  
**JR:** Yes. Oh, absolutely. I think that is so true. There is such a thing as art that is escapist, but it’s not the happily ever after stories that are escapist.  
  
**SS:** Hmm.  
  
**JR:** I think that’s right. I think stories, the right kind of stories, are an invitation into a reality that is truer and bigger and more joyous than the reality that we see with our own eyeballs.   
  
**SS:** Yeah.  
  
**JR:** And you know… yes, the sadness and the brokenness and the sin… all that’s true, but it’s just not the truest thing. With storytelling, with art of all kinds — and for that matter with social justice and whatever kinds of endeavors people are involved in — there’s this whole range that is available to us for telling the truth. Which includes acknowledging — with Flannery O’Connor for instance, portrays a world that can be pretty dark and pretty bleak.  
  
**SS:** Mmhm.  
  
**JR:** And yet, Flannery O’Connor never suggested that’s the truest thing about the stories that she was writing.  
  
**SS:** That’s right. That’s right. Have you ever read any of her stuff?  
  
**JR:** (laughs) Have I read… yeah.  
  
**SS:** (laughs)  
  
**JR:** I’ll look into it. I’ll look into Flannery O’Connor. Yeah, but… that model of true, truer, and truest, I think is really so helpful for giving us a way of talking about… why we tell the stories we tell.  
  
**SS:** Yeah, I don’t know, I’ve never heard it put that way — true, truer, and truest — but to me it fits perfectly into the categories of the creation, fall, redemption narrative, right? It’s true that God created things perfect and people messed it up, created disaster for ourselves. And the truer part of the story is we’re in an in-between time, right? Where Jesus has already begun the process of making all things new and where his Kingdom has already come in subtle but very real ways. And the truest story is where the trajectory is headed. The final outcome, the one and only everlasting chapter of the book, which happens to be the last, right? All the other chapters are temporary, at least in space and time — God lives outside of it — we’re in a temporary crappy chapter. And but we’ve already got the last one. It’s written. It’s sealed. It’s the truth about life. And it’s that happily ever after that stirs our longing every time we read a story that ends well and justice is served and the bully is sad in the corner…  
  
**JR:** (laughs)  
  
**SS:** And the bullied kid, you know, is class president. You know?  
  
**JR:** (laughs)  
  
**SS:** It’s just something that resonates, right?  
  
**JR:** Yeah. I also think this idea of the true and the truest is super helpful with our anthropology and the way we talk to one another and ourselves about our own failures. To say yeah, it’s true, you really screwed up, or I screwed up. But that’s not the truest thing about us.  
  
**SS:** It’s not. Sometimes it feels like the truest thing, but you’re right. It is not. It is not, even when it feels like it is. We talk about that just in our own ministry context. One of the kind of regular phrases that we speak is that in terms of identity and trajectory, your identity and trajectory are exactly the same in Christ in your very best moment as they are in your very worst, and vice versa. There are just certain things that are certain and fixed that we’re just positioned to receive and don’t really function as contributors in terms of, you know, how things like redemption are accomplished and applied. And yet we get to enter into it and participate in it. Um… so… I’m getting theological. This is more about writing books.  
  
**JR:** Yeah, I was trying to think how to rein that back to writing —   
  
**SS:** Sorry. (laughs)  
  
**JR:** — but I’m gonna let the theological point stand.  
  
**SS:** Well, there have been things written about these things. So…  
  
**JR:** That’s true. Okay. On a more prac— well, a more mundane note. Not a more practical note. Um… you’re busy. How do you write books? You’re the senior pastor of a large church. Where do you work this in?  
  
**SS:** So… some things come really slowly to me, and other things come really quickly. And one thing that comes slowly is writing chapters. One thing that comes quickly is writing sermons. It used to take me 20 hours to write a sermon. Now it takes me about 4.  
  
**JR:** Okay.  
  
**SS:** And every sermon has probably 60% in it of any given chapter’s material. It gives me… a sermon gives me a head start for the laborious process of writing a chapter. When I first started writing, I thought that it would just be an interchangeable discipline. And it’s so different, because when you write to speak, you don’t feel as much pressure to be a perfectionist. Because you know that there’s gonna be something that happens. If you’ve done it enough, you know that in the moment there’s gonna be sort of this fresh insight. You know, the theologians call it “unction for preachers.” But there’s this sort of… you know, if you write your 70% sermon, the remaining 30% comes to you in the spoken moment typically.  
  
**JR:** Right.  
  
**SS:** It doesn’t work like that with writing. You gotta nail it, because when your’e done, you’re done. And, you know… thank the lord for editors. You don’t need one. I need one. Right now my editor is Webster Younce at who is over at Harper Collins, Thomas Nelson. He does a great job. I also feel like I’m back in college English class because he’s so dogged on, Are you sure Gandhi said that?” Are you sure? Can you cite the original source? Because what so-and-so quoted, that doesn’t count.  
  
He’s a professor, which you would appreciate. It initially rattled me, but after the fact it’s okay. So thankful to know I have someone who cares that much to push me.  
  
**JR:** A good editor is a treasure.  
  
**SS:** Oh my goodness, he’s a genius with words. He’s a genius with what lands and what doesn’t. So that really, really helps a lot. I hit the jackpot with my two Tyndale books too. Just had a great editor. And we were on the same wavelength, so there was no ideological tension or anything like that, which can sometimes be a problem as I understand it. But yeah. I need those editors to sort of… you know, my wife is my first editor. She does a great job. She’s amazing at those things. But the publisher really helps, and assigning a partner to sort of get it right.  
  
But yeah. I write one day a month.   
  
**JR:** Oh, yeah?  
  
**SS:** And if I’m in a writing season, I ask for a one year writing period on a book. And I will isolate one full day to write a chapter each month. And that’s it! I can typically get a chapter out in a full day. The hard part, when you spread it out that much is to keep that sort of cohesive thread going through, because you get amnesia about what you’ve written before. But um… but that’s probably the only way it would work for me right now. I so admire, Jonathan, people like you who write full time and that’s your thing. I just don’t think I’m good enough at it to, to… I feel like I’m the right hander being trained to pitch left handed when I write. In ways that like speaking feels like a right handed pitch with my strong arm, and writing feels like a left handed pitch.  
  
**JR:** Hmm. Yeah. Yeah, well.  
  
**SS:** Writer’s block is especially painful when it happens too.  
  
**JR:** When you write on your one day a month you’ve set aside?  
  
**SS:** Oh goodness, you’re up a creek when it happens on your one day.  
  
**JR:** (laughs)  
  
**SS:** I don’t know, you’ve probably never dealt with writer’s block in a big way. But man, it’s painful.  
  
**JR:** I’ve had whole years of it.  
  
**SS:** Really?   
  
**JR:** Yeah.  
  
**SS:** Could’ve fooled me. I’ve read your stuff. You could’ve fooled me.  
  
**JR:** Well, I wasn’t writing that stuff when I was in my writer’s block. We’ll talk about that some other day. Last question: Who are the writers who make you want to write?  
  
**SS:** Eugene Peterson, top of the list.   
  
**JR:** Sure.  
  
**SS:** Ummm… (pause) And this is probably my enneagram 4 coming out… Henri Nouwen. Brennan Manning. I just love writers who, when I’m donen reading what tehy’ve written, I feel more at rest. And so, um…  
  
**JR:** I love that man. I wish you’d said that earlier when we still had plenty of time to talk.  
  
**SS:** Okay. And I love Flannery O’Connor too…  
  
**JR:** Writers whose work makes you feel more at rest.  
  
**SS:** Yeah, those are the ones who… because I’m a type A, and so I have this restless dynamic to my personality and wiring and it’s centering. But I also really jive with Flannery O’Connor and just the, you know, how she kind of catches you sideways with the zinger that makes you feel awful about the universe, but brilliantly tucked in there is the redemption realities. Leonard Cohen: “There’s a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.” She exposes the cracks and the light sneaks in, if we’re paying attention.  
  
**JR:** Mmhm.  
  
**SS:** So I like the disruptive stuff too, as long as it’s telling the truth. Um… I can deal with a really troubling, difficult, painful read, as long as it’s telling the truth.  
  
**JR:** Yeah. Yeah. Scott Sauls, thank you so much for being here. This has been fun. And I hope we can get together in other contexts soon.  
  
**SS:** Let’s do it! What do you call it? The Dudes… uh…  
  
**JR:** June of the Dude?  
  
**SS:** June of the Dude! It’s coming up!  
  
**JR:** It’s coming up, right.  
  
**SS:** We’ll sit six feet apart and do June of the Dude somewhere.   
  
(THEME MUSIC FADES UP)  
  
**JR:** (laughs)  
  
**SS:** I’ll offer my driveway, if you prefer.  
  
**JR:** That sounds great. Alright man. Thanks.  
  
**SS:** Alright. Thanks.  
  
(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 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.  
  
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(THEME MUSIC OUT)  
  
(PIANO MUSIC FADES UP)  
  
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(SHE WAITS BY THE GRAY HAVENS FADES UP)  
  
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(SONG FADES UP)  
  
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(SONG FADES UP AND OUT)