**DREW MILLER:** This podcast is brought to you by Lifeway and the Christian Standard Bible

(ACOUSTIC GUITAR THEME MUSIC FADES UP)

**JEN POLLOCK MICHEL:** I think if any of us waited for that inspiration to fill the sails, we might be waiting for a long time. I think life is a lot more like the doldrums where this is no wind and there are no waves. There’s no motion. You actually kind of create it by your habits.

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

(THEME MUSIC CONTINUES)

**JR:** Jen Pollock Michel is the author of several books and the lead editor of Imprint Magazine.

(THEME MUSIC FADES OUT)

**JR:** She hosts the Englewood Review of Books podcast. She’s also raising 5 kids all while living in Canada. Her new book is *A Habit Called Faith*. I thought that would be a great fit for The Habit Podcast, and I was not wrong about that.

Jen Pollock Michel, thank you so much for being on The Habit Podcast today.

**JPM:** I am really looking forward to chatting with you again!

**JR:** And I’m excited about your new book that’s coming out. I’m gonna try to release this about he same time that the book releases — *A Habit Called Faith*. I got excited when I saw that title of course, because I’m interested in habit. I’ve named my podcast The Habit podcast. To quote Flannery O’Connor: “I’m a full time believer in writing habits.” So let’s talk about habit, cause that’s really what your book is about, forming habits. Or I guess — that fair to say it’s about forming habits, or is it rather a vehicle for forming a new habit?

**JPM:** I mean… yes and yes, sort of. It’s about forming the habit of Bible reading, but it’s also about thinking of faith as a habit. I think a lot of times people think of faith as built by epiphanies, those sort of mountaintop experiences, and we don’t make the connection all the time between regular practices and formation of faith, and we also don’t think about the practices as a way into faith.

I got really interested in this idea that I just ran across in a book. It’s Pascal, but I can’t say that I was actually reading the *Pensées*, I was just reading somebody else who had read the *Pensées*. And Pascal had said there are a lot of people who… they resolve all of their intellectual questions about faith, but they still don’t have faith. It’s not anything that’s vital. They’re convinced on a rational level, but they’re not practicing the life of faith, and he said you actually have to practice the motions of faith to move your way into faith. And that felt really intriguing to me, especially the contest I live in. I interact with people every day who don’t really think the faith life is possible for them. Maybe they don’t have a lot of reference to it. Maybe they just sort of imagine it’s this emotional superpower you have to see what’s behind the clouds. And I think this idea of habit as a way into faith — not just as a way we practice faith, but the practices actually being a door into faith — is a really encouraging thing to people.

**JR:** It’s interesting that you’re talking about Pascal as an entry into that, because I think of Pascal’s Wager as a sort of intellectual thought experiment basically. What is it? The idea of Pascal’s Wager that if you wager that God exists and he doesn’t, you haven’t lost anything, but if you wager that he doesn’t and he does, you’ve lost.

**JPM:** Hmmm…

**JR:** That’s… I’ve always found that slightly distasteful, right?

**JPM:** (laughs) Yeah.

**JR:** But… and it never occurred to me until I read it in your book that the thrust of that is let’s live this way and see what happens.

**JPM:** Absolutely. Yeah, I had a really fun interview that I did — well, some of the things I include in this book are these faith stories, just the different ways that people come into the life of faith. And one of them is actually a bishop in South Carolina in the Anglican Church, and that’s exactly… he started to become intellectually convinced about the coherence of Christianity. Not necessarily the personal relevance of it, but the coherence of it. And then he just... made sort of that wager. He took that wager up and said I’m gonna sort of act as if God is really. I’m gonna just make that my presence and sort of move into a way of being. And then God became very real to him. It’s a cool story.

**JR:** Yeah, I love that story. Well, on a related note… another thing you said in your book is that “knowledge is informed by what you expect to see.” And so your challenge to the reader is I want you to expect to see God in the next 20 days.

**JPM:** Mmhm.

**JR:** That sounds a little bit like some sort of relativism, right? Knowledge is informed by what you expect to see and… so… there. I’ve made an accusation.

**JPM:** (laughs) You’re a relativist!

**JR:** (laughs) Yep. If that’s not relativism, what is it? This idea that our knowledge is informed by what we expect to see? Which, by the way, is just true, right?

**JPM:** Well, yeah. I was gonna say that’s just sort of borne out by research. We all sort of have these biases, these sort of ways, narrow ways, in which we see the world or expect to see the world, and so the world we expect to see is the world we actually see. And so it takes a little bit of training. It takes a little bit of intention and, I would say, deliberate practice to see beyond what we expect to see. And I think that’s true in the life of faith. Again, if you come form a sort of naturalist perspective, you don’t expect to see God. You don’t expect to see anything that’s outside the laws of nature, the regularity of gravity. You expect to see things that are predictable and understandable. And so I’m inviting readers to expect to see something beyond that. It’s actually entering the Biblical landscape which sort of subverts all of our expectations for what we think really… the natural world.

Again, if you’re a naturalist, you don’t expect to see the Red Sea parting, manna falling from the sky… you know, the signs and wonders kind of idea that both Deuteronomy and John — which are the two books that I’m using in the book — that’s a huge thread or motif in both of those books.

**JR:** Mmhm, yeah. That observation that what we expect to see shapes what we see and shapes knowledge reminds me of something — I think it was Chesterton, but I’ve never been able to track it back down. He said that the materialist who doesn’t see any wonder in the world is like the policeman who has ordered everybody in their houses after curfew then writes in his notebook, “The streets are suspiciously quiet tonight.”

**JPM:** (laughs) Yes! That’s exactly right. I think that’s exactly right. And you know, we have to invite people into practices. And this is again just a real interest to me because I live in a context where faith is not the obvious choice. I live in one of the world’s most cosmopolitan city, and I would say the average Torontonian doesn’t have a lot of reference to faith. I mean, maybe great-grandma or grandma went to church, but there’s just a very different history here. There’s a very different cultural reference to Christianity. And so inviting people into a practice where they actually… they change what they see. And I think that is what Bible reading can do for us.

I think a lot of times we think of it as sort of informational, but if we think of it narratively, like as a story that sort of shapes our expectation of the world that we have! As soon as we enter the landscape of Scripture, we’re in a totally different world than the one we would normally expect to see if we only came form that materialist, naturalist perspective.

**JR:** Yeah, yeah. Okay! So this, as I think you know, is a podcast about writing.

**JPM:** Mmhm.

**JR:** So I do want — without turning your book into writing lessons — I’m interested to hear about your habits, since this is a book about habit. Tell me about your writing habits. Especially interested, for instance… are there ways that as a writer you go through the motions. Your habits help you go through the motions even if you’re not feeling it, you’re not feeling inspired.

**JPM:** Absolutely. I think if any of us waited for that inspiration to fill the sails, we might be waiting for a long time. I think life is a lot more like the doldrums where this is no wind and there are no waves. There’s no motion. You actually kind of create it by your habits.

You know, so there’s all kinds of ways that I create wind, I guess. I think, again, if you sort take that, like — we could wait for the wind or we could paddle, and the habits are a little bit of the paddling. I create writing assignments for myself all the time.

**JR:** Really.

**JPM:** I do! I think about my monthly letter to readers as just a writing assignment. And I think of… I journal. I’m a regular journaler. I should say that I’ve actually become much more of a journal in the pandemic, because I think writing is the careful paying attention. It is the disciplined habit of paying attention to a lot of different things. And just as a writer who is very interested in the spiritual life, I pay a lot of attention to what is going on inside of me. You know, as much as I try to pay attention to God and Scripture and things that are going on outside of me, but I’m very interested in the intersection of those things. So journaling is a habit… it’s a spiritual habit, and I also think it’s a writing habit. It’s actually a way that you get beyond spectating.

**JR:** That’s a good way to put it.

**JPM:** I think as a writer, you have to move beyond spectatorship, and I feel as if our world is just built on the habits of spectatorship. And to get beyond that, where you actually sort of move into the habit of forming your own opinions, of noting your own reactions, of taking account of your own fears and worries and longings and desires… all of that is super important. So I have a journal. I’m doing regular examen every day. I’m asking myself literally the same questions every day, and I’m writing. And I’m not just thinking in my mind. I’m actually taking up a pen and paper.

Pen and paper is a huge foundation for most of the writing habits that I have. I try to get away from my computer, especially early on, because I just find that I just freeze up, that I have all these expectations that I bring with me, that… well, this better be good, and this better makes sense. There’s this way the the computer only allows you to draft and think in very coherent, linear ways, and I have to get beyond that.

I keep messy notebooks. I actually keep a couple of different notebooks. I keep a three ring binder, which is where more of my journal is. I keep — and other things that I sort of put in there — but I am definitely a lined notebook paper, fountain pen kind of person.

**JR:** Fountain pen…

**JPM:** I have a Moleskine. Do you as well?

**JR:** I write with pen and paper.

**JPM:** Okay.

**JR:** I like the Moleskine’s with graph paper. For me — this is probably some sort of superstition on my part, but it feels like when I’m really producing and having to meet a deadline or whatever it takes me the same amount of time to write one page, whether I have wide lines or narrow lines or the tiny lines of graph paper. And so — again, this is some sort of mental game I play with myself — the smaller the lines, the more I can produce, because it takes me 45 minutes to write a page or whatever, and I’ve written more if it’s got smaller lines.

**JPM:** Ohhhh… I love that.

**JR:** That may or may not mean anything.

**JPM:** (laughs) There is that sense of having to trick yourself. You have to take up habits that sort of maneuver around whatever your particular hangups are.

**JR:** Yeah. Yeah. And you said fountain pen? You use a fountain pen?

**JPM:** I’m a fountain pen person. Not for everything, but for my journal and for my Moleskine. And then I’ve got another notebook. My Moleskine is like, you know, just that sort of paying attention to a lot of different things. “I heard this on this podcast. Here’s that sermon I listened to. Somebody said this; it makes me wonder this. Oh, I’m formulating an argument in my mind. Does this work?” You know, it’s a sort of working out of ideas.

But then I have another notebook that is not my fountain pen. It’s just a spiral notebook, and it’s my throw the spaghetti on the wall. It can be super messy. I can tear out the pages. I can write in whatever pen I want. And I need some sort of canvas for that. That’s my sort of trick for getting around “oh you better think of something really clever, and it better be the first thing you write down!”

**JR:** Oh, that’s interesting. Um… something you said made me want to ask a second question, a followup question. And that is… oh! How much do you go back to these notebooks that you write?

**JPM:** That is a habit I actually think I’m actually trying to cultivate more now. The problem is… so… do you wanna know? I literally wrote like 300 pages, front and back, probably for the year of this pandemic journaling. Just really sort of wanting to keep a record of all kinds of things, sort of like my historical account of what was happening. And I’ve scanned those now, and I’ve put them in my computer. And I think, you know what? I don’t think I’m gonna go back to these a ton. I sort of flipped back through, and I then I drew out some things where I noticed themes. I was so — I have been — continued to be so intrigued by the way we live in time. So many of the anxieties I’ve had over the pandemic have been related to time. So I started to notice that and just keep a separate list. So you know… I don’t study it.

I think the Moleskine is a new thing for me that I hope to go back to more frequently. Iv’e found that I struggle sometimes to create pitches. I want to write an article, but then I don’t have it gathered well enough to kind of think about, what have I been thinking about? So that’s what I’m hoping to do a little bit more of there. But I think there’s a benefit to doing it, even if you don’t go back to it.

**JR:** Oh, I do too. And it seems like when I write down little ideas… I don’t do this as much, but I used to write on scraps of paper and then lose them, but it always felt like they came back right when I needed them. Casting the bread on the waters… (laughs) they’d just turn up.

**JPM:** So true! And books are that way too. You order a book. You buy it. And maybe your’e not… I don’t know. You don’t need it exactly when it comes, and you put it on your shelf, and then maybe you don’t pick it up for another year. I had that experience just recently with a book, where I thought oh, I’m really glad I have this book, but I didn’t pay much attention to it when it arrived.

**JR:** Yeah. Yeah, I know the feeling. By the way… what’s the relationship between the spiral notebook — the spaghetti on the wall notebook — and the Moleskine?

**JPM:** So the spaghetti on the wall is… it might just be a really messy sort of working out of an argument. It can actually go both ways. Maybe the Moleskine is, I read this essay, and they were making this argument. I’m not sure I agree with that." And then maybe I go to the spaghetti on the wall notebook and I make a list. Lists of things like here is why I take issue with what they said. That makes me sound like such a critic, but I think writing is… you’re in conversation always, with other writers and other books, and you’re reacting. There’s nothing to write if you just agree with everything. So maybe the Moleskine is sort of “oh, I read this, and this is the argument they formulated,” and then the spiral notebook is, “How am I interacting with that?” And then maybe the next step is my laptop, where okay, I think maybe I could actually piece together something coherent as a sort of response to that.

**JR:** Okay. You mentioned already the idea of not being a spectator.

**JPM:** Mmhmm.

**JR:** And the way you talk about entering conversation with other writers… and I think it’s important for readers to think of themselves as being in conversation with writers.

**JPM:** Absolutely.

**JR:** Even if you don’t plan to write, we’re always in conversation. And I think that’s… you’re kind of talking about the same thing, right? That’s another way of saying the same thing. Not being a spectator is acknowledging that you are in dialogue with other thinkers. Is that fair to say?

**JPM:** Yeah. That is absolutely fair to say. And I think I’m coming so late into this habit. I don’t know. It’s really weird how you can get through undergraduate school and graduates school and still not cultivate that habit. And I think there’s part of it um… being, honestly, a woman, I think, makes me sometimes — there’s a formation that we have, especially as Christian women, where, um… and it’s implicit. You know, it’s tacit. And I don’t know, I imbibed it in a way that I’m only now just kind of wrestling with. I mean, I think that writing for me is this practice of saying wait, I can take up a little space in the world. I can have an opinion. And there’s a lot of courage involved in that.

There’s humility too. It’s not just about well, now I’m on the world stage and I get to proclaim my wisdom to everyone! But it is. It’s a deliberate entering into the conversation, and that is the way that we’re formed. There’s a testing that happens as we sort of articulate something, lend it to others’ scrutiny. Enter into the conversation. Have our thoughts and ideas challenge and changed. I think I’ve just realized that as a spectator, if you don’t get into the game, if you’re just sitting on the bench, well, you’re not developing your skills.

You may not be failing. You may not be that guy who — our kids were watching a football game this past weekend, and it was like somebody had fumbled… I think they were catching a punt, they fumbled, and the other team recovered and scored because they were literally on the third yard line. If you sit on the bench, you can avoid those humiliating moments. It’s so safe. But golly gee, I think I’d rather just take a few tumbles and actually like, learn and grow. And for me, that’s what moving beyond a spectator position means.

**JR:** Yeah. You mentioned that being a woman has affected your willingness to step in —

**JPM:** It did.

**JR:** — and your willingness to be a producer, or a non-spectator. Are you aware of ways that being a woman has affected the way people receive what you have written? Is that something you’re conscious of, or is it more on the production end?

**JPM:** Thats a great question. I think I struggle… I think… I’d be speculating, honestly, to really say. I’ve been grateful for the enthusiasm both from men and women for my work, on a small scale. But I think sometimes people might have a hard time sort of situating me. I think if you have a position — like I think this is what a lot of men enjoy, institutional affiliation. And women do too, but this is just something I don’t have. I don’t have institutional affiliation. I don’t have credentialing, especially in theological education. So, sometimes I think — I wonder, I guess — if other people wonder, well, what business does she have writing on these things? I’ve tried to, in the last several years, to inhabit the role of a writer, because a writer is not an academic, necessarily. A writer can exist in a lot of different forms, right? There are writers that are academics and scholars. There are writers that are cultural commentators. There are writers… I mean, this is a long tradition, actually.

Just before we got on the podcast, we had the testimonies of Perpetual and Felicity— what is her name? The servant. I was just thinking about these writings from women that are very very old. These testimonies, this witness bearing that women have done for millennia. And so I want to be able to try to inhabit that, but I don’t know that I always feel… sometimes I feel as if I lack models, um categories. I struggle to name it exactly.

**JR:** I have to say, when I’ve read your work, it has not occurred to me to wonder or judge your work based on any credentialing, right? I read Surprised by Paradox, which I thought was so great, especially your distinction between mystery and paradox. I mention that all the time, by the way, to people. And I hope I’m not misquoting you. Probably.

**JPM:** (laughs)

**JR:** You do talk about mystery and paradox, right?

**JPM:** I do! I do, absolutely. You’re right!

**JR:** (laughs) That would be really embarrassing if it turns out… (laughs) And there’s something about the fact that, again, it wasn’t — it didn’t occur to me to think let me look up and see if she’s really been to seminary or whatever.

**JPM:** (laughs)

**JR:** This rings true. And I love… as you say, being a writer and being an academic are two different things. And I was an academic, and then I had to unlearn some of those things to be the sort of writer I wanted to be.

**JPM:** Isn’t that interesting?

**JR:** And so, for what that’s worth… that’s not just me encouraging you, though I hope you find that encouraging. But I hope for other people listening to this podcast that don’t have the academic credentials, if you’re telling the truth, that’s one of the great things about an article or a book being out in the world. It speaks for itself. And if it rings true, it rings true. I’ve read plenty of things by people with academic degrees that were just poppycock!

**JPM:** (laughs)

**JR:** And didn’t in any way make my life better. It might have helped them get tenure, I don’t know, but it didn’t do anything for me, and it’s hard to imagine it doing anything for anybody else.

**JPM:** Hmm.

**JR:** So anyway, I just offer that up as an encouragement. And I happen to have a PhD, and it doesn’t do me any good in terms of my writing world!

**JPM:** Isn’t that interesting? Maybe habits of study or… or… like, I think that is something really important for writers, and something I feel like I’m continuing to try to grow in. If you think of writing as a kind of witness bearing that we bring into the world… we bear witness to our lives, and we bear witness of reality as we see it. But to return to an earlier thread in this conversation, we have to inform our witness bearing, right? I can’t… I would be limited if all I offered were the world as I see it and know it right now. I have to enter into the discipline of study that informs what is there but what I don’t see.

**JR:** Thank you for that distinction, because there’s a difference between habits of study and academic credentialing.

**JPM:** Mmmhmm.

**JR:** Well, good. I want to talk about… we haven’t even really talked about what the… the idea behind your new book is here are 40 days of readings that, if you complete this, there’s a good chance you will have formed some new habits and may have a new way of thinking about God and the Bible and these sorts of things. And so, um, at one point you are quoting or paraphrasing a composer named Ian… is it Cusson, is that how we say his name?

**JPM:** Yes. Yes.

**JR:** And he talks about the importance of finishing, and that’s one of the things you say in your introduction. It’s, dear reader, I want you to finish this 40 days of reading.

**JPM:** (laughs)

**JR:** And this Ian Cusson talks about the idea that the real lessons of making are often… they come in the latter part of the project, and it’s so important to finish for that purpose. And I just want to talk about that for a little bit in our waning minutes of time together. Finishing. Why is that so important?

**JPM:** All the momentum, you know, usually of a project is at the beginning. You haven’t met any obstacles or any challenges, so… um… you know. I think… I guess I could use the example from this last year of how few books I finished. I did a lot of starting, and I didn’t finish a lot of things. And I just… I don’t know, curiosity waned. And I think there’s an argument for saying if your curiosity wanes in the middle of a book, put it down. Or maybe you start a project, a writing project, and you realize you know, this isn’t actually going anywhere. So there are arguments to be made for putting things down. I just think we probably rationalize too early why we should put something down.

And so I can give an example of a book I just read, and I can certainly talk about what it’s like to write a book. But a book I just read, Leslie Jamison’s The Recovering. It’s like 500 pages on her movement into sobriety. And um, it’s too long, truthfully. And I read some reviews after I read it, and other reviewers were saying this was too long. But there was a lot of beautiful stuff at the end of the book that I would have totally missed, and I would have missed how she was putting the whole thing together if I had only read the beginning or if I’d sort of left off in the middle. So you can’t appreciate the arc of something, the scope of something, the structure of something until you get to the end.

I think that happens in book writing too. There’s a lot of discovery that happens along the way, and the epiphany sometimes, honestly, even as a writer writing the book… you get to the end, and now you’ve arrived, but you see the map. And there’s a lot of epiphany that can happen there. So it’s this tension of when… I think there are real times when we can put things down, but cultivating the habit of sticking with something too. Sometimes maybe it’s not even that the project itself survives. Maybe you finish it, and you realize actually, this isn’t that great. But what did you learn along the way? What did the process teach you? What new thing can you bring into the next project?

One of the things that I’m trying to do now is just record more observations in finishing. So, um, noting what I learned through the process of doing something, or what obstacles did I meet along the way? Until you get to the finish line, you can’t actually even draw those conclusions. But those conclusions are what can help you for the next project.

**JR:** Yeah. Sara Groves talks about, um, every time she makes a record, she hits a point where she feels like this is going to be a disaster, what was I thinking, I can’t go on. And she calls her mother, and her mother every time says, you know, you call me every time.

**JPM:** (laughs)

**JR:** You know. We had this conversation. Just a reminder that we had this conversation for all your previous records, and they were beautiful. And that’s the sort of thing you don’t know unless you push through it.

**JPM:** That’s right. And if you start to notice some of your patterns, you can actually talk yourself down off the ledge. Like, I always get to this point in the project where it feels like nothing is making sense. I mean, that, for me, happens a lot. I start into something with a very clear idea, and then it gets more muddled the further I get into it. And then what do you do? Then you’re faced with the muddle and the lack of clarity, and that’s where you want put it down. And if you can just get to the point where you say, well, this always happens. What do I do when this happens? Oh yeah… maybe I go back to — for me, it’s always going back to the outline. You think of an outline often as something you begin with, but it’s something that I actually sort of revise along the way, because I need to just return to it. I need that sort of scaffolding.

**JR:** Yeah, and that muddle happens because you now understand some things you didn’t understand before.

**JPM:** That’s right!

**JR:** I mean, when you just barely know what your’e talking about, things can be pretty clear.

**JPM:** Yes. (laughs) That’s right…

**JR:** And then you learn more, and your’e thinking, I don’t know what I’m… and it’s true! That’s not just an optical illusion. You really are muddled.

**JPM:** Yes!

**JR:** And then if you push through, it’s a little less muddled.

**JPM:** Mmhmm.

**JR:** I was talking about this with Lisa Deam yesterday — she’s going to be on the episode the week before your episode — and we were talking about this idea that when you wade in, you don’t know where this argument is going. And whatever that argument was at the beginning probably isn’t the best argument you’ve got.

**JPM:** That’s right. I mean its’ sort of like… it is an argument for actually changing your mind. A lot of times we are afraid to do that. We’re afraid to challenge what we think we know about the world. We think that assertion is the most honorable of virtues. But to assert something and then to realize you were wrong about it, that you were misinformed about some things, that you neglected this whole— that your knowledge of something was totally partial — of course you should revise and resee and rethink. It’s just scary to do that, because you realize this is actually gonna be way more work than I thought it was gonna be when I set out!

**JR:** Absolutely. One more thing I was gonna ask you about — this is the penultimate question. We’ll have the last question here in a minute. You know what that is. Um, but we… I want to know… in your talk of habits, um… so often we think of habit as something that’s rote, automatic, I don’t hav etc think about, which is sometimes true. Where is the place of joy in the habits you’re talking about?

**JPM:** Hmm. I think habits are a way into joy. I think again, we have this idea that joy will come about spontaneously. We think if we live our lives extemporaneously, that somehow we’re just going to arrive at the things we derive the most joy from, but instead of thinking of joy as something that you practice. “Habit is the hinge of the heart,” as James K.A. Smith puts it, and I think that often we start with desire. We want a certain thing. We wanna cultivate, you know… I wanna be a better writer, I wanna be a better mother, I wanna be a better friend. You know. Sometimes we just start there. But what is going to carry you from intention into the actual joy that you’ve already identified would be true. We want the things that ultimately bring us joy, and habits are what carry you there.

I had a friend actually that sent me a poem recently — a collection that I had recommended to her, Anne Porter’s *Living Things*. And she sent me a poem, and it’ about this Polish woman Stella Rapowski or something — I don’t remember her name — and how she just does the same thing every morning, and every morning is a faithful copy of the one that came before is the idea. And she’s a “little sister of the sun,” I think is the image.

**JR:** Oh wow.

**JPM:** And so my friend sent this to me, and I thought oh my gosh! And she said this just reminds me of you, and I thought she must think I have the most boring life ever.

**JR:** (laughs)

**JPM:** You know? Cause I am kind of habituated to certain things. I do practice a lot of rhythms and routines. But you know what? I do those intentionally as connected to the places that I think will bring me the most joy. I’m not practicing things that I think are gonna make my life worse. I”m practicing things that might feel hard in the moment, but I think on the other side they actually have flourishing and real life to offer me.

**JR:** Mmm. Right. All right, last question. Who are the writers — I know you answered this before when you were on this podcast last year or the year before, whenever that was — but who are the writers who make you wanna write? Maybe this has changed.

**JPM:** I know. I was trying to remember who I had said last time. Well, I’ve recently been reading and talking about Jasmine Holmes’ book Mother to Son on Instagram, and what a powerful book. I actually interviewed her yesterday, and I said how do you have so much courage as you write? I really admire writers with courage, who don’t seem like they’re trying to placate all the constituencies of opposition. And you know, she’s talking about being a black woman, and there are a lot of constituencies that have differing opinions, and she’s very courageous and unequivocal in that book. And I think very nuanced. I think she actually maintains a lot of paradox in that book. So that is a book, recently, that I’ve been thinking oh, I could really learn a lot from Jasmine.

You know, Karen Stiller — did you have her on the podcast? I can’t remember.

**JR:** No.

**JPM:** She’s a Canadian writer, and she has a wonderful memoir called *The Minister’s Wife.*

**JR:** Oh yeah.

**JPM:** It has such a powerful voice in the memoir. It’s very… unadorned. Just the kind of nakedness of the human voice without pretension, without apology, without sort of placating the crowd to think a certain kind of way about the narrator. I really enjoyed that memoir. I’ve been thinking about a memoir project myself, and I thought I’m gonna definitely go back to Karen’s book.

And then Mark Buchanan is actually another Canadian writer. I have not read a lot of his things, but I was recently at an event where we were both talking to writers, and I loved his approach. I was kind of talking about writing the things that you know, which we know, is kind of one of those big rules, don’t write about things you don’t know. But he said actually I write about the things I want to know about. I follow my own curiosities as I write. And he I think is a very lyrical writer in the spiritual formation genre, and I recently got his book — well, after that event I bought his book *God Walk,* so I’m really excited to read that. I’ll just leave you with those three.

**JR:** Yeah, those are great. I want… did Mark Buchanan write a book called *The Rest of God*?

**JPM:** Yes! He did.

**JR:** I love that book.

**JPM:** Yes.

**JR:** That’s a great book. Okay! Well, I um… I guess we’re done here. We’re not really done, we’re just sort of out of time. I feel like we could talk for a long time. But thank you, Jen. I hope a lot of people read and benefit from your new book *A Habit Called Faith.*

(THEME MUSIC FADES UP)

**JPM:** Well, thanks so much, Jonathan. It’s always a pleasure to talk to you and to listen to the other conversations you post!

**DREW MILLER:** This podcast is brought to you by The Rabbit Room, where art nourishes community and community nourishes art, and all our podcasts are made possible by the generous support of our members. To learn more about us, visit [rabbitroom.com](http://rabbitroom.com), and to become a member, [rabbitroom.com/donate](http://rabbitroom.com/donate).

Special thanks as well to Taylor Leonhardt for letting us use her song “Diamonds” as the theme music for Season 3 of The Habit Podcast. You can learn more about Taylor and follow her work at [taylorleonhardt.com](http://taylorleonhardt.com)

**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).

(THEME MUSIC FADES OUT)

(ACOUSTIC GUITAR MUSIC FADES UP)

**DM:** This episode is brought to you by the Christian Standard Bible. Here’s Russ Ramsey on what draws him to the CSB as a pastor and a writer.

**RUSS RAMSEY:** Just the other day, I used the expression “the emperor isn’t wearing any clothes.” That’s an idiom, right? And it means something, but if a culture that had no familiarity with that expression read those words in the middle of a paragraph about something else, they would just be lost, right? What is he talking about? The CSB will take idioms and concepts and put them into as clear an expression as possible that is also as faithful to the text as possible, so it’s beautiful in that sense.

(MUSIC FADES OUT)

**DM:** To learn more about the Christian Standard Bible, visit [csbible.com](http://csbible.com).