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JONATHAN ROGERS, HOST: At The Rabbit Room, we're always saying that art nourishes community and community nourishes art. Here's another way to say the same thing. We can all be allies in bringing good, beautiful, and true things into the world. One way you can be an ally with the artists, musicians, and writers whose work you care about is to leave a review. It helps other people find and benefit from the work that has meant something to you. And if you want to leave a review for this podcast... well, that'll be okay too.

(THEME MUSIC)

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

Ron Block is a banjo player and an amateur theologian. I'm using "amateur" in its original sense of a person who does what he does out of mere love. I suppose by that definition he's an amateur banjo player, but he's also a professional banjo player. He's a longtime member of Alison Krauss' band Union Station. he also appears in the movie *O Brother Where Art Thou?* I'll include a link to his scene in the show notes.

JR: Ron Block, I am so excited to have you on The Habit. I love hearing you talk bout creativity. Of my friends, you're one of the ones who thinks the most deeply and speaks most articulately about the creative process, thinking it through all the way into the sort of theological, so... it was really something I wanted to do, to get you on this podcast, so some of our listeners can hear your insights about creativity. So, thanks for being here.

RON BLOCK: Thanks for having me, Jonathan.

JR: You came to a creative writing class that I taught last year, and you

talked to the students about a couple of — a healthy cycle and an unhealthy cycle with creativity, and I'd just love to hear you talk about some of that here.

RB: Yeah, I've done a lot of work in this area because I play music. 'Cause primarily when I do it, I'm always looking for how to get better at it. And one of the things that I found was that my beliefs about my ability determine the results of my practicing.

JR: Yeah.

RB: And I can expand on this a little bit. I dug into the research of Carol Dweck who is a professor of psychology at Stanford University, and she did research into what she calls the fixed mindset and the growth mindset.

JR: Yeah, Helena Sorenson talked about this in her episode about that —

RB: Did she?

JR: Yeah so I'll link to that in the show notes.

RB: So she says — Carol Dweck says — in a fixed mindset, students believe that their basic abilities — their intelligence, their talents — are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount, and that's that. And then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb. In a growth mindset, students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching, and persistence. they don't necessarily think everyone's the same or anyone can be Einstein, but that everyone can get smarter if they work at it.

So that's one aspect. I've had to realize in myself what aspects of my consciousness hold a fixed mindset, where I was told things maybe when I was young —

JR: Ahh, yeah yeah.

RB: That, “Oh, our family’s not good at this,” or you know, whatever those things may be for each person.

JR: Yeah, so it’s not that Ron has a fixed mindset. It’s that Ron has a fixed mindset in this area, or in this other area he might have a growth mindset.

RB: Yeah, totally. So it’s not just one thing.

JR: And would you suggest you need to have a growth mindset in every area of life?

RB: Yeah, every area. You know really, that’s what growth is all about. It’s learning those areas where you go, “Hm, I need to grow there” first of all, and then you gotta believe you *can* grow there, and then you start growing. But it has to do with believing that you can is the first order of business, right? And so I’ve had to do a lot of work in certain areas of my musicality, in certain areas of just my daily life with people, y’know, and just start believing the right things.

Another thing I was gonna bring up was the four minute mile was considered impossible until one Englishman broke it in 1954. And then two months later, this guy Bannister — he was competing against a guy named John Landy. Bannister beat Landy, but then Landy made the mile in under four minutes.

JR: So Bannister was the first one to break the four minute mile?

RB: Bannister was the first one. And then Landy made the mile in under four minutes. So all of a sudden you went [snaps fingers] *bam bam* two people did it in under four minutes. And then Jim Ryan became the first high school runner to break four minutes. And in ‘94 an Irish runner became the first man over forty to break the four minute barrier.

JR: [chuckles]

RB: So my question is what changed in 1954? Did people suddenly become stronger and faster after thousands of years? Like, y'know, the answer is no. The answer is somebody did it, and then other people went, "Wow, I can do that!" So the belief changed about whether the four minute mile was possible, and then all of a sudden you see this onrush of certain personality types going, "I'm going to do that too."

And you know that's really the mechanism behind, at least in my own life, of seeing musicians play when I was young. I saw Lester Flatt on TV, and I saw the banjo player, and it was Haskell McCormick, and I just went, "I want a banjo. I have to have a banjo. Dad, can I have a banjo? Dad, will you get me a banjo? [JR laughs] You know, I was 12 years old. And I just wouldn't stop so...

And then he got me one and he says I didn't come out of my room until I was 21, right?

JR: [laughs]

RB: So... but that's the first thing.

JR: Changed mindset.

RB: That changed mindset of seeing the thing.

JR: When you were growing up, did you know anybody who ran a marathon?

RB: Not really, I don't think so.

JR: That seemed like the most outlandish thing in the world. I'd see on television that people would run a marathon, and I'd be like, "whaaaaat?" And now people run marathons all the time!

RB: Yeah, it's fairly common.

JR: Yeah, that's not... super relevant to the conversation. But I thought about it whenever you were talking about this. A marathon might've been the most impossible — you had to be some kind of superman to run a marathon when I was growing up.

RB: Yeah, yeah.

JR: And now you just have to be... a person.

RB: A person. That goes "I wanna run a marathon," and then they get the app that says, y'know, couch to... couch potato to marathon in three weeks. Don't need that.

JR: [laughs] Yeah. So, new mindset... there's more to it than I think, "the four minute mile is possible so now I'm gonna go do it."

RB: Right... and again, I'll use myself as an example because that's what I know. Like, I know my own mindset. So when I was learning to play music, my early mindset about playing music and banjo and guitar and singing and every aspect of it — I didn't even question, "Can I do it?" It wasn't even in my mind. All I thought was, "This is amazing!" and then, "I wanna do it because it's amazing." And so there was no interim question of, "Can I do this?" It was just, I already had this assumption that I could do it. I didn't even ask if I could get good at it. I just *knew* I could.

JR: And did you keep that attitude?

RB: I did. In some ways I did, and in some ways well-meaning authority figures in my life would say, "Well how do you know you're gonna make a living?" And, "How are you gonna own a home? How are you gonna raise a family?" You know... that kind of stuff puts things — especially when it's a young man or a young woman going out into life pretty soon, I think I was about 15 or 16 when I started talking about doing it for a living — and

it puts things in your consciousness when people say stuff like that. I think what it did to me was make me go mayyyyyybe I don't have enough talent. So it gave me a little bit of a fixed mindset, which came into play later. It didn't bear fruit right then, but it started to. And it started to for a reason — I'll show you what I call the Try Harder Cycle.

JR: That's the whole reason I invited you on the podcast. [RB laughs] This Try Harder Cycle. I think it's really interesting.

RB: Okay, so... so now, I wanna put this in different terms for a second. If you think of, say, an introverted man whose wife wants him to go to a party, and he doesn't want to go to the party because he has the belief "no one likes me." Okay?

So, the man has... he has a desire for connection and to be liked. So that's the bottom — if you think of a stack, if you think of something stacked from the bottom to the top — he has a desire for connection at the bottom. That's part of our wiring as human beings. And then he believes a lie: no one likes me. Or people won't like me. So, over the top of that he has the fear of being rejected.

So he doesn't wanna go to the party, but his wife makes him go to the party. So this fear brings a desire to control. "I'll try to be funny," or, "I'll just be quiet," or he'll have some way — "I just won't care" — there will be some way in which he tries to control what he fears from happening. So he doesn't wanna be rejected, so he'll do a preemptive strike and reject other people or whatever the thing is. Or he'll try too hard to be funny.

So then there's tension. Because when you try to be funny, you're not funny.

JR: [laughs]

RB: You see people try too hard to be funny, lots of times it's not that funny. So then, what happens at the party? He stands around, he tries to

be funny, and people go, “Well yeah, he’s a nice enough guy,” and then they kinda move away after a few minutes and then he goes home going, “See? Nobody likes me.” So he reinforces that belief, and the next time it happens again. But the problem is not the desire for connection. the problem is the lie that “no one likes me.”

JR: So you put the lie before the fear.

RB: Yeah, because that stimulates the fear. The lie down there is the thing that’s kind of fueling “I’m gonna be rejected.” Because if he believed — if he had the desire for connection, and then the second thing in the stack was, “People basically like me. Some people might not. But people basically think I”m a decent guy and like me.” If he had that in there, he wouldn’t really deal with that fear.

JR: I guess I’m just asking, is it an important point — maybe it’s not a super important point one way or the other — I can imagine someone making that stack and saying the fear generates the lie. You know, because I’ve got that fear and insecurity it generates a lie. But in your point it’s saying the lie then generates fear.

RB: It’s actually both, and I’m not sure maybe which came first.

JR: Mmhmm. Those two are related somehow.

RB: What happens is it’s a cycle, so it’s stack. Desire for connection: I want to be loved. The lie: no one likes me. The fear: I’ll be rejected. Control: I’ll try to be funny. And then the tension it brings is, “I’m not funny. People don’t laugh.” And then it’s a capped social ability. It puts a lid on his social ability, and then it reinforces the lie. He goes “see? No one likes me.” So, it all kinda works together.

So when you apply this sort of thing to creativity, I would put it like this. Since this is about writing, we’ll make this about writing. So if I have a desire — let’s say I want to write. I love writing. I want to write. And

secondly, I have a lie: “Writing is so hard. It’s so hard.” And that may have come through experience or whatever, or somebody telling you it’s super hard, or worrying about writer’s block or any of that kind of stuff. Writing is so, so hard. That’s the lie.

And then the fear that it stimulates is, “I may not have enough talent.” Maybe other people have way more talent than me and it’s easier. So you procrastinate and avoid things that you love because you’re avoiding it. Or you’re trying too hard.

One thing in music that kills a performance or a recording or anything is a musician trying too hard. I mean you ever see — occasionally you see somebody singing the National Anthem [JR chuckles] and it’s like — I always go, “Can you just sing the melody? It’s a beautiful melody and you don’t have to try so hard to impress everybody.” Because it doesn’t impress me, it makes me go, “You’re trying to impress everybody.” So I would rather just hear somebody be up there and sing their heart and sing the words and sing the melody.

JR: I think I heard Jack Black sing the national anthem not too long ago. I don’t know if you saw that. And it’s just a guy singing it straight and I was like, “When was the last time I saw somebody singing it straight?”

RB: [laughs] Yeah, somebody singing it straight!

JR: And it was very nice!

RB: Yeah, you’re there to sing the National Anthem, not to get them to think you’re a great singer. One of the things that really helped me was starting to write songs with Rebecca Reynolds. And she would always just say, if I was trying to come up with a melody, she’d say, “You losing the image. You’re just trying to write a melody without thinking of what this is about.”

JR: Huh.



RB: And so I would've gotten off of — let's say we were writing a song about Ireland, and I would've gotten off of that image and instead I was going, "Where does the melody go? I can't make it go where I want to," and suddenly the attention's off the feeling that's in the song. And if my attention's on the wrong thing and trying hard, it kind of closes off the machine.

It's just like an athlete. A runner doesn't start a race and go, "Okay, I'm getting ready to go!" And they're counting it off, the runner doesn't go "URRRRRRRNNNGHHH!" [JR laughs] and then tense up his whole body. He gets loose and he stretches and he's in a place mentally, emotionally, physically where he's loose and ready for anything. He has his mind on the right things instead of, "I gotta try really hard." He's like "I love running and I'm gonna kick everybody's butt." Right?

So there's this real element of positivity that has to be introduced where that lie is. Instead of just ruminating on how hard writing is all the time, we should be thinking on how much we love writing and how much we love reading, and how much great writers have moved us, and how when we write that's what we wanna do for other people. We wanna give them an experience.

JR: Yeah. I'm interested in your choice of the lie being "writing is hard." Writing *is* hard! I don't think that's a lie...

RB: I think it is... I think editing is hard. [laughs]

JR: [laughs] Okay!

RB: No, but I use that because, translated for music, music is hard. Music is not hard. Writing... if I said to you, write me a sentence, any sentence, you could write a sentence in 3 seconds.

JR: Sure.

RB: And I could say, “Make it a little more interesting,” and you could make it a little more interesting. Right?

JR: Yeah.

RB: It’s not hard at all. But if you’re thinking in terms of writing and saying “I’ve gotta write the greatest novel in the history of mankind!” Well, all of a sudden you’re under pressure, right? And I tell this to students when I teach guitar and banjo workshops. I’ll do these workshop weeks, and one of the things I do is I put my banjo on — it’s one of the first things I say. I go, “Okay, I want everybody to watch this.” And I wish I had the visual here but I don’t, but I have my banjo on and I say — because I see all these people with tension in their arms and hands — I say, put your hands by your sides. Now watch me. And I have my hands by my sides, and then I lift up my left hand to the neck of the banjo, and I just kinda plop it on there. And then I lift my right hand and put it over the top of the banjo by the strings and just kinda plop it on there, and I go “that’s proper hand position.” Where you don’t have tension in your shoulders.

And then I play one note and go, “Is this hard? Play a note with your thumb, on the third string. Just open. Open note. G. G note.” And they go *blang, blang, blang*. And I go, “Is this hard?” And they go, “No.” And I go, “That’s how you play banjo.”

Just like that. It’s done brick by brick. You learn brick by brick. And if you learn the bricks, and realize each brick is easy, then the rest of it becomes easier and easier.

So, if you start out with the lie even writing is hard, if you start there, it’s just gonna get harder and harder. Sometimes we have to reset. I’ve had to reset stuff in myself, in playing, and tell myself that this is easy. That I have all the dexterity I need. It’s like telling yourself, if you’re writing, just going for a walk and going, “You know what? God has given me all the mental acuity that I could possibly need, all the imagination I could possibly need

to write a story. And it's not that hard." It's not. You can tell yourself that stuff.

JR: Yeah sure, we tell stories all the time. And I'm always telling people, y'know when it comes to — you also have all the words, y'know. Like people don't need to know more words. If you're a first grader, you probably need to know more words. But if you're a grownup, you don't need the words. You don't need a dictionary, you don't need a thesaurus. If you're going to the thesaurus you're —

RB: So it *doesn't* pay to enrich your word power necessarily.

JR: It does *not*. [laughs] It certainly doesn't pay to enrich your word power in the middle of the work you're trying to do. Anyway. Alright! So how do I get out of this cycle? How do I get out of this fear cycle?

RB: I think what has to happen — well, again, I'll go back to my own experience — what has had to happen for me — again this is one of those things Rebecca really helped me with — was just stopping believing that everything is so hard! Like, writing songs is hard, oh it's so hard, oh I got stuck, I don't know what to do. My way when I got stuck was like get a sledgehammer and try to smash my way through the brick wall instead of going a gentler way and going, "I wonder if there's a way around this wall? I wonder if the wall is even there?" It could just be a mental outpicturing of a wall that I'm thinking is there. Right? So that's one of the things she taught me.

What I've come to see, especially in my identity as a person but also in music and my identity as a musician, as a player, is I have to tell myself — if I come upon a hard bit, if I'm learning a Django Reinhardt lick or something and it's tough, I have to stop if I start trying to hard, and go, "You have all the dexterity you need to learn this. All you need to do is listen to it, get it in your head, play it, and where you mess up you have to observe, unemotionally, and not try harder, and figure out where that little bit is where you're screwing up."

So if you put truth in where that lie is, what happens to the stack? It goes, desire, and then you put truth in the inward parts, you put truth in yourself in a growth mindset. And you end up with faith and confidence instead of fear. And then you move forward in faith and confidence and you have an enjoyment of the process.

So you're enjoying it. And also you have a sense of — I get this when I'm practicing — this observation. Where before when I would practice and I would keep messing something up I would get frustrated and sometimes try harder, now I go, "Well that's weird. I have all the dexterity I could possibly need. Why do I keep messing this up? Let me look and see what's happening. Let me do it slowly." And then I go, "Oh, my third finger... when I push down on my fourth finger, my third finger moves to far away from the string. Let me see if I can get it to stop doing that."

It's just sheer observation. And that observation, the ability to observe without being all emotionally overwrought, comes from that sort of confident faith attitude that I have what it takes, instead of thinking this is too hard for me or I don't have enough dexterity or whatever the deal is.

JR: Where do we even get the idea that getting a chord or a note wrong reflects badly on you as a person? [RB laughs] Or writing a bad sentence? It doesn't mean you're an idiot, it doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you. It just means you wrote a bad sentence!

In my teaching, so often I get the pleasure of getting to show somebody hey, that's a bad sentence. Don't worry about it! Or sometimes, This whole essay's a mess. That's okay! Go write the next essay. [RB: Yeah!]  
Unfortunately we learn in school to write, so if you write a C essay —

RB: IT'S A BIG RED MARK! [laughs]

JR: Well yeah. [laughs] And if you write an essay that's a C or a D, that's gonna mess you up. But the truth is, in real life you write a bad essay — I

write bad essays! —

RB: You throw it away.

JR: Throw it away! Go do another one!

RB: My daughter would be practicing piano — in the library we have a piano in there — and she'd be there practicing. And I probably started doing this when she was 13, 14 — I'd stick my head in, and she'd be trying to play a passage maybe that was a little fast, and she'd mess up. And I'd go, "Hey, Erica?" And she'd say, "Yeah, Dad?" And I'd go, "Just remember... when you make a mistake, it means you're a bad person!" And she'd laugh and go, "Thanks Dad!" But it made the point for her that it's like... don't connect your personhood with making a mistake. Don't do that.

And that's where the bad part of this cycle really goes bad. When you connect your identity with your performance, and then you're getting your identity from your performance, and then your performance is bad, and then your perception of your identity goes bad, then your performance gets worse. And then it keeps feeding this negative cycle until you're depressed and angry and, you know, whatever the thing is. I think that's where a lot of problems come from in people. I know that just from my own mind.

JR: It can be hard to separate.

RB: Yeah.

JR: You may have actually done this I think at a seminar I taught at your barn. You may have been there. But one of my favorite things to do in a seminar is I've got a pair of essays or stories written by somebody in subsequent weeks, and the first one's terrible, and the second one... really good. Same person. One week apart. Because this bad story doesn't mean she's a bad writer. It just means that particular story's bad. And it

may be fixable, it may not be. And I guess you have to decide, “Is this thing I wrote that’s not good worth —

RB: Salvaging, or changing...

JR: — fixing, or is it worth just moving on?” And that requires some discernment. That’s not always easy. But I love showing people this thing that wasn’t any good was written by a good writer, because look what she did the next week.

RB: Was it Dillard that said “kill your darlings?”

JR: I don’t know where that originated.

RB: I like that. I like that. You have to do that in music sometimes too. I love what I played on guitar there, but I gotta take it off because it doesn’t fit.

JR: And it’s your darling... again, that’s a matter of you wrapping some sort of sense of self into this thing. And I don’t wanna kill it — it doesn’t serve the work, it doesn’t serve my audience or my reader — but I like it because I like the way it makes me feel. That’s just the other side of the coin of “this is bad so it makes me feel bad.”

RB: So, just to recap, on the writing side of this, the stack is desire: I love to write, right? The truth: I am a writer, I love writing, writing is easy for me, I can get better at it. And then that gives you faith and confidence.

Now that’s not gonna happen the first day you tell yourself that. Your mind is gonna go, “No, you’re not. You’re not a good writer. Writing is hard for you.” It’s gonna happen. But the thing is to just — at the bottom level of yourself, you just keep telling yourself, “I can get better at this. I can do this. I can grow, I can learn, I can study writing, I can study great writers, I can read, I can grow.”

So the next thing that comes is faith and confidence. That begins to come. And then you keep of course practicing writing. It doesn't mean you don't work on technique, it's not a magic formula. And then there's an enjoyment of the process, even the hard bits. You kind of enjoy — okay, this is a challenge, but this is easy for me, so it's a challenge, so I'm gonna get through it.

And then there's freedom and ease, and you have spontaneity, and then there's a released ability. Your ability gets the cap taken off of it. And then there's a reinforcement of truth: "I am a writer."

JR: It's a virtuous cycle.

RB: Exactly! It flips the cycle into a positive cycle. And I really think this is the source of a lot of great musicians and great writers where they may have struggles in a lot of other areas, and some great writers and musicians may sometimes have self-doubt. But I think at root a lot of them have this strong belief in what they're doing and what they're supposed to do. They still have doubts about, "Oh, is this record good enough?" or that kind of thing, but their essential setting is not, "I'm no good." Very few musicians that I have known have that setting that are really good musicians — they don't have that setting of, "I'm not very good."

JR: I don't see how you could possibly get very far with that.

RB: It doesn't produce anything good. And it's true in the spiritual realm too. You can't be kind and compassionate and loving and self-giving if you believe at root you are selfish and ugly and horrible. You can't do both things. It just won't work. Or it'll only work to a degree. It'll be the effort cycle.

JR: Yeah. So I wanna ask a couple things — actually I think I just wanna ask one thing about what do you call it? The growth cycle? That whole stack in that virtuous cycle works on the assumption that the truth must be good news rather than bad news.

RB: Right.

JR: Okay.

RB: It does. I do have this kind of inherent belief that nearly anybody can be good at nearly anything. Especially if they start fairly young. I've come to see that I can really improve at certain things, even — I'm 55 — even at my age, if I just go, "I'm going to improve at this because I can." It's powerful. Faith is generative. It generates action and motion. And so faith creates more desire, and allows desire to be fully formed, and then we move forward in that desire.

JR: Yeah, if you don't mind my correcting you on something that you've thought about a lot more than I have... [RB: No, please.] Well, "correcting" might not be the right word. But, you said, "almost anybody can be good at almost anything." I think it might be more helpful to say, "Almost anybody can get better at almost anything," because y'know, "good" — you end up having to compare, and with growth, all you really have to compare is to what you were yesterday.

RB: Yes, and that's a better way of phrasing it, yeah. That's great.

JR: So the assumption in the growth cycle is when I tell the truth, the truth is good news. Which is, y'know, as Christian people, that's something we believe anyway.

RB: Hopefully! [laughs]

JR: And there's no need to over-spiritualize this, but the truth is reality is the only place — of all the ways we have to avoid reality, reality is the only place we can actually be happy, be successful, have a good — so you know, reality is always good news.

RB: It's being present in the moment and actually living it.



JR: And one thing I'm always telling writers that's relevant to what you're saying is that getting better as a writer is probably not gonna be a function of trying harder. It's probably gonna be a matter of clearing away all those habits — habits of trying harder — and getting back to what it is that you — we all know how to use language.

RB: Yeah. We use it every day.

JR: Yep. And so, the hard work of writing is often the work of clearing away, not bearing down and trying harder.

RB: Musical technique is exactly the same thing.

JR: Uh huh, I'm not surprised.

RB: There was a time when I was not always vigilant with my technique. I had great technique early on because I was always just observing, going, "Oh I wonder why I can't play that." Then I'd fix it and great. And so my fingers stayed close to the strings, all that technique stuff. But years of giggin' and recording and being focused on the product sometimes more than the process... that's where I started to get little bits. My technique has never been *bad*, but there's been little bits where now I'm looking at things going, "That came from effort. That came from playing too hard on those gigs where you couldn't hear yourself. That came from, y'know, just various... it's mainly effort that causes all those problems. It's trying too hard.

When you push too hard on a string with your finger, like say your index finger on your right hand, and you pluck the string really hard, well, your finger goes too far and you then have to stop the force. So you're using way more force than is necessary, and then it causes way more movement than is necessary. And it causes a lot more movement than is necessary. Especially then when you go to play quieter, your finger still wants to move that far. So it takes a while to retrain. And I tell people in camps and

workshops that I do that your fingers are amoral. [JR chuckles] They just do what they're told! They don't have any concept of right and wrong, so whatever you train them to do is what they're gonna do. It's probably true with the mind and writing as well. The mind is probably just — it just does what you train it to do.

JR: Yep. Okay, I know you brought a poem that I love — you read it in my creative writing class — so I would love for you to share that now if you would.

RB: Yeah, great. It's called "The Archer," and it's from *The Way of Chuang Tzu* by Thomas Merton. It's — I'll just read it here:

When an archer is shooting for fun  
He has all his skill.  
If he shoots for a brass buckle  
He is already nervous.  
If he shoots for a prize of gold  
He goes blind  
Or sees two targets—  
He is out of his mind!

His skill has not changed. But the prize  
Divides him. He cares.  
He thinks more of winning  
Than of shooting—  
And the need to win  
Drains him of power.

JR: [laughs]

RB: That's a powerful one.

JR: Yeah... for some reason that poem makes me think of Tiger Woods.

RB: [laughs] Well it's true in sports, it's true in music, it's true in any kind of creative activity or probably business as well. It's having — well, if I'm playing when I was young, and I was playing in bands, and some banjo player I admired came up and was suddenly watching us play, suddenly there's something at stake. And then I need to impress them or whatever the thing is, and then I'm not in the present moment, I'm not enjoying playing —

JR: And the reward of making music is the music.

RB: Is making it! That's it. It's not listening... when I make a record, when I'm finished making the record, I barely listen to it anymore. Once in a while I'll put it on like 3 years later and go, "Oh yeah, that was fun." But the making of it was for me, and the listening is for other people. So in the present moment, if I'm not present when I'm making the music, then I'm wasting my time. [laughs]

JR: Alright, well we're running out of time. Last question that I always ask: who are the writers who make you wanna write?

RB: One of the first books or series of books that I remember reading was the *Chronicles of Narnia*. And I've always talked about those. In them I encountered goodness and real holiness, which is kindness and loyalty and compassion and stick-to-itiveness and all those great virtues that are in those books. Those are big in my life. And George MacDonald is — he really... his stories are fantastic, but sometimes I love the didactic bits. He'll stick these little bits in there that are like, it's like a little bit of a sermon? But it's just stuff that sticks in my head, like, "He that would be a hero will barely be a man."

JR: Wow.

RB: Y'know, these little bits of wisdom where you'll go, "Wow, if I'm worried about being a hero instead of just, like, washing the dishes, then I'm off the mark." Anyway, so there's these little bits. Writers like that make

me want to write things that benefit whoever they'll benefit. And a lot of what I write has to do with, y'know, that kind of thing. It's more... my writing often is more didactic.

JR: Your non-songwriting, your essays...

RB: My non-songwriting, yeah. And even my songs. My older songs, a lot of them are more truth-in-song form than a story. Through Rebecca Reynolds I've gotten more interested in the story aspect.

JR: Uh huh, yeah. Alright, Ron, thanks so much. I always love hearing you talk about the creative process. I always learn something.

RB: Thanks for having me, Jonathan. I appreciate it.

(THEME MUSIC)

DM: 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 The Arcadian Wild for allowing us to use their delightful song "Finch in the Pantry" as part of this podcast. Check out their album of the same name for more excellent music.

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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