

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

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

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**JR:** Andrew Peterson is a songwriter and a novelist. I don't know how a person excels at both, but he does. He's also the founder of The Rabbit Room. A great gatherer of people, Andrew lives out that Rabbit Room motto, "Art nourishes community, and community nourishes art." He's hugely talented, but more importantly, he knows what to do with his talents. More than anybody else I know, Andrew Peterson understands that his gifts aren't just gifts for him, but for the wider world. He's one of my best friends and nobody has had a greater impact on my work and creative life.

Andrew Peterson, thank you so much for being on The Habit podcast. I'm so glad you're here. I have just — I've read *Adorning the Dark*. As of this recording I've read it twice, because, um... you're... [sigh] Well, I don't even know what to say about why and how much I love this book. But one thing I love about it though is I've gone through it with a group of people in The Habit Membership book club, and the level of conversation that it's generated from them, um... and also just the fact that they — in writing this book, I think you're giving people the language to talk about what's going on.

But I think that's what's — and it — well, I say you're giving the language in the book. I think a lot of the... the fact the people that I'm reading it with are so... know what to do with it, I feel like that's kind of a testament to kind of what's been going on in your work your whole career. I mean, in The Rabbit Room and in your own songwriting and in your novels, you've

been giving people some language to think about their own creative life. I don't know the extent to which you were setting out to do that, but I think you have.

**Andrew Peterson:** Whoa... thank you. That's good to hear. And I don't know that I was that — I don't know that that crossed my mind as a thing. I was mainly wanting to give — like, encourage people in the sense of give them courage.

**JR:** Yeah.

**AP:** And I have found that over the years one of the best ways to encourage people is commiseration.

**JR:** [laughs]

**AP:** And so feeling like you're alone is a... it goes against what we were made for at our core. You know what I mean?

**JR:** Yeah.

**AP:** And so any... and art can do a lot of different things, but the songs that have moved me the most — not just the songs, but the kind of in general, the art that has moved me the most — has been the kind of art that said hey, either you're not as crazy as you think you are or you're crazy, but you're not the only one.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**AP:** And um... and that just like — the sigh of relief that produces in me is huge. And I don't know if that's some people or everybody, but I thought, well, if I could write a book that's helpful in that way, at least some people would be encouraged by that. So that's good to hear.

**JR:** Do you still feel lonely in making stuff?

**AP:** It just depends on what I had for breakfast. I don't know. There are days when I do and, um... [deep breath] uh... you know I have practiced, um... you know there's a spiritual formation aspect of the writing life. Like you develop things that are spiritually shaping.

**JR:** Mmhmm.

**AP:** And so, things like uhh... I don't always do it. But I know when it's time to make a record, um, I walk through my days in a different way than when I'm not making a record. Like, I feel like I've like, just turned the knob up on my practice of paying attention to the world around me and the people around me and asking myself if it's true that heaven and earth are full of God's glory, then where is that? Where do I see that? And how do I...

You know, and it's not as simple as saying, "oh, that's a pretty thing," but finding something to say about that pretty thing that hopefully is unique enough, or you're coming at it from a different enough angle, or an angle that is you enough that could maybe trip somebody up.

**JR:** [laughs]

**AP:** You know, if they're kind of zombie walking through the world, you can put a little stick in the path that says, "Hey, there's another way to do this."

**JR:** Yeah.

**AP:** And so all that to say that there is a, like a spiritual form — and I've been kind of, I've been thinking about this since Carolyn Arends talk at Hutchmoot about spiritual formation, and I'm not like a — I don't know how to talk about that very well yet. But yeah, I was just thinking like, oh, if you spend 25 years trying to figure out how to write a song, then the songs are one by-product, but then the better thing is that you as a human

have been practicing paying attention the world around you. So in that sense, I think that I have — I'm not less susceptible to feeling alone, but I recognize the traps now. You know what I mean?

**JR:** Mmhmm. Yeah.

**AP:** And you know in the book there's a — I talk about building the dry stack wall. Like there was a, uh... haha. I just built another one, outside my [laughs] outside the Chapter House.

**JR:** [laughs] You are just gonna be a series of walls.

**AP:** [laughs] I know. I just built another one. And I — you know, you just start the project, and I realized I had a little window of time to work on it. And beginning the project means you go, welp, it's time to go get some rocks, you know. And I had to take a serious deep breath and enter a deep, a different mode of thinking when it's time to build a wall, because I know all the work that it takes to get to the part where you're stacking rocks on top of rocks, you know what I mean? And so — which is so much like songwriting. I was just kind of like, oh, when it's time to make a record, you just think how do you even start doing this? Well, you just start. You just do stuff. And it takes work to get to the fun part.

And so all that to say that like, in that sense, when I started building the stone wall this time, it was like, okay, I recognize this. This is not a reason to not do it. It's just this is the thing I've gotta do in order to get to the fun part. And you know, there was something I was telling my brother about this the other day. You get this — sorry, I don't mean to talk about rocks this whole time — but, you get this big pile of rocks that's like, four feet tall you know, that you've carried to near where you work. And it's never as many as you need, but at first you've got this big pile of rocks. And there's a lot of time that it's like putting a puzzle together, but the pieces are not meant to go together. So you're just turning the rocks over and flipping them around, trying to figure it out.

But after about a week or so, I got to where I could see a slot in the wall about 20 feet away, and I could look at a rock and know with a pretty decent accuracy that that's going to fit perfectly in that little slot.

**JR:** Wow.

**AP:** And the satisfaction of grabbing that rock and carrying it 20 feet and slipping it right into place is like nothing else.

**JR:** [chuckles]

**AP:** It's just, like, the best. And that's true of songwriting too, with words. After a while there's this struggle, but once you kind of grease the wheels you get to working and you enter a flow and you're like, "ooh, I know what little word goes in this slot."

**JR:** When you say what word goes into that slot, it sounds like you're talking about vocabulary. I think you're probably talking about something else, aren't you?

**AP:** I'm talking about songwriting. That's what I'm comparing it to. [JR: Sure.] Like, you've got a verse and you've got, you know, a rhythm that you're singing to, and I've gotta find a way to say this thing in this way. And sometimes it comes easy. Sometimes you're like, "Ooh. Wow! I'm a songwriter! I just wrote a thing!" You know. [JR: laughs] And that's rare, but you know you get just enough of those to keep going.

**JR:** Yeah. I wanna return to something you said a while back. Um, you mentioned the idea — I mean, a while back. I mean, five minutes ago. You mentioned the idea of, so you look around at the world and you see the beauties of the world — and this was off the top of your head, so you may not remember exactly what you said — but you said basically you said you find something that's uniquely you. Now I don't remember how you said it, but basically it's not that you're looking for something nobody's noticed anymore, but you are looking for your own self, you know your own way of

seeing that.

**AP:** Mmhm. Yeah.

**JR:** Do you have anything more to say about that?

**AP:** Just that I think there's a lot of pressure when you're writing a song to try to write a song that nobody's ever written before. So love songs are the example that pop in my head, that if you... it's daunting to write a love song, cause there's a lot of good love songs in the world. But nobody else has been married to your wife as long as you've been married to your wife. Nobody else.

**JR:** Not even close.

[JR and AP laugh]

**AP:** So freeing yourself of the need to be unique in that way, and just going, kind of going... I'm just gonna write a song for her. Specifically for her. Now it's a new love song.

**JR:** Yeah. Because the feelings — I know I've talked about this in some other episode of this podcast — but the feelings that feel so unique to you, there's nothing unique about what you feel.

**AP:** Hmm. Yeah.

**JR:** There aren't that many feelings. [AP laughs] But what is unique is the house you've lived in with Jamie. The specifics are unique. The feelings aren't. So, to take the pressure off to write about the feelings and say, "I'm just gonna write about this house." Or this whatever, this trip we took together... this is unique all of a sudden.

**AP:** Yeah, totally. At a DNA level, your relationship with your loved one is

different than every other relationship... ever.

**JR:** Yeah.

**AP:** So I guess that's what I mean, is you just go... [clears throat] I think sometimes the enemy just wants to shut us up. And the trick he uses is to say you have nothing new to say, you're not special, whatever. And you know there's a sense in which, no, we're not special, but nobody else can write this song but you.

Where was it? I was watching some TV show the other day, and somebody said — they were talking to a counselor, and they were like, “Why am I complaining? This suffering isn't... isn't anything special.” And the counselor said something like, “The worst... the deepest suffering is your own.” And I was thinking oh, that's it. All you have is your experience. So um, that is... enough.

**JR:** An idea I keep coming back to is something Sam Smith said at a talk at Hutchmoot a few weeks ago. That you can't write like Tolkien. But Tolkien can't write like you either.

**AP:** Amen... [laughs] Take that, Tolkien! [laughs]

**JR:** [laughs] Yeah right!

**AP:** That's good.

**JR:** Yeah, and it sounds like some kind of, um... in one sense, it sounds like some kind of facile, you know... I don't know, self-esteem kind of thing. But it's literally true!

**AP:** Mmhmm. Well, I thought that when I watched Pete's play *The Hiding Place*.

**JR:** [laughs] Yeah.

**AP:** And *Frankenstein* was that way too.

**JR:** Yep.

**AP:** I was like, I can't think of another human being on earth who could have done this in this way than Pete.

**JR:** Yeah.

**AP:** Like, this guy who, with the history that he's had, his early on love of language and high prose, and all of that stuff. Coupled with him being in the military for a few years, and then having this beautiful and rocky journey to faith in Christ, to, um, you know, being a part of *The Rabbit Room*. All of those little ingredients go into the cauldron that make *The Hiding Place* exactly what it is in a way that it could not be — couldn't have been written by anybody else. And like, it was so delightful when I was watching it. There were moments when I was like — where I saw my brother in the play. You know, where it was like, undeniably, that is my brother talking.

**JR:** [laughs]

**AP:** And uh, and it was this like, deep... like, is it pathos? Is that how you say that word? I'm always intimidated by Greek words... Is that a Greek word? [laughs]

**JR:** [laughs] Yes.

**AP:** [laughs] Welcome to my brain. But anyway, like the depth of emotion that was in it, but then the scene with the Eucharist in the concentration camp. I was like, man this is just... if my brother hadn't written it, I would have been calling him as soon as I walked out of the theater to say, "You



would love this play.” [JR laughs] You know? And so I think that’s the thing. It’s like all of these little ingredients get you to a point. And it takes a long time to find that voice, but once you tap into it, there’s nothing like it.

**JR:** Yeah... I mean, I love that example because that’s a story that’s already been told. He didn’t make up that story.

**AP:** Yeah. Right. [laughs]

**JR:** And millions and millions of people have read that story, and yet... here it is again.

**AP:** Yep. He found a way to tell her story in a way that’s uniquely Pete. That’s crazy.

**JR:** Yep, yep. And it’s... Pete’s not the only person that could do that. I mean, he’s the only person who could do that particular thing, but every... everybody brings a sensibility and a different combination of experiences and. It’s a remarkable thing to think about.

[pause, flips through book] Um, yeah, so my favorite, um, passage in this whole book is a little thing you wrote, um... when you were walking — well, I don’t know if you were walking when you wrote it — it was about walking down the hill, and you observed... I wish I could find it. I have the book right here, but I — now I can’t find it.

**AP:** You mean you don’t have it memorized? You don’t have the page number? [chuckles]

**JR:** I worked at it for a while, but... I’m old. [AP laughs] Uh, okay it’s um... the idea that — the gist of it is that we’re just reassembling the beauty that’s around us anyway.

**AP:** Mmm.

**JR:** And so uh, the uh... I just wanna talk about that for a little while.

**AP:** Sure.

**JR:** Again, this is also... again I think we're talking about originality, and where originality comes from. It doesn't come from looking deep inside necessarily. It comes from looking out and thinking, the only person who looks out through these eyeballs is me. So, if I just write what I see... by definition, there's something original there.

**AP:** Yeah, totally. And I think that, if I'm remembering right, that passage is where it talks about how we're like toddlers in a cathedral.

**JR:** Yeah, right.

**AP:** Kinda playing around on the floor in the light of the stained glass or whatever.

**JR:** Let me read it.

**AP:** Sure.

**JR:** "I'm convinced that poets are toddlers in a cathedral, slobbering on wooden blocks and piling them up in the light of the stained glass. We can hardly make anything beautiful that wasn't beautiful in the first place. We aren't writers so much as gleeful rearrangers of words whose meanings we can't begin to know. When we manage to make something pretty, it's only because we are ourselves a flourish on a greater canvas. That means there's no end to the discovery." That's good stuff...

**AP:** Thank you. [both laugh] I like hearin' your Southern accent read that.

**JR:** [laughs] Great.

**AP:** No really! It makes me happy. I feel smarter [JR laughs] listening to Jonathan Rogers read my words.

**JR:** But yeah, in the end you can't make anything beautiful that wasn't already beautiful.

**AP:** Mmhmm. I don't know what to add to that except to say it just relieves the pressure a little bit. It's not our job to make God's world beautiful. He's already made it beautiful. We just get to tell about it.

**JR:** It's our job to give an account of what we've seen.

**AP:** Yeah.

**JR:** That's great. Um... and the relief of not looking inward anymore. Whew! [laughs]

**AP:** Huge, yeah. It's funny, I just did a podcast with Ian Cron. And uh, you know, it was about the Enneagram, so we went dark, you know, talking about the Enneagram 4 stuff. And uh, anyway, I just talked — or maybe I'm getting confused — but I mentioned somewhere that when I look back at my early songwriting I can see... [deep breath] that kind of like, inward looking. The listener probably isn't receiving the song that way, but because I know who I was when I was writing those songs, I feel like I can hear in those songs a misguided need to be somebody, to kind of like leave my mark on the world somehow. And man, I just... I'm just not interested in that anymore.

I've been thinking about it a lot lately, there's this Rich Mullins quote that I love: "If your ambition is to leave a legacy, then what you leave is a legacy of ambition."

**JR:** That's Rich Mullins?

**AP:** That's Rich Mullins. That sounds just like Chesterton, doesn't it?

**JR:** Yeah!

**AP:** But... and I love that thought because it's kind of like if our goal here is to like — and I think you know Milton better than I do. But I remember in the beginning of — doesn't he like invite God to help him tell a story that's going to be this world-changing thing? Am I getting that right?

**JR:** Mmhmm, yeah.

**AP:** And I just feel like that's not right. That's not what our ultimate goal is. Um, so... there's a sense in which your goal as a writer or an artist or as just a human doing the thing, like... like... my goal is — on my best days, what I would want at my funeral is for Christ Himself to be the star of the show.

And this just popped into my head, but, Steven Curtis Chapman. Um, I uh... [chuckles] I hope it's okay if I talk about this. Like, he has the best reputation I think of anybody I've ever met. Like, I lived in Nashville for many years before I met or got to know Steven, and I was so skeptical. Like, everybody was like, he is such a good man. He's such a good man. And I remember being like, okay... [JR laughs] I can't wait to spend some time on the stour bus with this guy because I'm gonna find out if this is really true. And right off the bat I realized that um, Steven was broken, and, you know, he had his flaws, but he couldn't — but there was something about the way he drew attention to Christ's goodness in the middle of it, so that the conversations about Steven later are about *that* and not him. Does that make sense?

**JR:** Yeah.

**AP:** So you just get this sense that it's Jesus filling in those blanks, and then what you remember is the glory and not the grime. And so uh... I don't know, there was just something interesting about that. That it's not

— our goal is not to, um, to leave behind a reputation that we were awesome.

**JR:** Mmhmm. [laughs]

**AP:** You know? That's not what we're trying to do, and that's not what we should be doing with our songs or anything else. Is like, "Oooh, I'm gonna write a song that's gonna be a song for the ages." You know, like... no! That's not the point. Like, if that's the point, then you're gonna run out of gas eventually.

And so, anyway. It reminds me of, uh, Brown Bannister, since we're sitting here in this Lipscomb studio. And I may have told you this story, but when I dropped Aiden off the day he moved into college here at Lipscomb, I was just a mess. I was crying the whole time, and uh, was, uh... and he was kind of like, "Papa, get it together!" You know? [laughs]

And the reason I was so grieving was not just that I was gonna miss my son, but that I felt like I had all this regret. Uh, you know it's kind of like the at the end of *Schindler's List* — "With this ring..." you know? [JR laughs] Every night that I was watching Netflix at home, I could've been spending drawing with my son in his bedroom, or all of this stuff. Just the voices were loud, and I was beating myself up over it, and he was like, "Relax, you're a good dad." And Jamie was like, "Andrew, you're a good dad. It's okay."

And then we got to the school, and everybody that I met, they'd be like, "Oh, how are you handling all this?" And I'd be like, "Man, I have so many regrets." And they'd be like, "Oh, no no no! You're a good dad. You're a good dad." And none of it helped until I bumped into Brown. And I — and, uh he's a professor here — and he's like, "How ya doin'?" And I was like like, "Man, I'm not doing great. I'm —" And I gave him the whole thing: "I just have so many regrets." And he laughed. And he goes, "Ah, I remember that feeling! It has been so fun to see how the Lord has made good of my mistakes."

**JR:** Mmhmm.

**AP:** And that was the first time that anybody said it, like turned the narrative around a little bit. And said, “Well, of course you’ve — what, why would you not have regrets? You’re human. You’re a mess. You haven’t done this right.” That’s not the point. The point is watch how the Lord redeems the thing. And uh, and then He gets the glory. So I guess that’s the — that’s the goal with what you’re writing. Is like, if you... it’s not that you try any less hard to be excellent. But there’s just this little nuanced shift in thinking that I think is where the gas in the engine comes from.

**JR:** Yeah. Well, I wanna — so I thought this was where you were headed with that train of thought...

**AP:** It may have been. I may have just gotten... [laughs]

**JR:** Right. [laughs] But one thing I really love about your book, *Adorning the Dark*, is — I think it’s early on in the book — you get on the subject of your, um... this need to feel like you are somebody that gets you started writing. That, as you said, can’t sustain you. It’s actually okay if that’s where you start.

**AP:** Totally.

**JR:** And I think that... the grace in that, I thought, was really really helpful. I spend so much time talking to writers like, “Don’t be so... stop trying to make a reputation for yourself...” whatever. And that’s really stopped me in my tracks to say, you know what? That’s why we start.

**AP:** Yeah, totally! It’s kind of like, um, you know, have you ever been... well, I can’t think of any example specifically. But the feeling of, I wanna help this person, but my motives aren’t pure. I would be helping this person to help myself feel better about myself, and then you drive on.

**JR:** Mmhm.

**AP:** And... that's an enemy victory. You know what I mean? I remember that happened with my neighbor. I knew they had a lot going on, and they had a funeral that weekend, and I noticed that he wasn't able to finish mowing this, like, acre-sized part of his yard before they had company. And I was like, "I should go mow his yard for him." And uhhh, "Oooh, that's kind of a gross thought." Because immediately, I felt the pride. Before I'd even done it I felt the pride...

**JR:** [laughs]

**AP:** ... of having mowed his yard for him. And I thought, "Oh yeah, that's gonna be good, because he lends me his tractor sometimes, and this is a way of evening the score." All this stuff. And I almost didn't do it because I was so conflicted about my motivation, and then finally I was like, "Just mow the guy's yard, man!" It's okay! And so the entire time I was on the mower, I was so pleased with myself.

**JR:** [laughs]

**AP:** I was so... I was just like, "I am such a good guy. I'm doing this thing!" And you know, the Lord's gonna redeem all this stuff. But the point is doing something, you know? Don't wait around, for Pete's sake, um... to make sure that you're not gonna have any regrets. You know what I mean? It's like, no you're not gonna be a perfect parent. It doesn't mean you don't have a baby.

**JR:** [laughs] I always thought the most amazing thing Adam and Eve did was have a baby, after all that happened.

**AP:** [laughs] Oh...

**JR:** They completely broke the world...

**AP:** Uh huh.

**JR:** And, um —

**AP:** Oh that's right! 'Cause they would've had a baby after all that, I guess.

**JR:** Yeah, and they got kicked — you know, there's this angel with a flaming sword, but there was also God saying, "Your seed is gonna bruise the serpent's head," and uh, and so they took God at his word and said, all right, I guess we'll have a family.

**AP:** That's amazing. Yeah, I'd never thought of that before.

**JR:** Okay, so this is... uh, I'm pretty sure this is gonna be the first episode of The Habit podcast after the new year. I can't remember what date that's gonna be, but people are still thinking about making their plans for the new year. And um, I like to talk to people about, you know, maybe don't think in terms of resolutions so much as habits.

**AP:** Yeah.

**JR:** A resolution feels like this is me, doing something in my brain that's gonna change the course of my life. And whereas new habits go beyond your brain into your body and nearly everything else. Talk to me about habits in your writing life.

**AP:** Yeah. Um... well, the uhhh... I don't have good ones. 'Cause it goes in cycles.

**JR:** You only write, like... you don't... you're not always writing songs. You're writing songs when you have an album coming out.

**AP:** Right. And so... that's just a way of kind of staying sane. Like, I'm not



one of those people that just wakes up and goes, [whispers] “I just can’t wait to write a song today.” There’s just a lot of other interesting things to be doing in the world. A deadline is the thing that kind of reorders the year. And I go, okay, so that means — so in January, I usually have a meeting with my manager Christie, and we kind of map out the next year and a half or so and go what things do we want to accomplish, and then everything works backwards from there. And so, that’s when the habits get in. But it speaks to what I was gonna say, which is I think accountability is the key.

Um, I was just talking to Andy Gullahorn about he had a... like a rotator cuff problem from playing too much badminton?

**JR:** [laughs]

**AP:** And uhh... and he was going to the doctor and physical therapy and all this kind of stuff to get it done. And he told me he was gonna have to get surgery, and then he got a second opinion, and the second doctor was like, “You don’t have to get surgery. You just have to do your physical therapy.” And Andy was like, “I’ve been doing my physical therapy!” And he was like, “Well, you haven’t been doing this and this and this.”

And so Andy said after a few months of going to a physical therapist, and he was like, “I was very committed because I wanted to play badminton again.”

**JR:** [laughs]

**AP:** So he was like, I was very committed to getting better, but once I had the meeting with this doctor, I had to admit to myself that I hadn’t actually been doing as much work as I thought I’d been doing. So what he did was he told Jill, his wife, to text him every day to make sure he had done his physical therapy. And he got better. And it just made me think that accountability and community was the answer to the thing. So, a resolution in my mind is like something you, obviously, something you resolve to do within yourself. Whereas I think we need other people to help

us develop habits.

And I think that's, uhhh... church is a good example of that. Going to a church where people are gonna miss you if you don't show up on a Sunday. And they're maybe gonna text you later that day and say, "Hey, where were you? Are you doing okay?" Or whatever. And um... it's hard to go to church. You know? Some Sundays it's like, ahhh, I don't know if I've got it in me. But then I think this is a habit that I've had ingrained in me since I was a kid, and the week just won't feel right if I don't show up, you know?

And so Dude Breakfast is that way for me. Like, if I said to myself, "I'm gonna do a better job at seeing my friends," that ain't gonna last. But if I talk to my friends and say, "Let's have breakfast every Wednesday morning at the Waffle House at 8 o'clock," now you've got something that's gonna, um... that's gonna form you.

**JR:** Yeah.

**AP:** So I think that's something that for me, that's... whenever I think about spiritual formation or habits that are gonna shape me, it just can't be in my own mind. I've gotta do it in community or it won't work.

**JR:** Yeah. Art nourishes community. Community nourishes art.

**AP:** Mmhmm.

**JR:** Um, as you know I always end these episodes with the question, "Who are the writers who make you wanna write." So... who are the writers who make you wanna write, Andrew?

**AP:** Yeah. Well... I think I said this the last time I talked to you, but *you* are one of those people. Um, every time I read something you've written, I get excited about it because, like, your voice is so uniquely Jonathan Rogers that it kind of goes back to what we were talking about earlier in the

podcast. That you just have to say it like you say it, and um... and it is, uh, it is good.

**JR:** Well, thanks.

**AP:** So truly, you are one of those people. Ummm.... I think uh... Mark Helprin is one? I just started reading another Mark Helprin book. His book *Winter's Tale* is just... I think, um... marvelous. Maybe magnificent. I started to say magnificent, but now I wanted to back it up a little bit.

**JR:** [laughs]

**AP:** But it's one of those books that my... I could feel my brain crackling as I read it, and I didn't really know language could do what it did.

**JR:** I've never read Mark Helprin.

**AP:** I think you would... I think you would love it?

**JR:** Halprin? Helprin.

**AP:** Helprin. H-E-L-P-R-I-N. It's hard because his books are pretty... big. They're like these big, long [deep breath]... like, uh, Tolstoy-sized book. But um, *A Soldier of the Great War* was the first one that I read, and I loved it. But he's great, and Annie Dillard is one that, uh... like, there's certain authors that when I see one of their books on the shelf, I'll just kind of pull it down and open to a random page and stand there for five minutes. She's one that makes me wanna write. Uhhh... [deep breath] And from a song —

**JR:** I wanna — I feel like there's some way to make a chart of the writers who like Annie Dillard and the writers who... I mean, everybody *admires* Annie Dillard, and some people really enjoy reading her. And some people are like, "I'm impressed with this, but it's not..."

**AP:** It's not my thing?

**JR:** It's not my thing. It's... I'm so impressed with her, but I don't voluntarily just pick it up and read.

**AP:** Interesting. No, I... *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, like, I could open up to anything thing and kind of get lost for a few minutes. Mainly because it's so... you know there's... it's like as a songwriter, if you go see Phil Keaggy, you wanna quit playing guitar forever. Right? You just go, well *that's* amazing. There's a genius there that's crazy.

But then, there's another kind of songwriter. When I go see James Taylor, I think, oh, I could learn to play that guitar part. You know? And I could sing "Sweet Baby James" around a campfire. And so there are some writers that are like, they're no less excellent in what they do, but there's something kind of attainable. Like most of us who write probably have a book that we read at some point and you thought, oh! I think I could actually do this! Maybe not as well, but enough to make you wanna try.

**JR:** And you don't remember what that book was for you, do you?

**AP:** Um, well for me it was uhhh... from a musical standpoint, it was, uhhh... it was Marc Cohn and Toad the Wet Sprocket. Um, both of whom were baritones. Glen Phillips is a baritone, so it was like in my range, and I could actually sing the songs. Um, and then it was Rich Mullins. Because once again, he had — wasn't a great singer. And so there was something attainable about it that made me wanna try to do it.

And then poetically speaking, there was something about the language those guys used that was, um... earthy. And... and at the same time there was this real craftsmanship to it that appealed to me.

**JR:** You're saying Marc Cohn and Toad the Wet Sprocket, and...?

**AP:** And Rich Mullins. And James Taylor. All of those guys. When I hear Paul Simon, I'm a little more mystified. That's more like a peak that I know I'm never gonna be able to climb. And again, just to clarify, I'm not suggesting that I'm as good as any of those guys. I'm just saying they make you wanna get busy. That they — it feels like, oh yeah, I may not be able to finish the race as fast as they diid, but I could run that marathon, you know? But it may take me ten hours. Does that make sense?

**JR:** Oh, absolutely.

**AP:** So uh, anyway, those guys are... and I think Annie Dillard and Mark Helprin are in that boat for me too. Again, not that I could do it, but that I wanna try.

**JR:** Yeah. Yeah.

**AP:** So yeah. Um, who else? Buechner was that way for me. Frederick Buechner. There was something about the rhythm of his sentences that was really appealing to me and musical, that made me wanna try it. So... yeah, those are a few to get started.

(THEME MUSIC FADES UP)

**JR:** Yeah, great. Well, Andrew, thank you. I always love when we get a little bit of time to talk.

**AP:** Me too, man. It's good to talk to you.

JR: We'll do it again soon.

(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.

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(THEME MUSIC OUT)

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