

(ACOUSTIC GUITAR THEME MUSIC)

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

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JR: Scott James is a pediatric infectious disease doctor in Birmingham, Alabama. Besides taking care of children at work and raising four children of his own, he also writes books for children. His most recent book, *Where is Wisdom?* is inspired by Job 28, that poem in praise of wisdom that comes right after Job's three frenemies have had their say. It's a gorgeous picture book illustrated by Hein Zaayman.

(THEME MUSIC FADES OUT)

JR: We recorded this conversation in the midst of the coronavirus season, so I felt very fortunate that an infectious disease doctor was able to make time to chat.

Hey Scott James, I'm so glad you're on The Habit Podcast today! Thanks for making time for me.

SCOTT JAMES: Thank you, Jonathan. I appreciate you having me on!

JR: I know you've been exceedingly busy because you're a physician, an infectious disease physician in Birmingham. Although as we were discussing a minute ago, before we started recording, you're a pediatric physician.

SJ: Yeah, pediatric infectious.

JR: Which means you haven't been quite as busy with the, with the, um... pandemic as you — if you were say a geriatric infectious disease person.

SJ: Yes. Yes. We've been quite busy, but I'm thankful that so far this virus seems to be sparing children, to a certain extent.

JR: Yeah. So you, um, you work with children in your day job, and then you write for children. In the last month, you've released a book about wisdom based on Job 28. And the name of that book is...

SJ: *Where is Wisdom?* I stole it right from Scripture.

JR: Yeah, good. That's, uh... that's always safe. Um, tell us about Job 28. Just remind our listeners what happens in Job 28.

SJ: So Job 28 is — I like to think of as this oasis in the middle of a really challenging book. So Job is, um, one of my favorite books. I love it in that it's not afraid to ask big questions and really wrestle through a lot of things. So um, you're kind of going through Job, and there's these sort of rounds and rounds of conversations where Job and his friends are having these conversations, really hard to follow conversations sometimes. And then in the middle of it in Job 28, Job's responding to one of his friends has he's kind of transitioning in a section of the book, and he just drops this poem down in the middle of these conversations.

And um, it's... some Bibles label it a "hymn to wisdom." And Job just kind of goes into this very... this language that is full of imagery and very vivid pictures. And he starts describing kind of like the ingenuity of man, and how good men are at sort of delving into the earth's creations and finding treasures, and he's, uh, kind of just talking about how they dig deep and mine silver and gold and grow plentiful wheat in harvest. Basically he's just talking about how God created this beautiful world, and men are really really talented and ingenious at delving into its treasures.

But then he sort of pauses halfway through and kind of gives this, um... there's this moment, this self-reflective moment where you can kind of hear him poetically saying, "But is that all there is?" There's gotta be more to this. And that's where he kind of turns the lens and he turns it away

from the gifts of creations, and he turns the camera toward the Creator himself, and he kind of highlights God as the source of all satisfaction and the true treasure. And so he starts kind of highlighting this idea that while we're searching for earthly treasures, there's a bigger treasure to be found in God. And he's using wisdom as kind of the entry point to that.

So that's— it's this famous chapter where he starts asking this question, where is wisdom found? So then you go on a treasure hunt looking for wisdom, and no one knows the way. We can't find it. And so ultimately he ends that chapter kind of looking to God. Highlighting God's goodness and creativity, uh, the fact that God is a generous giver, and the fact that God is sovereign over all. And so he kind of concludes with — the end of the chapter concludes with the fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom. And so it points ultimately to God, and I just loved how engaging and creative that chapter is in the middle of that book, and I love that it highlights good things about creation and tells us to enjoy them, but also points us to God, asking us to look first and foremost to him as kind of the source of our wisdom and joy.

JR: Yeah. So, you know wisdom, it seems to me — and you can, you've written about wisdom for children. I don't have the same experience you do in that, so I wanna hear from you. You know, there— one way to write to children is to, um, simplify things, kind of put them in black and white, to give... you know, to reduce big questions down to easy answers and give them, uh... give those easy answers to children?

It's much easier, for instance, to write about morality to children, I think, than it is to write about, say, wisdom. Which, um... which isn't... I can't remember who I heard saying this recently, but basically, our moral codes don't always give us... I'm should say they almost never give us easy answers to the hardest questions that we're dealing with. You mentioned earlier, again before we started recording, that you worked with the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. And if morality gave us the easy answers to difficult questions, we wouldn't need an ethics commission, right?

SJ: Right.

JR: And wisdom somehow lets us make our way in a world that's very complex. Um.. how do you... when you're writing for children, how do you deal with that truth?

SJ: I think it would be much easier, like you say, if we just had a list of rules to go by. If there were some kind of black and white list of do this, don't do that... if you follow these rules you will be wise. And yet we know from experience that there's just never going to be an exhaustive enough list of rules. And that's just not how God intended it to be. So, that's just the heart of the gospel. It's less about following rules and more about trusting in God.

And so when I'm talking with kids, I'm trying to help them think through the fact that wisdom first and foremost flows out of your relationship with God. Are you looking to God, are you trusting in God, are you letting God kind of define who you are and who you see yourself to be.

And so in that way I like to think of wisdom as being nimble. So instead of here's a list of rules to follow, and in every situation you find just consult with this list and do what it says and you'll be wise. That's not reality. Right? Because I don't have a verse that tells me how to act in the middle of a global pandemic. I don't have a verse that tells me how to act in all kinds of scenarios in my daily life. And our kids are wise enough at baseline to understand that reality. And so instead, if you point them to the one that gives wisdom, if you point them to the relationship with God, then you sort of give them what I like to think of as a rock-solid foundation in knowing and loving and trusting God. And then they can, from that position, they can pivot in whatever direction, whatever life throws their way, they can kind of take those baseline wisdom lessons that they get from God, just from trusting him and knowing him, and they can face whatever comes their way. And that's part of the practicality of working out wisdom in daily situations.

JR: Yeah.

SJ: It's not about consulting your list of rules that you keep in your pocket and doing what it says. It's just about being able to face whatever life throws your way and trusting that God is in control of it and has a plan for it.

JR: Uh huh. So what does storytelling have to do with it? Can you sort of close the loop from that idea to storytelling? As opposed to... given the fact that you can't make a long enough list.

SJ: Sure! Maybe... hm. I think storytelling can be a way to sort of en flesh that and sort of give, help kids... (sigh) I don't know, sort of put their imagination through the paces and sort of be thinking proactively about the things that make up their life. So if we're telling stories, whether we're kind of expounding stories that come from the Bible or just sort of talking about made-up stories, if we're going in that direction with kids, then these can be sort of training — training might be the wrong word — but training exercises that will help them be sort of thinking through how they're gonna encounter their world around them, and just, yeah, give them sort of like actual, vivid examples of... here's a scenario where these characters are going through these issues, and this is a very tough situation for them to be in, and let's look and see how they're evaluating what's around them and responding to it in a way that is or isn't faithful to who God is. And so there's— you can get good positive and negative examples from that, as we know from so much good literature.

JR: Yeah, right. And one thing that... in good stories, the resolution tends to be something you weren't expecting, right? You've got your ideas about how things are going to work out, and if a story doesn't surprise me... (pause) I'm not interested in that story. Um, and when I say "doesn't surprise me" sometimes I like to hear that same story 15 times, so in that sense it may not surprise me. But if the outcome of that story is exactly what I expected... that's not much of a story.

And I do think in that sense, storytelling prepares us for wisdom. Because in the world God made, every... it seems so often that the solution to the problems that are presented to us are upside-down solutions. That kind of is the gospel, right? That the solutions that we could figure out for ourselves, weren't, you know — the saying that they say in I think recovery, AA, things like that is “your best thinking got you here.” Which is kind of the situation we're all in! Is the best things about us got us in the mess we're in, and what gets us out of that is grace, which is surprising but believable. Right?

SJ: Right, right.

JR: You don't see it coming, and then after it comes you're like, well of course. That makes perfect sense. And that's the way stories work, good stories. But it's also the way the world God made works.

SJ: And I think there's this aspect where, yeah, when your'e thinking about these surprise ending and the way it takes you in a way you didn't expect, that's the mark of a good story. Like I encourage my kids — I encourage myself to — when we encounter a story, a phrase we use around our house is the let — basically meet the story on its own turns. Let the story kind of define its context and its direction. And I try to like... I want my kids to read — the way I phrase it is I want my kids to read empathetically.

So I want them sort of stepping into the story, and rather than just inserting themselves into the story where they say, hey look, if I were the main character, I would do this, I would act this way. I want them to kind of get in there, and then meet the character on his own terms, get to know the world that the character's in, get to know the surroundings and the motivations and the choices that are in front of them. But actually have some empathy to where they're immersing themselves into that world and letting the story kind of guide itself. And I think in the end they're gonna end up learning more about themselves, rather than sort of maybe reading selfishly, where you just sort of insert yourself into the story.

And I kind of generally find that when I'm tempted to insert myself into the story — I call it a kind of “choose your own ending” approach, where I just say if I was this main character, I'd do that. And if they don't act the way I think they should act, then I get frustrated. And I feel like that's a relatively bad way to encounter a story, and it ends up being less fruitful. And so I wanna be surprised by the story. I wanna let it go where it's gonna go. I wanna let it open up my eyes to things that I haven't previously considered. I wanna learn from that character. I wanna know who they are and get to know what's motivating them and why they're making that decision. But ultimately I feel like it's gonna be a more fruitful experience for me if I'm actually learning from that character, rather than trying to impose my beliefs on who he or she is.

JR: Yeah. Which also, by the way, is a better way to live in the world. In the actual world. And interact with people there.

SJ: Yeah.

JR: And so I think you are... I mean, what you're talking about here is wisdom, right? It's stories that tell, that help our people, live with wisdom. And it's not even a matter of... I know your book *Where is Wisdom?* specifically talks about wisdom head on. But even stories that don't are still about wisdom, it seems to me.

Do you, um... you mentioned, um... telling stories with your kids. How many kids do you have?

SJ: I have four.

JR: How old are they?

SJ: They are now 8 through 15.

JR: Okay.

SJ: Every two years.

JR: Do you tell them family stories? Do you spend a lot of time talking about family history?

SJ: We do! Yeah, a good amount. I think we're all over the board with stories. Made-up stories, factual stories, historical stories, family stories.

JR: Yeah. I'm always curious to know if people are really sort of telling the family stories.

SJ: Yeah, because I think it helps our kids are in this moment in time, and they see the world through the context that they're in. So what they're experiencing now is, in one sense, all they know to be true. And so, um, my wife and I and they're grandparents are continually just... I don't know how conscientious we're doing it, but we're broadening their horizons by telling them about other experiences besides their own. So that's from a different era, whether or not it's when I was a kid this is how it was. They're always amazed to learn what it was like to grow up before the Internet and things like that. And then hearing their grandparents, my grandmother — they're great-grandmother — telling them stories about growing up on the farm in Mississippi. And it's just, you can see their horizons broadening as they learn to appreciate that which is beyond what they can grasp.

So I wanna burst the bubble of their little local context. It's a balance, right? I want them to appreciate their local context, but I want them to know there's a world outside that. And I think that goes over time, like back through history, but also just geographically. Telling stories from other parts of the world, other cultures. So my wife and traveled a good deal, and now that our kids are old enough, after this pandemic is over we're gonna try to take our kids places that are going to sort of blow their mind, and let them see what life is like outside their bubble.

JR: Yeah. I um... now I can't remember who, it was on an earlier episode

of this podcast, somebody was talking about the idea that one definition of identity is finding your role in a story that you didn't write.

SJ: Hmm.

JR: And you know, we think of, um... in our culture, it has become kind of a truism that you make your own identity. Which you just can't really do. You don't, you know, like if you've ever tried to give yourself a nickname, it never sticks.

SJ: (laughs) That's a good Seinfeld episode.

JR: You know? I always wanted to be called The General. I thought everybody'd call me General, but nobody will do that. Because you can't make up your own nickname. I mean... you could. But there are whole books about people who tried to do that. *The Great Gatsby*, you know?

SJ: Yep.

JR: Whose real name was what? Stan Gatz or something like that. And he gave himself a name and it almost worked, but it didn't work.

SJ: Right.

JR: Um... and um... and I think that's such an important part of storytelling. That's one reason I love family stories as a reminder. There's a story that's been going on, and you have a part in it, kid.

SJ: Yeah!

JR: You didn't invent the story, but you've got an important part to play in the story.

SJ: Sure. Here and now, in this family context, uh, but then also telling the

stories of God's people, generation after generation. So just making sure that, uh, I want my kids to have a vibrant, personal faith in Jesus Christ. Like, I want them individually to believe and to trust and to identify with Jesus Christ. But I also want them to understand that they're part of a church. They're part of a bigger community, and they're part of a community that has spanned generations. And that means something to have an identity that's defined by a larger purpose.

JR: Yeah.

SJ: I love that.

JR: That's great. You speak of fostering a Biblical imagination through your writing. When you use that term, what do you mean?

SJ: So I think kids — my kids at least, I'm sure there's some kids out there that have bad imaginations — my kids were born with vivid imaginations. And they don't — it's not something they have to work at. I mean, it's just a natural part of their life and day to encounter the world and encounter their thought process with, yeah, just these beautiful, creative imaginations. And so when I think of Biblical imagination, I simply wanna harness that and sort of put their imaginations to work for the use of knowing God better and meeting him in his word, listening to Scripture.

So I think... I don't remember where I first heard this term. I think Michael Card might have been one of the earlier voices that I heard talking about it.

JR: I can imagine.

SJ: He's so great, isn't he? Um, but he makes this cool distinction. I've heard him talk about how the imagination is sort of a bridge between the head and the heart, the mind and the heart. And then he talks about a Biblical imagination being when you take your imagination and you put it in service to listening to Scripture. So it's this imagination that we have, and yet I want to use it in service to something greater than myself. I want to

use it in service to listen to God. And so he kind of puts it at the feet of Scripture. And he says, don't abandon— it's the idea of don't abandon your imagination and your creative thought process when you encounter Scripture, but use it to dive in all the more deeply.

Um, and so... I don't know, I just sort of think through it as, for our kids, when we're reading Scripture together or talking about it together, it's simply this concept of like we don't want to gloss over Scripture, when we're reading a Bible passage. We don't wanna just kind of skim over it superficially. We want to dive deep. But we don't want to helicopter over it analytically. We wanna step into the scene. And that's where I get this idea of an empathetic reader, where you are really seeking to understand the person that you're dealing with.

So just in personal empathy, like if you and I are talking, I wanna know, Jonathan Rogers, I wanna know where you're coming from, what you're feeling, what you're thinking. I wanna understand you so that I can love you better. And it's the same way if I'm reading a passage in Scripture. I wanna know, ultimately, the Author — the capital A Author — but I also wanna know it's specific context and the characters that are in that scene. And so it's... put that imagination to use in service of knowing God better through his Word. And so for us, it's simply that idea where we encourage our kids to step into the scene. Think what they're thinking, feel what they're feeling, imagine what it must have been like to experience what they're experiencing. Walk through that scene, see what they see, and feel what they feel.

And I think again if you kind of approach it in that way, um... you know, with some hermeneutical tactics in there as well. It's not just a free-wheeling, just kind of "hey, how does that passage make you feel?" But thinking through it smartly. Letting the text kind of... uh, put the text in the driver's seat and let it define its own terms and its context, and just sort of meet it where it is.

JR: Yeah.

SJ: And that's kind of contrary to that "choose your own ending" impulse that I was talking about before? Where I just wanna make myself the main character of whatever I'm reading? There's a selfish way to approach Scripture as well. Where you just bring your own presuppositions, and you just bring your own preconceived notions to the text, and no matter what that text says, you're gonna find something in there that justifies what you already believe.

And you... I've never made this connection before, but you said that a good story has surprise endings. It leads you places that you might not have expected. And I think in the same way if you come to Scripture and you're never surprised, and you're never challenged, and you never scratch your head and go... wow. How does that even work? How does that fit together? I don't understand that. If you're not challenged by Scripture in that way, I think there's a good argument to be made that you might not actually be encountering it on its own terms.

JR: Yeah, I know. I mean, even with the parables for instance, we, um... those things are hard to make sense of! And the fact that we've been to Sunday school all our lives, and we've had people to maybe salve that confusion before we even really felt the confusion.

SJ: Yeah. Job 28, I think, is a good example of that. Because it's the passage — it's one of many passages, it's there in Proverbs as well — where it talks about the fear of the Lord. Like, that's the linchpin of Job 28. We're talking about what wisdom is, it's the fear of the Lord. And I think my whole life, I think every time anyone ever taught me or told me about passages that included the concept of the fear of the Lord, they had to intro the conversation with a bunch of caveats about what it doesn't mean. Well, it doesn't mean fear. It doesn't mean actual fear. You're not supposed to be afraid of God. And they give me all these kind of, um... yeah. We don't just wanna take it on its own terms. What do you mean by the fear of the Lord? Like, I think in a certain way, he means the fear of the Lord. Like, why not let it mean what it means? Like, if I'm in rebellion against God, I

probably should be afraid. Um... and so... yeah, letting Scripture kind of define its terms, and not necessarily bringing ourself to bear on it all the time.

JR: Yeah. Hey, one thing I wanted to talk about that we haven't gotten around to, and I want to make sure we get to before we run out of time, the illustrations in the book are so gorgeous! Um, which you didn't do yourself.

SJ: That's yes, I—

JR: You wrote the words.

SJ: Yes.

JR: And a lot of those you didn't even write, you're telling me!

SJ: (laughs)

JR: What did you even do in this book, Scott?

SJ: Ohhhh... uh.

JR: (laughs) Tell me about those illustrations.

SJ: The illustrations are—

JR: Hein Zaayman?

SJ: Hein Zaayman. He's a young artist/illustrator in the Nashville area.

JR: Okay.

SJ: *Phenomenal*. I just the... what he brought to this book, this project,

how he brought those words to life through his illustration, never ceases to amaze me. And consistently, any feedback I've ever heard from the book, even from my own children, is that the best part of the book is the illustrations. And I receive that gladly, because that's a very astute observation. The illustrations are phenomenal.

JR: They really are.

SJ: Well, especially in the idea that what I'm trying to do is ignite imagination. I want kids to sort of, um... man, for the rest of their life, if every single time a kid thought about Job 28, some vibrant illustration that kind of brought it to life in their mind and triggered some remembrance of truth from that passage... if that comes to mind for a long time, then that's a success for me. So I think Hein contributed so much to that.

JR: And Hein was somebody who had a relationship at B&H and that's how he ended up on this book?

SJ: No, actually, I'm the one who brought Hein to B&H's attention, for this project at least. Hein, um... I became aware of him through the Rabbit Room community, so kind of a mutual acquaintance through Rabbit Room was highlighting his work in another area. He does all kinds of amazing illustrations and graphic design, and um, so yeah. I was just reading a Rabbit Room article one day or something along those lines, I don't remember even specifically what it was. Might have been an article or it was in the forum, I don't remember. But someone from The Rabbit Room highlighted his work, and it really captured my imagination.

And so then a year or two later is when I was kind of actually developing this project with B&H. And I said, please see if this young man would be available to write— to join this project. And I'm so happy he was willing and able to join, because I can't imagine it without him now.

JR: Yeah. When you were talking about your... how happy you would be if, you know, if a child thinking of— or a grownup who used to be a child

thinks about those pictures whenever they think of Job 28. I was just thinking about every now and then I'll run across a picture from the children's Bible I had when I was little, and the amount of... I don't know what the word is. Whatever the positive word for baggage is. The freight—

SJ: Mmhm.

JR: — that it contained... so much comes back when I see the pictures of, um... whether it's... any of my notion of what Noah's Ark looks like came straight out of a children's Bible.

SJ: Yup.

JR: No doubt it was historically inaccurate. I don't know. But it's where I... I have not... until you said that, I hadn't really thought about how much those pictures shaped my Biblical imagination.

SJ: Yeah. That could be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on the pictures. (laughs)

JR: Right. Yeah, right. I can't even get enough distance from those pictures to say good or bad, you know? (pause) Um... let's see here... um... oh! I do wanna talk about a minute about... I've already touched on the fact that you're a pediatrician. How does your work as a pediatrician — or does it — shape your work as a writer?

SJ: Oh, yeah of course.

JR: Or is writing just what you do when you're not... (pause) pediatricizing?

SJ: Yeah, well both are true. It definitely shapes... and I think it's [part of, um... I think it's more just sort of an outworking of who I am. The way my brain thinks, the way I like to communicate, I was just born to be a pediatrician. And I think I was also wired in a way that makes me enjoy

writing for children. So I think they definitely go together in that sense. Even though the work is very different. So I write a lot as a scientist.

JR: Okay.

SJ: So I communicate as a pediatrician, I write as a scientist, and I like writing kids' books and stuff as well. So those are like very, very different things that need to be communicated, in different styles. And yet, um, there are some common themes that run through all of them. And hopefully it's a common theme for all of us in our lives, as we're writing or communicating in any way.

I think first and foremost is just respect the reader. So, write in such a way that is assuming the best of your audience and assume they can grapple with big ideas, and you don't need to talk down to them or condescend. Um, and I think (clears throat) in children's literature, that can be a temptation. A lot of children's literature has that voice of sort of talking down, or being simplified.

So when I'm talking with my patients, I'm trying to get them... so when I'm talking one on one with a child who's fighting some illness, I wanna make sure that I'm talking with them in such a way that they can understand what's going on, to the extent that their little mind is capable. Um, so it's gotta be an age-appropriate sort of thing. But I'm communicating *big* ideas with them.

JR: Yeah.

SJ: Um, like... yeah, I mean just for example, in my HIV clinic, I'm talking with children or adolescents with HIV.

JR: Wow.

SJ: That's a huge conversation. That is not a conversation to be taken lightly. So you've gotta communicate in a way that expresses the gravity of

the situation and what's going on, and you're talking through some really, really big, difficult, life-changing conversations happening in there. And yet if you come across clinical, and detached, and condescending, then they're not gonna hear what you're saying. That's not helpful to them. So you've gotta be able to engage their heart and talk with them directly in order to get the proper communication across, but in a way that really lands where it can have an effect on them.

JR: Yeah.

SJ: So like in a different way, that's writing for kids too.

JR: Yeah!

SJ: If I'm talking about complicated and nuanced concepts like wisdom, I've gotta be able to communicate that in a way that's Biblically faithful and does not try to over-simplify a massive concept, but in a way that actually connects with a child's heart and communicates it in a way that's gonna land in a way that they can understand.

Um, so... yeah, I wanna like... I think pediatric training and the way I interact with patients sort of brings things like that to bear on how I write. I wanna respect the reader, I wanna not shy away from the big truths, I wanna ask hard questions and tackle difficult subjects, and I wanna let the Bible speak for itself. And contextualize it in a way that kids can understand it, and in a way that my patients can understand it, if I'm splitting that analogy. But still communicate those big things.

JR: Do you... um, it's okay if the answer is no. But have you ever given any thought to equipping young patients as storytellers? In other words, part of what you have to do is get their story.

SJ: Mmhm.

JR: What... (pause) do you have anything to say about that? I'm just

curious.

SJ: (pause) Ummm, I think... so a lot of traction that I've had with patients and kind of getting them on board with understanding what's going on to them, with the population that I serve, a lot of it is this sort of transition of medical care. So as a patient is growing up, going from childhood to adolescent to adulthood, and at a certain point in there, they have to, um... they sort of have to take responsibility and take ownership of their own healthcare, and it's no longer mom and dad or foster mom and dad or whoever making those decisions and taking care of them. They need to actually take that responsibly on themselves. And so the storytelling aspect of it... less equipping them to be the storyteller — although I hope that's an outcome of it — but more equipping them to engage the story and understand it and kind of appreciate the fullness of the story.

JR: Uh huh.

SJ: Whereas, I don't know, a lot of times — I think people in general, but I do sense it in the younger generation currently — a little more prone to compartmentalizing? And saying here's a thing that I'm dealing with, and here's another thing that I'm dealing with, and just kind of having separate categories that don't always, I don't know, interrelate in a holistic way.

JR: Yeah.

SJ: So when I'm talking through big concepts like this with patients, I'm trying to paint the big picture for them, so that they can see the background of it, the current reality of it, the future prospects of it. And if they can get on board with that whole picture and see their place within that story, then they're more engaged in their own healthcare and taking care of themselves.

JR: Yeah. That's great.

SJ: One of the ways that I — maybe the most concrete way is if I'm talking

with a young person who is faced with the decision to take practical steps right now to take care of themselves versus... not.

JR: Yeah.

SJ: (chuckles) We all face that, every day. But I tell younger patients that... I basically tell them, I'm looking out for thirty-five year old you. I think thirty-five year old you is going to be an amazing person, and the world needs to see that person. The world needs that person in it doing awesome things. So I'm trying to get fifteen year old you to make some good decisions right now so that thirty-five year old is able to bless the world like I know she's gonna.

JR: Yeah.

SJ: And that's part of— that's a picture, that's a story that I'm casting into the future. And I'm trying to get them to just buy in to the fact that they have a future, that there is a place for them in the next chapter of the story. So let's make some decisions now that will help them get there.

JR: Yeah. Wow. We're back to wisdom again.

SJ: Always. Hopefully.

JR: Hey, I always end these conversations with the question, who are the writers that make you wanna write?

SJ: So I'm...

JR: That's the question I'm asking you now.

SJ: I'm coming at it from a children's author standpoint, and yet I think my honest answer is that um, reading grownup stuff makes me wanna write for children.

JR: Yeah.

SJ: So maybe the ending you expected was the list of children's book authors — of which there are many fantastic ones that inspire me. But I honestly gotta say when it comes to finding inspiration for writing things for my children or for the children of my church or the larger world or community, I love finding writers who are writing, not for kids but for adults, that have these big concepts that I can try to distill down and communicate clearly and effectively to kids. And so by doing that it's like my inspiration for children's books are any and all writers that I'm coming across.

JR: Uh huh.

SJ: So like, John Newton. Not typically a children's author person.

JR: Right.

SJ: And yet I love... he's one of my favorite older authors. He's one of the dead guys that I read a lot of, and it's very common that I'll come across some concept or phrase or line or just big idea that he's talking through that makes me wanna, oh, I wanna phrase that in a way or write that in a way. And so I've written stories for my own kids — I've written some stuff that stems from thoughts that John Newton gave me.

JR: Uh huh.

SJ: Or I think of big Biblical theology books like Greg Beale and Tom Shiner kind of stuff. And just the way that they weave the whole story together and show the big picture of Scripture. I'm just fascinated with kinda trying to help my kids see how it all ties together like that. There was one I... I simply heard Andrew Peterson explaining something about one of his songs once, and it set me off on a tangent of diving into a particular concept, and it made me go write a whole book about it as well. And then

the *Where is Wisdom?* that we're talking about today... that simply came from a line in a sermon that my pastor was preaching.

JR: Oh cool.

SJ: So writers that make me want to write, my pastor, Matt Mason, would have to be in there as well 'cause he... when I talk about this Biblical imagination and sort of encountering the text and letting your imagination get set on fire, he's uh... the sermons he writes every week make me do that in my seat, every single Sunday.

JR: That's great. Well, Scott, thank you so much for being here. I loved to hear what you had to say. And I love thinking about your holistic way of thinking about all your work and all your life, and the ways that writing is one part of the whole big project of your life. So thanks for sharing that.

(THEME MUSIC FADES UP)

JR: And sorry your book is coming out at a time that's not great for book releases but, here's hoping and here's praying that good things come from it.

SJ: Thanks, I appreciate that. Thanks a lot for the conversation.

(THEME MUSIC)

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

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

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(THEME MUSIC OUT)

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