

(ACOUSTIC GUITAR THEME MUSIC)

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

(THEME MUSIC CONTINUES)

**JR:** Jen Pollock Michel is the author of three books, most recently, *Surprised by Paradox: The Promise of "And" in an Either-Or World*, which received Christianity Today's Award of Merit in the category of Beautiful Orthodoxy. Here's what Glenn Elliot said about *Surprised by Paradox*...

(THEME MUSIC FADES OUT)

**JR:** "What do you call a book that rattles our comfortable certainties, while somehow leaving us sturdier and more joyful, a book that dances in the mysteries without going mushy or cynical, a book that stubbornly insists we find God in the kitchen as much as the cloister? I call this book a paradox. I call it a wonder."

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

**JEN POLLOCK MICHEL:** I am so excited to be here!

**JR:** You are, um... a person who's done a lot of thinking about paradox. Your most recent book was *Surprised by Paradox*. And um... how does coming to grips with paradox make one a better writer? Have you — surely you've done some thinking along those lines.

**JPM:** Well, truthfully, when you sent that question, I was like that is a really good question. I don't know that I've always thought about it in terms of my writing life. I've thought about it a lot in terms of my spiritual life. But it reminded me of Alan Jacobs' book *How to Think*.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** And I have really appreciated that book and how he talks about thinking is not just like an intellectual exercise. That it is actually — it is a function of moral character. And I think paradox has the promise of forming the kind of virtues in us that we need, not just for good thinking, but for good living. You know, so there's a lot of curiosity that's required for paradox. I think there's humility that's required for paradox. I think there's patience, a patient paying attention to things. So... that makes you a good writer because those are the qualities, I mean, those are the virtues truthfully that you need for good writing.

**JR:** Right. Yeah.

**JPM:** That was kind of what initially came to mind.

**JR:** Um, that's a... I haven't read that Alan Jacobs book, but I need to, because I've heard good things about it.

**JPM:** Mmm...

**JR:** Um, and so he talks about writing as a— the moral dimension of thinking?

**JPM:** He does. You know, and I... I mean, I think we see that, don't we? Kind of in where we are, specifically, like in our society?

**JR:** Yeah!

**JPM:** Just all the fracturing, and the lack of charity, and the kind of culture of outrage. I mean, I think good thinking — when you think about the moral dimension of good thinking — all of that is required, right? Like, kind of thinking the best of a person who disagrees with you.

**JR:** Yeah.

**JPM:** Like, sustaining attention long enough to hear them out, you know?

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** And to... understand their position — the best of their position, not just the caricature of their position.

**JR:** Right. Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

**JPM:** So, isn't that wonderful? I think there's a lot of...

**JR:** Yeah, it's great!

**JPM:** Yeah.

**JR:** I can't remember if I've said this on this podcast or not, but it's something I say often enough I probably have. But Aquinas said, "The great enemy of truth is self-interest."

**JPM:** Mmmm...

**JR:** I get my idea of what I want to be true, and I don't... I'm not open to what's actually real and true.

**JPM:** Mmmmm....

**JR:** But... yep. Must be the same thing Alan Jacobs is saying.

**JPM:** And Jonathan Haidt, you know, is another person who's doing really interesting work on this. You know, *The Righteous Mind*. He talks about, like, we basically, we make our... moral reasoning is more a function of intuition, and then you come to the reasoning after your intuition.

**JR:** Yeah.

**JPM:** You know, you just sort of confirm what you think you know to be true in a very gut-level, visceral sense. And I think that's... I think that Aquinas quote kind of taps into it a little bit. Just kind of confirming what you want to be true. Um... yeah.

**JR:** Can you give us a working definition of paradox?

**JPM:** I can. Yeah. Ummm... you know, I think... it's interesting, because I think when I first started writing the book, I thought I was writing a book more kind of about mystery.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** And my editor said no, I think this is really about paradox. And when I think about the differences between those... I mean, mystery is kind of like... like, oh, we don't really... this is a vague, kind of nebulous concept or idea. And paradox is *not* that. Paradox is actually an assertion of truth. It's just a truth that seems self-contradictory, where you have to hold a couple of things in tension.

And there are paradoxes that are more... I mean, if we think about Scripture, in Scripture there are paradoxes that are a little bit more... just paradoxes of language, you know? So that, "the first shall be last, and the last shall be first." Well how can that— how can both of those things be true? You know? This doesn't seem to make any sense. And when you think about it long enough, you know what Jesus is saying, you know?

**JR:** Mmhm.

**JPM:** Umm... but there are paradoxes that are much harder to untangle. When we assert that Jesus is both God and Man. You know, fully God, fully man. So paradox isn't the moderation of two things that seem self-contradictory? Like... oh, kind of half-God, half-man? You know, if we

were to think about Jesus. No. *Fully* God, *fully* man.

And I really appreciate Chesterton on paradox, 'cause he, in his book *Orthodoxy* — and I think this is just such a wonderful way to think about it — he talks about paradox as an affirming of the white and the red and never the pink.

**JR:** Yeah! Yes!

**JPM:** You know, and he says the church — do you know that quote? It's so wonderful!

**JR:** I was just about to bring it up actually!

**JPM:** Oh really!

**JR:** Yeah, I mean when you started down that path, but you're doing great! Keep truckin'!

**JPM:** (laughs) I mean, I think that's, you know, he talks about... yeah, the church's hatred of pink. And so a lot of times we wanna moderate things? You wanna kind of find that compromise, middle road position. But that's *not* paradox. Paradox is the affirmation of these two things that seem like you can't hold them to be true at the same time.

**JR:** Yeah... yeah. As distinct from just a... are you drawing a distinction between a verbal paradox and something that goes deeper than that? Is that what you're getting at?

**JPM:** Well, I... I don't necessarily do that in the book. I've been helped by some people, you know — it's funny, 'cause after you write a book, you still keep learning about the thing you just wrote about.

**JR:** Sure.

**JPM:** So, somebody actually introduced me to a guy named Austin Freeman, who wrote his dissertation on paradox at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. And he was the one who kind of helped me think about the different kinds of paradoxes. He says that there are three different kinds of theological paradoxes. You know, I'm not an expert on those, like, very sophisticated, um, nuances of paradox. But I think... so in the book, I don't really talk about the difference, I guess.

**JR:** Mmhm.

**JPM:** But — although, there *are* differences.

**JR:** Okay. Yeah. Um... (pause) Your subtitle to your book is basically leaving behind the either-or and picking up that... both/and, or... something along those lines.

**JPM:** Mmhmm.

**JR:** Forgive me, I should... I don't have it right in front of me. Um, but so what happens when we move from an either/or mindset to a both/and mindset?

**JPM:** (deep breath) Yeah... I think an either/or mindset is kind of a constricted, sort of, umm... I would say unimaginative, and by virtue of being unimaginative, probably faithless position sometimes?

**JR:** Huh.

**JPM:** So, I talk about how, really, the book inauspiciously started in a counselor's office, you know, where I was in a hard relationship with a member of my extended family. And what I couldn't figure out was how I do I go forward in this relationship? And I kind of went to the counselor thinking, well, here are two alternatives, right?

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** Either I sever this relationship 'cause it's so dysfunctional, or I just suffer all the dysfunction and the lying and just pretend it's not happening so I can love this person. And the counselor said, "Do you think there could be more alternatives than that?" And it was such a simple, obvious question, but I thought how often do I actually do that in my life?

**JR:** Hmm.

**JPM:** You know, I sort of reduce things to... you know, these two kind of options, two alternatives. And I actually — in my spiritual life — you know, prayer sort of is like offering to God those two options.

**JR:** (chuckles) Yeah, right.

**JPM:** Do I go? Do I stay? You know...

**JR:** Right.

**JPM:** And he's like, ummm.... neither— D. You gave me A, B, and I'm gonna give you K as the answer.

**JR:** Yeah, right. Yeah.

**JPM:** And so I think if we, if— I don't think everything is a both/and. I wanna be clear about that. But I think we need to be able to enter into the possibility that our imagination is constricted, limited, and there are possibilities beyond what we can imagine. And sometimes that both/and is the position of imagining those different possibilities. I often think it's — the both/and — is the position of sustaining tension and dissonance.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** Which is something I don't *really* like to do in my life. I like things to kind of be easy and tidy and neat, you know. I wanna know that I'm doing the right thing, and that I'm on the right way, you know?

**JR:** Yeah.

**JPM:** And... (pause) I think the both/and position, um... it doesn't let us resolve things as neatly, but it *is* the way of faith, often.

**JR:** You know, I think that's — you make a great point. 'Cause both/and, I think — to move toward both/and, you know, feels like you're moving toward some sort of squishiness, or loosey-goosey or whatever.

**JPM:** Mmhm.

**JR:** "Taking the easy way out," so to speak. And you make a great point when you say holding those things in tension is *not* the easy way out.

**JPM:** No.

**JR:** It's difficult.

**JPM:** Right. And there... trust me, I think there are people that would use the both/and as kind of a slippery slope. You know, like a kind of theological mushiness. But I think that is the difference between, just... talking about an affirmation of mystery versus an affirmation of paradox. I do think that paradox helps us to affirm things that are true, not — so it's not just that we affirm things that are unknowable, you know?

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** But we affirm things that are true. The tension is in the understanding of that truth, that it just doesn't kind of fit our categories,



um, and our sort of neat, kind of... easy, tidy formulations.

**JR:** Yeah. Yeah yeah. (pause) Yeah, it's the... um... (pause) Um... (sigh) How to put this? I mean, it feels — sometimes when we talk about the both/and, it feels like we're moving toward some kind of slippery slope toward relativism or something.

**JPM:** Mmhm.

**JR:** But... but on the other hand if the truth turns out to be both/and, then you've got to hold... you've gotta to that truth. You can't... what am I saying here?

**JPM:** Mmhmm!

**JR:** It's, you're not getting on a slippery slope if it's true!

**JPM:** Mmhmm.

**JR:** (chuckles) You're not getting mushy if that's what the truth turns out to be.

**JPM:** Right. (pause) And, and... I mean, I just love that... you know, you think about the Incarnation. I mean, the ultimate sort of paradox. And how many centuries the Christian church had to wrestle through that. Wrestle to kind of articulate what that meant? You know, what it... wrestle to understand it, wrestle to articulate it, wrestle to understand the implications of what that meant for understanding who God was. Like, they were doing the hard work of thinking.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** And um... and I think that's the beauty of paradox, you know. Is that it invites us into that kind of participatory... kind of role? Umm... I mean,

sometimes I wish everything, truth were just sort of handed to me in these nice, easy... like, you open it up, and it's IKEA furniture. Put it together!

**JR:** Yeah, right!

**JPM:** Even a dummy can do this. And I think there's something way more beautiful that's offered to us. Um... as a Christian, particularly, I believe that.

**JR:** Hmm. Yeah. Well, I have, um... here's something I wanna talk through with you, since you've done more thinking about paradox than I have. (pause) I've often, um... here and there made the case that story is a great way to help people grasp paradox in a way that, um... you know, some sort of more formal, you know... (pause) A sermon or an essay can help somebody grasp... paradox. Um... because there's something about the way stories are structured, and the idea of the eucatastrophe and things like this, that, that... lends itself to helping us grasp things that are really hard to— I mean, by definition, a paradox is hard to work out rationally or with our reason.

But... (pause) you tell me. Is the um... is that, um... maybe I'm not being generous enough to... (pause) to more formal forms of writing than storytelling. How important is, um (pause) I mean, for ins— also I should point out that Jesus, in communicating paradox told fictional stories. And um... but anyway, what position do you take on that in terms... are there... are there other good ways besides storytelling to communicate paradox?

**JPM:** Mmm. I mean, I think you're right. I think you're right to say that if we wanted to rely just only on kind of reasons, dissertations, and propositional truth, like, we'd end up kind of in a circle. You know, we can say these things, we can assert these truths, but it doesn't mean we're any further into understanding them. So I think you're right to say there are other ways. And I think the Bible makes incredible use of narratives and image and symbol and story.

And I was actually just re-reading for a talk I'm giving, um, Hans Boersma has a book — he's a professor at Regent College in Vancouver — and um, he talks about how theology has suffered from a lot of control. We want to kind of... we want to rationally, um... we rely on our reason, and we want everything sort of understandable and systematized. And he said we need to actually recover use of narrative and image and symbol.

**JR:** Yeah.

**JPM:** And that sounds true to me. I actually... I wish I could remember the quote, but I'm staring at a book by Robert Alter, who's um, a Hebrew scholar. And um — not a believer. I think he's probably Jewish, but I'm not sure. I don't know that he's a believing Jew, you know, maybe. But anyways, he's written a lot about how, um... how striking it is that so much of the Old Testament is written in prose.

**JR:** Huh.

**JPM:** And he says that that allows us to sort of grapple with the complexity of what it means to be human. And I think that seems true to me. That um, as you kind of — like, you think about the story of Jacob in the Old Testament, and there's a lot that we just have to kind of puzzle over. Like, was he a good guy or was he a bad guy, you know?

**JR:** Yeah.

**JPM:** And there's no explicit kind of statement on his moral virtues or vices. We just have this collection of stories. And again, I think it allows us to sort of participate in a different way. It engages us in a different way. So I think I'm with you, that we kind of find a limit — propositional truth is limited — and story has a lot of possibility.

Which is why I really think the task of, um... (pause) Christian writers — and I'm excited to see a lot of Christian writers turn to story as kind of a, as the more primary medium of communicating truth. I think we've been

nervous about that. I think lot of writers are nervous to share their own stories. Like, is that so self-indulgent and so self-focused? And it certainly can be.

**JR:** Sure.

**JPM:** But it can be an incredibly powerful way of articulating truth that can't be sort of neatened and tidied into those propositional statements.

**JR:** Yeah. You know, we get our... we have in our head the idea of what authority ought to look like.

**JPM:** Mmm.

**JR:** And I'm borrowing from N.T. Wright here when he says people who think of themselves as being really serious about the authority of Scripture... well, if you're serious about the authority of Scripture, then one thing you have to do is take Scripture on its own terms.

**JPM:** Yeeess...

**JR:** And not — you know, my idea of authority is somebody's gonna tell me what to do, and...

**JPM:** Mmhmm.

**JR:** And therefore, I look to Scripture to give me a list of rules. But... but what if, I mean... (pause) I don't know where this is that N.T. Wright says this, but he says, it's like you go to your drill sergeant expecting to be given orders, but he says, "Once upon a time..."

**JPM:** (laughs)

**JR:** (chuckles) You know? But if we're serious about the authority of

Scripture, we need to take it on its own terms.

**JPM:** Mmhmm...

**JR:** Which, much of the time, is story or poetry. And sometimes it's lists of dos and don'ts, but not all that often.

**JPM:** Mmhmm!

**JR:** Compared— as a proportion of what's there.

**JPM:** It's interesting. I have had so many conversations about this with my 17-year-old son, who's actually in a period of just kind of examining his faith, and asking really rigorous, intellectual questions. And I think that's a really important... I think it's really important to do. I'm glad he's doing it. And I'm glad that I'm having — we're able to have all these conversations with him.

But one thing he's asking me is why didn't God make it easier? Like, why not just give us a book, like, that— it's universal truth for all time, forever, you know. And in some ways we have that book, but in other ways we have book that's so — it is enculturated. It comes to us from a particular time and from a particular people group. And so like you look at the Old Testament — you know, there are some hard things in the Old Testament! Why didn't God just say "Slavery is wrong! End of story!" Like, why not that from the very beginning? And that's *not* what we have in Scripture, and we often really *want* that.

But I think we have a way more beautiful book. I think we have a wiser book. I think we have a book that is actually forming in us the virtues that we talked about at the very beginning. The virtues of thinking.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** And um, the moral character that's required for thinking. And

thinking is a part of faith! It's not the whole of it, but I think it's part of it.

**JR:** (pause) Yeah... that's... so much good stuff. Alright, switching gears a little bit... I've been looking at your back and forth with Shawn Smucker that y'all do on your blogs.

**JPM:** Mmhmm.

**JR:** Tell me how... so, he writes these Dear Jen notes, and you write Dear Shawn notes. How did that get started?

**JPM:** That got started from a Twitter conversation last summer. Umm... I... I think I might have responded to something he said, I don't know. I was curious how he was talking about his domestic life and his professional life as a writer. And I was just... it just sort of piqued my curiosity, 'cause I think a lot of times women writers have that conversation. Like, how do I sort of balance my domestic obligations and my professional ambitions. And I was like, oh, here's a guy who's talking about that. And he's got six kids!

**JR:** Yeah.

**JPM:** And then to kind of learn a little bit about his story... when writing is lean, and he's driving Uber.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** So it just came from there, and I said to Shawn, "Would you be interested in just hosting kind of a... you know, epistolary conversation on our blogs?" And he was like, "Yeah, that sounds great."

**JR:** (chuckles)

**JPM:** And for me, letters is, like, such a low stakes kind of writing. I just

get so tied up into knots. I mean, it's kind of like as soon as I sit down at the computer, and then it's like (gasp) now is the time to work on the book! You know, I seize up. I have nothing to say. But like, oh, I can say, or — whether it's a book or an essay or it's something kind of formal and I'm gonna have to turn it in to an editor and lots of people are gonna read it. Whereas a letter just feels like... there's a lot of room in it to kind of be exploratory and not be definitive on anything. And I've been really appreciating the conversation.

**JR:** (pause) Well, I— it's just fun to have that little glimpse. I need to provide a link to that in the show notes for this, because it's really been fun to see two writers talking about kind of whatever's on your mind, as you said.

**JPM:** Mmhmm!

**JR:** It's pretty wide-ranging stuff. And one thing I've learned from this is that you're a Capon fan.

**JPM:** I am... (laughs)

**JR:** Robert Farrar Capon, yeah. His book— oh, my goodness. *The Supper of the Lamb* has probably had more of an impact on my writing life than the last— of anything else I've read in the last five or ten years. I just love that book. So I'm glad to know you love it to.

**JPM:** I do! You know, I re-read it over Christmas, because I was, umm... moving into a season of a lot of cooking. (laughs)

**JR:** Yeah.

**JPM:** And so I thought I just need to remember why this is important. And I need to just have a vision for why this matters. And I was like, okay, I just gotta re-read *The Supper of the Lamb*.

**JR:** Yeah. Yeah... well... his... (pause) His... the way he awakens the reader to the, um... well, the “thinginess: of things, you know?”

**JPM:** Mmhmm... yes...

**JR:** To the... to loving things for their own... for their own sake, and on their own terms. Which is a little bit about what we’ve been talking about in these other matters. Receiving truth as it comes to us, and the facts of the world as they come to us, instead of thinking about how we wish they were different. It’s just made a huge impact on me. I love his work.

**JPM:** One of the things that I was mentioning to Shawn in a letter was just this vision of wholeness? Like, to... his work? Like, what he’s commending is a vision of wholeness for the Maker. And that’s a word that I’ve been using a lot recently, because I think... I’d like to think of myself more as a maker than a writer. Because there are so many things I’m making in my life.

**JR:** Yeah.

**JPM:** You know, I’m making books, and... all kinds of... writing all kinds of things. I’m making that. But I’m making a marriage, you know? I’m a partner in making a marriage. And I’m making, in terms of the parenting that I do with my children, I’m actually making a home. Like, I have a house, and I’m trying to make it a space that is welcoming to people. And I’m making things at church as I direct a variety of different things — a magazine, I’m an editor there. So just... you know, I just, I... (pause) And so... one of the things that Capon had said was that “the eye of creativity is the eye that conceives all things into loveliness.”

**JR:** Yes.

**JPM:** That was a phrase that had struck me, and I thought (gasp) *that’s* a vision for *all* the making that I’m doing, Whether I’m standing at the stove or whether I’m sitting at my laptop, I’m conceiving things into loveliness,



imagining the lovely... the lovely world that God has made and that God will remake.

**JR:** Yeah. Yeah, that's um... and I think it's in the same part of the book he says, you know, boredom is— he talks about boredom is the great enemy of goodness, really.

**JPM:** Mmmm...

**JR:** The eye that can look on the great beauties of the world and be bored is in trouble.

**JPM:** Mmhmm...

**JR:** Well, that's... oh, I just love that stuff. Making... can you say... just give me an idea of *why* you find the word “making” so helpful.

**JPM:** Well, making—

**JR:** Um—

**JPM:** Yeah, go ahead.

**JR:** Well, making, so helpful, especially with regard to... how does that help you reframe your conception of yourself as a writer when you think, well, this is just another thing that I make.

**JPM:** Well, it helps me to remember that I'm made in the image of a maker.

**JR:** Mhm.

**JPM:** You know. And so making feels like... something that directly connects me to who God is. You know, in the beginning, God made. (chuckles) And so... as opposed to just “writing.” And I also think it helps

me see things less in competition with each other.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** You know, my writing life isn't competing against my domestic life. You know, I am making. All of these things are making. And whether or not, um... and I also don't know what publishing will hold for me in future years. I mean, I can't say that I'll be writing in the same way in ten years. I mean, I hope so! I hope. But who knows, you know? But I know... I think a lot of times we think, well, if this thing ends, then that's *the* end.

**JR:** Right.

**JPM:** Well, whether or not publishing ends for me, I will still be making. And there will also be— there's going to be an expiration date on my domestic life in the sense of that I work — next— actually, this spring we're sending number two off. You know, two will be gone, and three will still be at home. So my domestic life is gonna change, and it's gonna evolve, but I'm always gonna be a maker.

**JR:** Yeah.

**JPM:** And it's just helping me to imagine so broadly this kind of idea of calling. Um... yeah. It's helpful to me.

**JR:** Yeah. And I'm sure you know that the word "poiesis" that we get poetry from just means making.

**JPM:** Oh!

**JR:** So the poet is a maker.

**JPM:** No, I didn't know that actually.

**JR:** Ah. Well, there you go.

**JPM:** Thank you!

**JR:** That's um... (pause) I can't put my finger on why that matters so much to me, but I just love the fact that a poet is just a maker.

**JPM:** Mmm...

**JR:** It just *feels*, you know, kind of like... it just feels so much more down to earth than... poetry.

**JPM:** Yes...

**JR:** Which doesn't. (laughs) I mean, I realize any poet will tell you it is sort of an earthy endeavor. But the word "poetry" we have so many highfalutin' ideas about it. And the idea that it's the same... "poiesis" is what's used to describe, you know, cabinetry as well poetry.

**JPM:** Mmm hmm! And you can make your bed! (laughs)

**JR:** (laughs) Yeah, that's right!

**JPM:** You can conceive your bedroom into loveliness by making your bed! Spoken like a true mother. But you're right, it has arms big enough for the ordinary and the small, and it makes what feels very cosmic into something beautifully ordinary.

**JR:** Yeah. That's right. Okay. Well, let's... I wanna wrap up with the question I always wrap up with, and that is who are the writers who make you want to write.

**JPM:** Mmhmm... (pause) I mean, I read a lot of spiritual writing because that's the kind of writing I do. I, um, *love* writers who can texture writing —

spiritual writing — with like real life. And so, um... you know, the only blog I subscribe to is Lore Ferguson Wilbert's.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** And um, I love her writing. I've read her book that's forthcoming. I'm just really grateful for her. I just feel like she really draws people in to a textured, material, physical, earthly life, as much as a spiritual one. Um, and I would say one of my favorite books is Winn Collier's *Love Big, Be Well*. Um, I don't know if people are familiar with that. I feel like that book needs to be on everybody's shelves. And it's fiction, but it is... it's just spiritual writing that's just textured. It's letters of a pastor to his congregation. And it just... I don't know, it has a kind of— it has an earthiness to it.

I also love Lauren Winner. She's kind of a favorite writer. I'm often opening... I have to say I think... I think it was this book *Surprised by Paradox*. I kind of got stuck with the introduction, and I'm like, "How did Lauren Winner start *Wearing God?*" I'll open that and try to, you know, imitate some of the things she's done.

**JR:** (chuckles)

**JPM:** In most — I can only talk about nonfiction people, which is bad, which sort of reveals my bias toward nonfiction. A nonfiction writer that is *not* a writer on faith is Caitlin Flanagan. I don't know if your listeners are familiar with her.

**JR:** I don't—

**JPM:** You don't know her?

**JR:** I don't know her work, yeah. But I think somebody else has mentioned her on this podcast though.

**JPM:** Okay. She has... I think she has several books out. She's an essayist as well, so you can often find her in *The Atlantic*, is where I read her a lot. She had an essay back in December — which was incredible — on the abortion debate. And she doesn't necessarily draw the same conclusions I do, but she is... so brave. She's like, so unequivocal in her writing. And I love that because I think it's hard to do? It's hard to be, you know, very direct and bold and brave and say, "No, this is what I think is true." And what she essentially says in that essay is while I am an abortion supporter, there's no doubt to me that abortion is the taking of a life, and it's an act of violence. You know? And I mean, this is published in *The Atlantic*! (laughs)

**JR:** You're talking about the essay "Losing the *Rare* in 'Safe, Legal, and Rare'"? Is that the one you're talking about?

**JPM:** Umm... I have it...

**JR:** That would've been just a month ago.

**JPM:** I think the — I have "The Dishonesty of the Abortion Debate," but maybe it was titled something different in the print magazine? Sometimes I find that print versus online...

**JR:** 'Cause it turns out I *have* read her, and I thought that was a great essay. I didn't make the connection.

**JPM:** Okay, so it's probably the same... it's the same one. I'm sure it's the same one. Because it came out in the December issue.

**JR:** Uh huh.

**JPM:** I have a lot of admiration for people who can write... well? But not just well in the sense of, "Oh, these beautiful sentences." But, like... persuasively. And very emphatically.

**JR:** Right. It's refreshing to find a writer who loves reality and wants to help their readers align with reality, even when it turns out that their understanding of reality is different from mine.

**JPM:** Right.

(THEME MUSIC FADES UP)

**JR:** Yeah. Alright, well, Jen, thank you so much for being on The Habit.

**JPM:** Yeah, you're welcome! Thanks for having me!

**JR:** Well, let's do it again someday.

**JPM:** That sounds good. (chuckles)

**JR:** Great. Thanks, bye.

**JPM:** Bye bye.

(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](http://jessraymusic.com) to hear more of her beautiful songs.

**JR:** The Habit Membership is a library of resources for writers by me, Jonathan Rogers. More importantly, The Habit is a hub of community

where like-minded writers gather to discuss their work and give each other a little more courage. Find out more at [TheHabit.co](http://TheHabit.co).

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(THEME MUSIC OUT)