

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode #06: When Looking Good is Actually Bad

Amy:

Oh, no, we know how to play the game, girl. We know how to couch it in terms that just seem glorious.

Cheri:

You know, I wasn't going to say the phrase "play the game," but since you had to go there ...

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Hey, this is Cheri Gregory, and you're listening to Episode #06 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules.

This week, my de-LIGHT-full co-host, Amy Carroll, and I are debriefing with each other after our interview with Suzie Eller about her new book *Come With Me: Discovering the Beauty of Following Where He Leads*.

Cheri:

One of the things that really grabbed me when we were talking with Suzie is ... she talked about Peter being the one who was waving his hand at Christ saying, basically, "Notice me, notice me, pick me, pick me." That's just such an image for me.

As we've talked before, I'm the classic teacher's pet. I really didn't care as much about whether my classmates liked me as I cared about really impressing the teacher.

What are some other ways we do this as adults? We're not in the classroom anymore, but I think there's a lot of ways that we are still raising our hand, wanting to be noticed.

Amy:

One of the strange things that I actually wrote about, that people have said, "When I read the book, I didn't think I was a perfectionist, and then I realized I was." This was one of the areas that people have talked about that with, is that my service has been my way of waving my hand around. Now, the problem with that is service just looks so *virtuous*, doesn't it? It looks so great to the outside world ... "that Amy Carroll, man,

she's always in there working ..." especially at church, because they're my people, and they're the ones I want to impress. "She's always in there doing whatever it takes."

Beneath that veneer of virtue was something a lot uglier, and it was this motivation of wanting to impress, of wanting to fit in, of wanting people to think I was virtuous. I realized one day that I want to be known as a godly woman. Well, mmm, that can be good, but I had to think about *Well, what's my motivation behind that?* It was still approval. Crazy.

Cheri:

I'm guessing that when people said, "Amy, we can always count on you," that felt wonderful.

Amy:

Oh, absolutely. One of the masks that I've worn is competence. Again, it looks virtuous, it has that veneer, but then the motivation behind it is really the little girl sitting in the seat, waving her hand. "Call on me, call on me, look at me, approve of me." Those motives, man. They'll get you every time.

Cheri:

Mine is a little more sinister. I have always thought of myself as being a problem-solver, that you can count on me to fix whatever is broken. More recently, I've had to realize *No, I'm not so much of a problem solver as I'm a problem-preventer*. I go ahead, and I anticipate what the problems might be, and then I take care of them before they happen, which can be good, don't get me wrong. But sometimes, I'm doing it in a very controlling and even manipulative fashion.

Sometimes, the problems actually need to happen, because other people in my life need to recognize the consequences of their choices. It looks like help. It looks like I'm a problem-solver, but really, I'm a problem-preventer, and ... back to what we've talked about before ... I'm a pain-preventer. The pain I care about is mine, not so much the other person's, but mine.

All that time, I'm busy bragging about what I've done. "Guess what almost happened, but it didn't happen? Yay, me." I don't say those words, but the story comes out and I'm expecting the accolades.

So, how do we recognize this ***need to be seen*** when it's happening?

I'll go ahead and answer it for me. I was at a seminar a year ago now, and the leader was asking us to brainstorm. I still remember my answer, because he turned around to me and said, "That's excellent." I swear I heard the alleluia chorus, the angels sang. I didn't hear another thing for the next 10 minutes, and then I recognized what was happening. I recognized that, literally, my brain was being bathed in adrenaline [I meant to say "dopamine"], and oxytocin, and all these wonderful, pleasurable chemicals. I wasn't paying any attention to anything anybody else had said. Other people had very good ideas that I could have been listening to, and learning from, and writing down, because I had paid a lot of money to go to this seminar, but no. I was sitting here feeling fabulous. I'm guessing it's the way a drug addict feels when they've just had a hit, because I'd had a hit. It was definitely a chemical hit.

I was so conscious of it. I have to believe it was the Holy Spirit at work, because normally I don't notice it so quickly, and I went, "Oh my goodness, I didn't let it pass." It could have been great in the moment, and then I could have moved on, but I was just sitting there, basking in it as if it mattered long-term. It mattered in the moment; it was nice.

Amy:

Sure. Sure.

Cheri:

But moving on... That really hit me, that I have a need to be one of the first to respond, to give that incisive input that will then earn me that compliment, so I can then sit back and literally isolate from everybody else, for whatever period of time, feeling really, really good about myself. That really struck me.

Amy:

You know what strikes me about what you just said, Cheri, is that it's a — and I don't mean this towards you, because I'm applying it to myself — it's a perversion of our gifts. I always think of you as brainy girl. You are brainy, and it's so glorious, and you are such an intellectual, and that's one of the reasons I enjoy hearing your ideas so much, but what we do is we take the gift that we have, and instead of using it to glorify God, we use it to get approval.

Cheri:

Did you have to say that?

Amy:

I might identify with that.

Cheri:

Here we go. I'm going to say a positive and a negative, because that's what you're making me think here. First of all, you were one of the first people — because you and I did speaker coaching as part of our path to becoming friends — you were one of the first to really give me permission to be "Cheri Gregory: the Girly Geek Who Speaks", and make me realize I didn't have to hide the academic side of me.

On the other hand, what you just illustrated is I was sitting there in self-worship. That's what I was doing. I was so self-focused at that point, I was basically going, "Yay, me! Yay, me!" whereas I could have been going, "Yay, God. Thank you so much. I am learning so much right now. I'm so glad to be here." I could have turned it around to gratitude; instead, it stayed so very self-focused that it was unhealthy.

Amy:

Oh, I love that you just talked about gratitude. I heard Suzie ... she taught our staff devotions recently ... and she talked about examining where our joy is coming from.

In that situation, or in a situation where I'm getting some accolades for the service I've done, where is the joy coming from, or what are we taking that compliment, how are we processing that?

If there's joy that is, "Wow, I'm so excited that God was able to use my gift in this situation. Thank you, God ..." **if the gratitude's going towards God, then that's showing that our joy is in the right place.** If the gratitude is just that warm/fuzzy from gaining acceptance, it's a red flag. It's an indicator that we need to do a heart check.

Cheri:

That makes so much sense, though, because what I'm hearing is that the initial good feeling isn't the problem. Feeling good that I had a good answer to contribute, that was okay. It's the direction, then, that my gratitude and my joy went. That's fixable.

Amy:

Yeah!

Cheri:

That's something that the Holy Spirit will convict on. It's something that I can learn to notice.

The other thing I find, at least, is let's say I find myself in the midst of what I've just labeled self-worship again. I can repent, I can confess, and, at least for me, I can laugh at myself and say, "Whoops, here we go again." Not to trivialize, but as a recovering perfectionist, I can wallow in my mistakes for days when they're not worth it. To be able to say, "Whoops, I'm sorry. Thank You for the conviction. Let's have a do-over. Thank you," and to take that self-focus and move it off myself without a ton of groveling ... which, again, is self-focused ... is something that I can work on and practice. That totally, totally works for me.

Amy:

There's a lot of hope in what you just said, because we don't have to consider ourselves an utter failure if we recognize that our joy is in the wrong place. It's an indicator that we need to redirect. That's it.

Cheri:

Instead of, "Oh my goodness, I completely failed," it's, "Ooh, course correction. It's time for a course correction." I like that.

Suzie talked about how John grew into becoming "the beloved disciple of Christ." Now, he called himself that all along, and you asked the question: "How do we grow into being Amy the beloved disciple of Christ, or in my case, Cheri the beloved disciple of Christ?" What do you think that looks like?

Amy:

When I read Suzie's book the first time, I remember laughing out loud when she pointed out that John had called himself the beloved disciple and Jesus didn't yet. That is so funny.

Then when she talked with us about growing into that, I thought, "There's a lot of beauty in that. What if I started considering myself Amy, the 13th beloved disciple? How would that change me?" I really started thinking. John believed that. It was true, of course.... Several years ago, I had an event planner say to me, "I am Jesus's favorite, and so are you," and I loved that. I thought, "John really was the beloved disciple, even if Jesus ... it was never recorded that He said it, but so are we."

How would it change us to call ourselves that and own that, and then what would we look like decades down the road, like John when he wrote the epistles of John, and

transmitted that love of God to us? That belief changed him. I thought, "That belief would change me. I need to step into knowing I'm the beloved disciple."

Cheri:

For me, one of the bad rules that I've wrestled with and become much more aware of in the last few years is "You can be yourself *or* you can be loved." I felt like I had to pick one. I could either be myself and nobody would like me, or I could be loved by seeking approval from other people, doing what they wanted, following all the rules, that sort of thing.

What hit me a few years ago is when you take the word **be** and **loved**, and you put them together, you get **beloved**. The truth that I am learning to live in is that I can be myself and be loved, because I am **beloved ... be-loved ...** by God. I love the idea. I had never thought of it that way. To really think of myself and to call myself "Cheri the beloved disciple of Christ."

And what would it be like to wake up in the morning and to put that on as my primary identity? It's another way of getting up in the morning and saying, "I'm pre-approved."

Amy:

Several years ago, I was speaking at an event, and I was given a gift. It was a bracelet that said beloved on it. I was walking around at the event that day, and I realized that the bracelet had actually been made by a local artisan, and so there were a lot of girls at the event that had these bracelets, but theirs had different words on them. Well, my word that I always love is joy, and I thought, "Gosh, I wish they would have given me a bracelet that said joy on it ... " in my head, I didn't say it out loud. I was griping about my present, and I really felt like the Lord said, "No. That's your word. That's the word for you."

Then, Cheri, you know what I realized? I was doing this exercise with my Sunday school class one Sunday, and we were looking up the meanings of our names, and the meaning of my name is beloved.

Cheri:

No way!

Amy:

Amy means *beloved*. They had chosen that gift specifically for me. It totally went over my head. God reaffirmed that that was the word for me. It was just such a beautiful reminder. I wear that bracelet, and I tear up every time I put it on, and it is that idea of the pre-approved, that I am loved, that I am Amy the beloved disciple.

Cheri:

I love that.

As a side note, do you know what my name means?

Amy:

No.

Cheri:

Well, it's a French word, and it can have two meanings. My mother told me that she chose it because it means *sweetheart* ... *mon cherie* ... but the other meaning of chere is *very expensive*. Depending on the day, my husband will tell you what my name actually means.

Amy:

That's hilarious. Depending on what the credit card bill looks like that day ...

Cheri:

Beloved, sweetheart – kind of in the same ballpark.

Amy:

How interesting. See, our friendship was meant to be.

Cheri:

Absolutely!

When Suzie was telling the story about Peter fishing, catching no fish, and then Christ saying, "Throw the net out again," and Peter making the difficult decision, even though

he was the fisherman who knows better, he still decided to trust, and he went ahead and cast the nets out, and he caught all of the fish. And "It was never about the fish."

It made me wonder: *What are our "fish"?* In other words, what do we get so focused on that we think is the point of what we're doing, and then, at some point, hopefully we realize, no, no, it's not about the fish, it was never about the fish?

Amy:

Well, I realized, for me, that it's my to-do list. I'm a productivity freak, I guess, and my to-do list become supreme in my life so often. I get so super focused on that, of producing, of checking off everything on the list, of getting it done, that my people seem in the way, and that's such the wrong way around. How about you?

Cheri:

I'm totally there with you with the list. I think, for me, my list is safe, because I know how to do things, and I know how to accomplish the things on my list.

I'm working on a research paper right now, and I'm having so much fun finding all the articles I need because it's so doable, and it doesn't involve emotion. I *am* an emotional person, but that's the minefield in my life. So finding articles, reading articles, writing this research paper, it takes work, but I absolutely know I can (back to the magic word — *control* it) and I can have the guaranteed outcome, which I think is what the fish are. I think the fish is the guaranteed outcome we're after, or at least that's how I see it.

For me, I'm having to look at the relationships in my life. I have a 25-year-old daughter and a 23-year-old son, and for me ... back to what you said ... the messiness of relationships, that the people in our life aren't accomplishments. We never check them off our list. We may have dreams for them, but they don't match their dreams for themselves. We may have standards we'd like them to live up to, but they don't match the choices they actually make. For me, it's so easy, then, to just withdraw completely and say, "Well fine," basically, "if you're not going to play by my rules, I'm done. I'm not going to play the game."

But love isn't a game. Love is an all or nothing commitment.

If there's anything that I'm slowly learning, it's that I'm really not good at this unconditional love thing, because unconditional love has no conditions, funny thing about it. Learning to walk away from the expectations, learning to walk away from the rules, learning to walk away from the checklist of how I would know if I was a good mother, or a good wife, or a good teacher (in the case of my students) and say, "I'm just going to be here in this messy thing called relationship. And the most important thing is

that we stay in communication, and that we wrestle whatever this is out together for as long as it takes."

Ugh, "...as long as it takes"?!? I want a timeline. I want to know when I'm going to be done so I can know when I can feel successful.

I think I've used the word success enough times, maybe that's my "fish" — that sense of succeeding, finally, and having something to show for it.

Amy:

Right. We've said the word *product* so many times, and the problem here, the real problem, is that our fish are products. They're external things, and God is so ... I just am convinced ... so unimpressed, unconcerned about our externals. It's the internal the He wants us to focus on, because that's what He's focused on.

Cheri:

Be sure to check out the web page for this episode at CheriGregory.com for this week's give-away and free downloads. And we'd sure appreciate it if you could share this episode with your friends via Facebook ... you'll find easy one-click buttons for sharing right there on the web page.

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We hope you've enjoyed this week's episode of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules with Cheri Gregory and Amy Carroll.

For today, grow your grit ... embrace God's grace ... and when you run across a bad rule, by all means BREAK it!