

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode #08: Making Failure Your Friend

Amy:

Cheri, don't you think every perfectionist needs a friend like Kathi?

Cheri:

Oh my goodness, I just feel like I spend so much time just sitting back and watching going, "How does she do that?"

<music>

Cheri:

Hey, this is Cheri Gregory, and you're listening to Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Today, my delightful co-host Amy Carroll and I are talking with Kathi Lipp about making failure your friend. You may not be a woman in ministry, but we know that you'll be able to apply Kathi's humor, how-to's, and hope to your work, your mothering, your marriage, or your every day life.

I'm just going to briefly introduce my friend, Kathy, who is a wife, a mom, a speaker, and author. Easily the most supportive and encouraging person I know. If I were to use one word to describe Kathi, it would be generous.

Kathi thank you so much for joining us today.

Kathi:

Oh my goodness, well that's quite an introduction. After all my rants on Facebook, I don't know that other people would consider me supportive and generous, but thank you. That you think that means the world to me.

Cheri:

Well, you have had a lot to show for your ministry. I probably have my numbers off, but you have about 16 books, a popular podcast that just celebrated it's 100th episode, you've got some e-courses, the Finally Clutter-free Conference, you lead a team of contractors and intern. I'm sure that a lot of people look at you at go, "Oh my goodness, she is just so lucky. All of this came so easily for her." I want to start out by asking you what is your secret? How does everything you attempt just turn out so perfectly the first time? Let us in on this.

Kathi:

Okay, so I'll tell you the assumption most people make. Can I tell you that?

Cheri:

Absolutely.

Kathi:

You knew Roger was going to have to be a part of this conversation at some point. I've got a pretty terrific husband, who is an engineer and is kind of amazing. They assume that anything I've done well is because of Roger.

Cheri:

Oh my goodness.

Kathi:

Which I would say is true to a certain extent, but it is kind of funny to me. People tell me all the time, "Well if I had a Roger, then I could do X, Y, and Z." The secret to my success is I think success looks very different on both sides. What looks successful to other people feels gut-wrenching on this side so much of the time. It feel like failure so much of the time. It's kind of funny that to the rest of the world it seems successful, and I'm the one who's saying, "Why aren't we going more?" Because we've tried so much that has just completely fallen on its face. You mention making failure your friend. I don't like failure, but I guess I've come to the realization it's a necessary part of what we're doing here.

I really do believe this is a ministry and a business. I believe that I have to be wise in what we're doing. It's interesting when you look at the course I'm taking, half of them are ministry courses and half of them are business courses. I believe that's biblical. You look at the shrewd master, who has given his 3 servants different responsibilities really because of the amount of money he's given. He's not saying, "Oh, well, you know, you invested in Jesus' name, so it's okay we lost everything." No, it's not.

I want to be wise with my resources and my resources mostly in what I'm doing are people. It's important to me that they are working well for our ministry/business, and two that they are growing at the same time, because if this isn't working on both sides then we need to reevaluate our relationship. I've had to reevaluate my relationship with a lot of my contractors. It's not that they're not brilliant people, it's just maybe not a good fit. The ministry side of me wants to hang on to people for years til they can do what I need them to do, but the business side of me and honoring all of that and being wise in it means sometimes we have to end relationships. It breaks my heart because it feels like a failure each and every time, but I've also seen that people have gone on to do really kid of incredible things when they've been released from what they're not supposed to be doing.

Amy:

That's so awesome. I've been reading the book of Acts, and you know anytime as Christians we think that failure isn't part of the package with ministry, we should go back and read Acts.

Kathi:

I think I'll need to go back and read Acts.

Amy:

It's so awesome.

Kathi:

You know, it's so true that I always with I grew during good times, but I don't. I grow during the hard times and the questioning. Cheri knows, probably about a year and a half ago, I was ready to quit everything because I just felt like things were not happening. I thought, "Am I doing this for my ego? Am I doing this for finances?" I knew I wasn't doing it for finances, that was pretty obvious by our bank statement. At one point, I was very content to just say, "God, I give all this up because I don't feel like I'm being faithful with what you're doing." Those conversations are hard, and you have to get to the point where you admit your failure, and God can do great things with that.

Cheri:

You've known me for I think about 10 years now, so what I'm wondering is from your perspective what's the difference between how you see someone like me- I'm more of a classical perfectionist.

Kathi:

Right.

Cheri:

How would you say the difference between how I respond to failure and how you tend to respond to failure.

Kathi:

I do have an example.

Cheri:

Okay.

Kathi:

I think that my approach to trying things is throwing a whole bunch of stuff against the wall and seeing what sticks.

Cheri:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Kathi:

I think that you have a target on the wall, and if it doesn't hit the bulls-eye that's put in the failure category. Do you feel like that describes you and me?

Cheri:

I think so. Just listening to you say, "Try a bunch of stuff," I'm already starting to feel like hyperventilating a little bit.

Kathi:

Right.

Cheri:

Because of course if I'm trying a lot, how will I know for certain in advance that it's going to go well? You're less concerned about knowing in advance if things are going to turn out well.

Kathi:

Yeah, because I just can't know. I always want to try what's fun and see if it resonates with my audience.

Cheri:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Kathi:

Try something that's been helpful to me and see if it resonates with my audience. I go in not knowing, which means that I probably waste a lot of time, a lot of money, a lot of effort. For some reason I'm more okay with that. As you and I have been working more and more together, one of the things that I found so interesting is you assume that I have thoroughly thought out plans.

Cheri:

(laughs).

Kathi:

For absolutely everything I'm doing. I have a great faith in the people I work with, so I don't want to be the person who's like, "Here, I've come up with an impossible idea. Go make it happen." I don't want to be that person, because I've worked for people like that and they make me crazy. But I do want to throw a bunch of stuff out there and see what people are excited about, what gathers their interest, and what makes them feel like, "Wow, I could do that." I think that that's probably the biggest difference between the two of us.

Cheri:

How do you walk away from failure so easily, and then how do you start new projects so quickly after failure? Sometimes, for me at least, if something doesn't go well it could be months and even years before I'm willing to go back and revisit it; where as I just watch you bounce back so quickly. I don't want to imply that it's easy, but I'm just curious how you do it.

Kathi:

I was going to say, because you said, "it's so easy to walk away," and I'm like, "I don't know that it is." I do have to say that I don't want to spend any time on anything that I don't feel like is garnering results.

Cheri:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Kathi:

You know, I feel like it's such a privilege to get to do what I do. I came to this late in life. I didn't start really writing until I was about 38 years old. I've written all these books, and in fact I'm really slowing down on the number of books I'm writing because I want to do a better job. I'm going more toward center now and saying, "I would rather do less books and be more passionate about them."

Cheri:

Sure.

Kathi:

I think that's going to be harder if I'm really passionate about a subject and it doesn't connect with people. I think I've got some pain ahead of me. I also know that one of the things that helps me is being part of a team because a team will tell me, "You know, Kathi, I don't think that's gonna work." Part of me will say, "Yeah, let's just go ahead and try it anyway," but I really do want to listen to people because I don't want to spend time on things that aren't going to work.

As I've gotten older, there's been a little bit more room to be surprised by God. I can plan, and plan, and plan, but God has His own plans. If I'm looking more to become a part of His plans, then I'm not going to hang on to things quite as tightly as I did in the past. I'm going to be freer to say, "You know what, I had a plan, but God had a different plan." That's a hard place to be. It's very easy to say as I'm sitting here in my studio, you know, things are going well right now. I believe there's a mourning process to letting go of-

Cheri:

Sure.

Kathi:

Of things that were important, but if I'm holding on to too many things, then that means my hands are not free to be open to what God's bringing to me. I want to be open to that.

Amy:

Kathi, one of the things you mentioned when you were taking is just about you want to do things that are successful. How do you measure success?

Kathi:

You know, it used to be financial, and it is til a certain extent. You know, if I can't pay my contractors-

Amy:

Sure.

Kathi:

I'm not being successful. If I can't help out with the mortgage, or whatever it is that Roger and I are working towards, if I'm choosing not to tithe. You know, that's not success. That's craziness. I really am measuring success more and more by the people I work with and seeing what's happening with them. The people I'm investing in, and the causes I'm investing in. You know, some things have numbers attached to them, but some things I just know in my gut. I may not ever know the impact I'm having right here and right now, but God knows. The chariots of fire scene, we've all seen it, we've all heard it.

Amy:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Kathi:

Every pastor has quoted it, but, "When I run, I feel God's pleasure." Okay.

Amy:

Yeah.

Kathi:

Okay, I do not feel God's pleasure when I run, but I do feel God's pleasure when I speak.

Amy:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Kathi:

When I talk about Compassion [International], which is an organization I'm all sold out on; when I help communicators communicate better; when a woman goes, cleans out her spice rack, and gets rid of things that she's never going to use I feel God's pleasure. That's how I know I am being successful. Maybe not in the moment is it showing up in my bank account, or maybe it's not showing up on my Facebook followers, but in that moment I can feel God's pleasure. I need to surround myself with people who understand that, that not everything is the numbers, not everything is the finances. Sometimes it's just knowing, "Yeah, I believe that God was pleased by that. I could feel that in my bones."

Cheri:

Well, what I'm hearing you talk about here is transformed lives. You know, for so many of us who struggle with perfectionism, we don't even get to the results stage because we don't put things out there. We spend so much time planning, and buying the system, and-

Kathi:

Right.

Cheri:

Reorganizing the system, and we make the 10 year plan, and the 5 year, but nothing gets out in front of people for us to find out. Because of course we wouldn't want it to fail and then we would feel bad about it. What I'm hearing you say is you're putting enough things out there to see what, you use the word resonates.

Kathi:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Cheri:

When I was really stuck in perfectionism, I couldn't put anything out there to even see if it resonated, because it had to be perfect.

Kathi:

Yeah.

Cheri:

What I'm hearing in you is such a, I'm sure it doesn't always feel that way, but such a freedom to just try, and then try again, and try again. Would you say that you tend to just aim to learn as you go rather than get it all right the first try?

Kathi:

You know, I do my research, but I remember going to a conference. It was about organization. The presenter was talking about a guy who had come up to him with his Filofax and all this kind of stuff, and he was showing him, the presenter, this. He goes, "Wow, that's an impressive system." Then, the presenter was talking to some co-workers of this guy, and one of the co-workers says, "Yeah, he's super organized, but he spends all of his time saddling up." The presenter said, "What do you mean?" He goes, "He spends all of his time rearranging stuff, and organizing, and planning, and he never gets out the gate." I remember I used to be like that. I would plan our meals for a month when I was at home with my kids, but I would never get it just right, so I'd never go shopping.

Cheri:

(laughs)

Kathi:

It was never perfect, so I would never go shopping.

Cheri:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Kathi:

That has helped me so much. I don't want to be the person who is spending all my time saddling up. One of the things I think is so important is you need to have a band of safe people. People that you can try stuff on, and they're not going to say, "Wow, that sucks. What were you thinking?" But they can say, "I love your heart behind that, Kathi, but I don't think that you're the person who's supposed to be speaking on that." When people can criticize, and critique, and explore with you with love first, saying, "It's not that your idea sucks, it's that I think you have been called to so many other things, I think this would take you off-task." That's a way for somebody to give me feedback without killing me in the process. You need safe people around you who will let you play, who will let you experiment, that you can send stuff out to and get feedback, and know that you're not going to be crushed by it when you receive that back.

Also, I think it's really important to stay in your lane to a certain extent. I've figured out my 3 passions in life are really helping people kind of remove the emotional, spiritual, and physical clutter from their lives so that they can do what they need to do; to help communicators get better at what they do; and to get kids through Compassion sponsored. If it's not 1 of those 3 things, I need to be really convinced why I should be doing it. Maybe there is a reason I should be doing it, but I need to have some solid facts and evidence behind that. I'm not trying a bunch of things that are kind of out of my lane. I used to do that, so like 90% of my stuff failed before. Now I think I'm up to a good 60% of my stuff fails, but the 40% that sticks, that's the stuff that I can get excited about.

Cheri:

I love how casually you say, "Oh, yeah, about 60% of my stuff fails."

Kathi:

(laughs)

Amy:

Me too, I thought the same.

Cheri:

I'm like, "Where's my paper bag so I can hyperventilate?"

Kathi:

Can I just say this though, 60% of my stuff failing is failing within the first hour and a half of my trying.

Cheri:

Sure sure.

Kathi:

So these are little failures.

Cheri:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Kathi:

Here's one of the things I love about failure is I get to teach other people what to avoid. No failure is lost; there's always a value in it because I can share with other people, and my team knows *We're not doing that again*. So we're learning. It's when you fail and you don't learn from it that it's the colossal waste.

Amy:

That perspective, Kathi, is exactly the way Cheri described you, which is generous. It's an others-focused perspective, and Cheri and I were just talking about how perfectionism makes you so self-focused. That is a really valuable key that you just shared with us.

Cheri:

Does this bad rule sound familiar: "You should be ashamed of yourself for failing!"

This is the bad rule that kept me trapped in *error terror* for so many years. And I'm grateful to Kathi for being a role model of *imperfectionism* and for being a friend I feel completely safe failing with. In fact, she encourages me to fail. She's always telling me, "Fail fast, and fail often!"

So instead of, "You should be ashamed of yourself for failing!" the truth I now tell myself is, "I can be proud of myself for *trying*."

We hope you'll check out the resources on the webpage for today's episode at CheriGregory.com. We're giving away a copy of the book that Kathi and I co-authored — *The Cure for the "Perfect" Life: 12 Ways to Stop Trying Harder and Start Living Braver*.

You'll also find a free download of 31 Bible verses for Braver Living, and a link to sign up for our 5-Day Braver Living eMail Devotion series.

We hope you enjoyed Episode #08 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Next week, Amy and I will sit down and share all the "ah-HA!" moments we had while learning from Kathi.

If you haven't already, be sure to go to Amy's website (AmyCarroll.org) and check out the online book study she's doing with her book *Breaking Up With Perfect*.

For today, grow your grit ... embrace God's grace ... and when you run across a bad rule, go right on ahead and break it!