

**Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules**  
*Episode #09: Finding the Up-Side to Failure*

**Amy:**

You know what I realized when I thought about our conversation with Kathi?

**Cheri:**

What?

**Amy:**

She doesn't take failure personally. That is so amazing to me! I take failure so personally, and Kathi does not take failure personally.

<music>

**Cheri:**

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

Today my delightful cohost, Amy Carroll, and I are debriefing from our conversation with Kathi Lipp about "Making Failure Your Friend."

Amy is the author of *Breaking up with Perfect: Kiss Perfection Goodbye and Embrace the Joy God Has in Store for You*.

**Cheri:**

So, Amy — we've talked in past episodes about how your perfectionism impacted your marriage. What I'm wondering today is: Has your fear of failure impacted other relationships in your life as well?

**Amy:**

Unfortunately, the answer to that question would be a definite yes. Definitely I can look at my parenting, particularly. One of the interesting things that's been happening is in responses about the book, moms have been writing to me about how they're so concerned that they've passed on their perfectionism to their children. I certainly recognize that in my oldest. The beauty of that is we are now on a journey together to break up with perfect together. We have lots of

conversations around this, and he's a pretty insightful young man. So that's a lot of fun.

Also, particularly in my friendships — I had had really strong friendships. I loved girlfriend time for years and years and years. Then, after our move I had about four or five friendships in a row just implode within a couple years. What I realized is that the disturbing common denominator was me. I just started realizing people don't feel comfortable opening up to me. That was particularly the thing that I noticed: "How come everybody knows this about my friend's life, but she's never felt comfortable telling me?" I had to start really looking hard at myself and saying, "What is it about me that people don't feel comfortable sharing their struggles?"

It was my perfectionism.

**Cheri:**

Whoa ... that is some serious soul-searching going on there, sister! Those of us who are recovering perfectionists, we like to tell ourselves, "Oh, I'm just hard on myself, not everybody else. But the thing about being afraid of failure is we're afraid of other people's failures, too. And that fear leaks out.

During our interview with Kathi, you mentioned learning some important lessons about failure from reading the nook of Acts. Tell us more about that.

**Amy:**

I think in the Christian world we have all these underlying ideas that undermine us. Ideas like, "If I follow God, then things will be easy," or, "If it's God's will, then I'll know, because things will be easy," or "Ministry will be so glamorous if I'm part of it because I'll be surrounded by Christians, and so things will be so much better than in this stinky secular job." The funny thing is, is I've had those same thoughts. I've had those same beliefs, and then I got in ministry. It can get so disillusioning so fast, until you read the book of Acts. I've been going through the book of Acts again with the First Five App that Proverbs 31 does, and digging in. The early church was a mess. It was just a mess. They had conflict. They had persecution. They had beatings. They had people making up lies about them, and some of them were in the church, and they had all kinds of things going on. It was far from glamorous, far from perfect, far from even orderly in lots of circumstances. We even see spiritual greats like Paul and Barnabas having a falling out, separating.

It gives a perspective on: What does it look like to follow Jesus, but to be human? It's always going to be a mess. We always need him. We always need him.

**Cheri:**

I like that. I know for me, I have a hard time, still, not equating failure with, "What did I do wrong." You know? If something didn't turn out right, then it has to be my fault. I have to be the one who goofed somehow. You're just kind of normalizing it, and saying, no, it doesn't just happen to us. There's a history of this.

**Amy:**

Absolutely. Let's just take the Paul and Barnabas thing, for example. It looked like a big failure, I'm sure, and I'm sure it was uncomfortable for their friends, and the churches where they had visited, and all of that. Yet, God redeemed it, and God used it, and it actually almost hints at, in scripture, that it was part of God's plan, because by separating they actually multiplied the work of the Gospel and how it was being spread, and being done. Because the two went separate directions, more got done. Wow, that is hard to wrap our brains around, but my favorite name of God is "Redeemer." When we consider what could be the outcome of a failure, we get to see God as the redeemer of that failure. Suddenly it's not all about us any more, which is shocking, always.

**Cheri:**

Instead of putting so much focus on the failure and the misery of failure to make sure we have our eyes open to what God is already in the process of doing with it, from it, and through it, and having an expectation that he will bring something good out of it.

**Amy:**

Yes, absolutely.

**Cheri:**

That's something I'm working harder at practicing. I have such a lifetime of habits, of just pulling back, withdrawing, disappearing, I wouldn't even say licking my wounds, just really shutting down because failure has always been so horrifying to me. It's always been this, you know, the black and white thinking. The all or nothing, a hundred ten percent or zero, finding the ability to keep trying, to keep moving, even if some days it's just a little bit. That's a new thing for me.

**Amy:**

I agree with that. One of the things that I've realized recently about myself is one of the traits that I have that I think is a good trait is that I tend to see the good in other people. I love a redemption story. I can see a lot of times the good that God is working in hard situations for other people. I have such a hard time seeing it in my own life. I'm a half glass full for everybody else, but I tend towards being half glass empty for myself. I think I hadn't realized that until just in the last little bit, and realizing, "Okay, so if I really love

God as a redeemer, do I believe that he redeems my failures? Do I believe that he redeems my circumstances and hard situations?"

**Cheri:**

Boy, those are great questions.

**Amy:**

I'm working on them.

**Cheri:**

I'm just thinking for myself, my first thought is still the idea that once I've failed I'm on my own to get back up, and get moving, and get back to where God is rather than that God is right there in the midst, not surprised, and that that's one of those moments where in weakness He can be my strength. I can say those with my words easily enough, but to say it at a heart level when I'm in the midst of a circumstance like that is definitely still something I'm working on. I think I'm recognizing it earlier than I used to.

**Amy:**

That is going to help me, Cheri, to think about God being with me in the midst of my failure. The Redeemer, right there, not somebody that I have to work my way back to. Great concept.

**Cheri:**

All right, now you said you have a lot to say about why the book-writing project was so difficult for you, more emotionally than anything. I want to hear about this, because I wrote my first book when I was two, and then I just ... Almost more than I wanted a horse — which I never did get and now I don't want one, because I know how much work they would be — but my entire life goal has been to write a book. I loved writing the first book, and I'm mostly loving writing the second book. Tell me how your experience of writing a book differed.

**Amy:**

I think I was probably like most Americans. I think 80% of Americans say that they want to write a book. I kind of in a very nebulous way thought that way, but when the rubber met the road and I had to write the book, my self-doubt came in and a lot of that self-doubt was I didn't know if I could do it well. I didn't know if I could do it perfectly. In fact, I wrote a first-book manifesto for myself. One of the points on my manifesto was that I would not turn in a manuscript that I was bored by, myself. I just had this high bar for myself. I would not turn in a mediocre book.

**Cheri:**

Oh my word. What was the topic of your book?

**Amy:**

I know, right? Even in the midst of one morning in the bathroom, seriously, I was melting down sobbing over some circumstances that had erupted in the middle of the book project. After my sweet husband talked me down off the ledge, he kind of grinned at me and he goes, "So, I'm really sorry, it's not *perfect*."

**Cheri:**

<laughter> He did not.

**Amy:**

I laughed, and went, "Shut up."

**Cheri:**

Okay, true confession here. You know Kathi Lipp and I working on a book called *Overwhelmed*? I made this promise to her last year that this would be the most non-overwhelming book she had ever written. My life goal with this book has been to make sure she was never overwhelmed by the writing process at all. Because I have that kind of power, evidently!

About a month and a half ago it suddenly hit me, "I can't control whether Kathi is overwhelmed or not. I can't control anything in this world. What made me make a promise like that?" I was like, "I know what this is. This is Perfectionism showing back up again."

I called her and I said, "Kathi, that promise I made, it was a really dumb thing. I'm sorry. I'm not going to try to make good on it any more."

**Amy:**

There is a reason that my book is called *Breaking Up With Perfect*, not *I Broke Up With Perfect*.

**Cheri:**

And this isn't just Perfectionism. This is now People Pleasing showing up, saying, "I'm responsible for somebody else's emotions." And if I follow that trail far enough, it's the fear that if my co-author, who happens to be a dear friend that I trust deeply, but People Pleasing says, "Well, if you don't take care of her, she'll never write a book with you ever again." The simple fact is she may never write a book [with me] again just because she

doesn't want to. She may never write a book with me ever again because we never ... There's a hundred different reasons why that might never happen. It suddenly occurred to me, "I'm trying to take extra good care *to guarantee* ... oh wait, that's called control, not love, or caring, or friendship. That's called control, otherwise known as manipulation."

On to a really fun subject other than this one ...

**Amy:**

Yes, please!

**Cheri:**

One of the things Kathi said, that you and I both resonated with ... We were talking about how to measure success. She said, "Sometimes it's just knowing God is pleased." When are some of the times that you have had the knowledge that God is pleased with what you are offering in your ministry?

**Amy:**

One of the things I was thinking as you were talking, that I struggled with, and I think it's tied into this wiring that I have — this crazy wiring of producing — is that I can very often get into this place of feeling like God is the big project manager in the sky, and that I'm the ministry machine, and that I'm supposed to be churning out, and churning out. My worst times of wrestling, unfortunately, are in the middle of the night when I'm wide awake and should be sleeping.

Just this week I had about an hour of wrestling and wrestling with some circumstances that I'm walking through in ministry. In the midst of that, I turned to the Lord, and I said, "I just need help. I need to know what to *do*." I was looking for direction and guidance, and I just felt God whisper to me, "Amy, just trust me. Will you just trust me to work this out?" I just felt so enveloped by his love, and I thought, once again, I've fallen into this mindset that I have to produce something for God, that I have to power through on my own, that I have to work out all these circumstances. In the midst of that he just kind of wrapped his arms around me and said, "No, I'm going to take care of this for you. I see it. I love you. I'm here with you. I'm going to take care of this one, just trust me." That was a sweet moment.

**Cheri:**

Listening to you, now, I'm thinking of all the time and energy I've put into checking to see if other people are pleased, trying to make other people pleased, and learning — again, this is something that's just slowly happening — but just taking the time to sit and ask God, "How do you feel about me," and to hear his response, and to really receive it.

Ultimately I say with my mouth, and with my brain, "That's what matters." When my actions follow, then I'm living a much more integrated life. I'm living with integrity.

I had a thought for you.

**Amy:**  
Yeah?

**Cheri:**  
A follow-up to Kathi's not personalizing her failure ... That's such an amazing insight. Here's the analogy that hit me this morning:

I think it's the difference between being a beauty pageant contestant and a baker, because for the beauty pageant, I am the product. If I go lay out on the beach and get sunburned, I can't compete that night because I've ruined myself. But, if I'm a baker, and I burn a batch of cookies, I can throw them away and I can bake a new batch of cookies. I'm not the product. I'm separate from the product.

We burn cookies and stay home from the beauty pageant.

**Amy:**  
Oh, girl, that's genius. I love it!

**Cheri:**  
With all due respect to beauty pageant contestants, I know nothing about them!

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We hope you've enjoyed Episode #09 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Be sure to tune in next week when we'll be talking with Michele Cushatt.

For today, grow your grit. Embrace God's grace. And when you run across a bad rule, you know what to do: go right on ahead and break it!