

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

*Episode #21: Decking the Halls for Delight
How to Decorate for Enjoyment NOT Approval*

Cheri:

Look at you, you've got yourself a – is that a scarf or is that a top that has a cowl?

Amy:

It's a scarf, but it's going to be 77 here today. It's still hot. It's the end of October, though and I've been looking at Pinterest and I wanted to wear a scarf. So I just turned on the air conditioning.

Cheri:

I was like, "Wow, you must be having real winter and everything already!"

Amy:

No, I wish!

Cheri:

That's so funny! We've got a storm coming in, but I, I think it's not going to hit too hard and I think my power will stay on...

<music>

Cheri:

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

Today, my deLIGHT-full co-host, Amy Carroll, and I are going to give you a step-by-step how-to for decorating your house from top to bottom so that...I can't even say this with a straight face. You know I'm joking right? What we're really going to talk about is how to decorate our homes with Grit and Grace this Holiday Season.

Cheri:

So the bad rule that we're looking at today is this whole idea that your house should look like the Christmas section of Home Goods – decorated top to bottom. I love how one of our listeners put it. She said, "Well, I feel like my house should look like the pages of a magazine - specifically Country Living – not the Time Magazine Tornado Special."

Amy:

Hilarious! Yeah, exactly! Well, and here in the South, Southern Living...

Cheri:

Yes!

Amy:

...that is the pinnacle of good taste and decorating and food.

Cheri:

So, we're going to talk about some ways to simplify the ways we Christmas-fy our home and it sounds like you've had some recent insights on this. Tell us about that.

Amy:

Well, I love to decorate. I've talked about that on this show. It's one of my creative outlets. I need to set a timer when I get on Pinterest right now because I'm already thinking about decorating for Christmas, and looking at pictures, just to get ideas and things. But I used to decorate to try to live up to Southern Living or some of these high-end magazines. I'm one of these girls that has champagne-taste on a beer budget, and so, I always try to figure that out. But I was trying to look like the champagne taste, but you know, I'm not really that girl. I really love whimsy, I love fun, I love things that make me laugh and smile. So, in the last, I'd say, five or six years, I've really gone for that.

Here's a great example of how I've resisted it. My guys, I guess, hmm, maybe seven or eight years ago, they wanted colored lights outside...

Cheri:

Gasp!

Amy:

I don't know about your region of the country, but in my region of the country, good taste says white lights outside.

Cheri:

Oh yeah, absolutely.

Amy:

And so I'm like colored lights? I resisted for several years. Like, you know, southern girls with good taste do not put colored lights outside. Finally, I thought, "This is ridiculous, the guys want colored lights." They're the ones that put them up also.

Cheri:

I love it!

Amy:

So surely they should have colored lights, so, I mean our neighborhood association hasn't kicked us out yet, but we have colored lights. And you know what, Cheri? I love them! And they're so much more of an expression of my personality.

Cheri:

Sure, of course.

Amy:

And I thought, "Why did I hold on to the white lights for so long and care?"

Cheri:

Because there was a rule, there was a bad rule. And you broke it! Good for you, girlfriend!

Amy:

Oh yeah! Mm, hmm. Oh, we look like the gingerbread house now, for real, color everywhere.

Cheri:

Okay, now in the notes that you sent me, you said something about elf legs. What is this?

Amy:

Oh, this is my current obsession. I'm sure people have seen them, they're kind of trending – but my front porch wreath this year will have elf legs sticking out of it. Cause I don't – have you seen them?

Cheri:

No.

Amy:

They're adorable and I thought every time I walk up to my door, I'll laugh. I must have those! So it's basically just legs that you stick in your wreath and all you – it looks like an elf has fallen into it.

Cheri:

I love it!

Amy:

It's adorable!

Cheri:

How cute! So does this have anything at all to do with Elf on a Shelf or it's just another fun elf thing?

Amy:

No. It's just a fun elf thing.

Cheri:

OK. I have to admit. I'm really glad that my kids were not little when Elf on the Shelf was a big deal cause, oh my goodness. I love the fails that I see and I love the outrageous things but the idea of having to do something with Elf on the Shelf every single day – let's just say the tooth fairy never ever managed to do her job in our house – so the whole Elf on the Shelf thing never would have worked for me.

Amy:

Yes, it's too much.

Cheri:

For me for decorating as an HSP, it's taken me years to realize that I do love the white lights. I don't mind the colored lights, but what I cannot stand is the either the really bright LED lights that have this really electric, o-zoney, blue light – I'm making up words here, I don't really know what's in them – but just this really hyper-intense...

Amy:

You can barely look at them.

Cheri:

Yeah, it's just too much for me. And I'm not a fan of the randomly blinking lights. I love the fact that on the lights we have right now, you can either click a switch or you can replace a bulb and they'll either stay on or they'll blink. And so for the people in our family who like the blinking lights, when I'm not in the room, I'll set it to blink and when I'm there, I just want that glow, that comforting, beautiful glow. And I'm not a fan of the music that has kind of the strobe light affect with the lights because for a highly sensitive person, that's just way too much stimulation. I'm not saying other people shouldn't do it, but they shouldn't expect me to sit and look at it and have peace and joy. I'm more likely to have a headache, you know, a strobe light-induced migraine is more likely what's going to happen to me.

Amy:

So you like to drive by the houses with the yard lights orchestrated to the music.

Cheri:

Oh my goodness

Amy:

But you don't want to live there.

Cheri:

I do not want to live there. I admire them. I recognize that that is a feat of amazing creativity.

Amy:

Yes!

Cheri:

And then I come home to my little tree with its little, clear white lights that have kind of more of the yellow glow and nothing's flashing and nothing's loud. And my idea of the perfect music in the background is Mannheim Steamroller's, "Silent Night."

Amy:

Ohhh, yeah, beautiful

Cheri:

Just, just single notes, so sweet, nothing crashing.

Amy:

If you're, one of our listeners with that yard though, listen, we love you and we want to know where you live so we can drive by. We'll wave!

Cheri:

So you had some good practical tips on um, decorating ideas.

Amy:

Well, one of the things that I tend to do every year is that, we know that Christmas ornaments are already out, it hasn't even been Halloween yet. The stores are filled with Christmas decorations. I love Christmas. Immediately when the stores are filled, I want to go on a shopping spree, every year. I do! I see a million things I like. But what I've realized is that my attic is filled with things that I won't even use this year, so my thing that I do is that I make sure that I take down all my current ornaments first before I allow myself to buy anything.

Cheri:

That's so smart.

Amy:

I will usually allow myself to treat myself to one thing a year that's new and small, because I'm Christmas obsessed.

And then, um, one of the things that I try to do is clean out before I pack up so I don't have a lot of extra stuff around and I'll shop for something new when things are on sale after Christmas. How about you? How do you manage all the stuff? Do you have an attic full of stuff?

Cheri:

You know, years ago, we did. And I think it was probably five or six years ago, Anne Marie said, "Mom, it's time. It's time." And actually it was before Christmas, we pulled everything out and we cut down by about half, just gave away anything that didn't have meaning. And then she actually helped me go through and do something that was really hard, and some of our listeners might want to do this and some of our listeners are going to be horrified that I did it. I understand that everybody is different when it comes to being sentimental, but I had some ornaments from when I was a child. And I can see fifty without binoculars now. I told myself I was going to make a wreath with all the heirloom ornaments and Anne Marie had to tell me the truth about them. She was like, "Mom, they're dirty, they're ugly and they're falling apart."

Amy:

Wow, it takes our kids to give us a correct lens sometimes!

Cheri:

And she said, "Mom, let me photograph them for you and keep the pictures as the memory and get rid of them," because they were too ugly. I never put them on the tree, they were too ugly and gross looking, so they never went on the tree. They just came out every year and I thought, "Oh, one of these years I'm going to make a wreath." But of course, if I had made the wreath, I wasn't going to hang the wreath because they were too ugly and dirty and gross. And so we did have a little farewell party for them. And again, I know that there are listeners who are like, "Noooo! You don't mean you threw them away?" And I'm like, "I'm not going to confess to what I did with them." But the point is, there's a whole box with this kind of stuff that is no longer with us. And some of them were broken. And again, I had these fantasies of repairing them some day, but for me, the fantasy really was going of back and repairing parts of my childhood.

And it was so freeing to say goodbye. I don't need this anymore. Anne Marie took beautiful pictures where they don't look gross and ugly. And I can remember, you know, I have the memories that I want without having those boxes full of stuff I don't use anymore. We're actually pretty paired down. We do two artificial trees because I have a big bay window that we want to be able to see out of the center. So I put one on either side, just simple lights, and we've gone from glass ball ornaments to plastic ones because we have cats. And they love to play with them. And I'll tell ya, the nice thing about the plastic ones is they bounce rather than shatter.

Amy:

Well, that's great because I think one of our corollary bad rules was that there is only one way to decorate a Christmas tree. So what you're saying is that you've given up the glass bulbs and you've given up on the ideal of going back to your childhood ornaments and things, so that's terrific. There's not just one way. Now at our house it wasn't the decorating of the tree, it was the actual tree that was the problem.

Cheri:

What do you mean?

Amy:

See, my husband grew up with the abomination of an artificial Christmas tree.

Cheri:

No!

Amy:

I just, when we married, I thought, "I have to set this man free from that. I must. It is my job."

Cheri:

Okay, now you have to understand, I hate to interrupt your story, but you have to understand, I understand - when I was in college I hauled six foot tall live Christmas trees into my dorm room every year. So I am with you there, I'm totally with you.

Amy:

Me too, me too. Yes, I remember buying a tree with my roommate one year that took up half of our living room because we had such a small apartment. So I introduced my sweet husband to the joy of shopping for a Christmas tree, dragging it into the house every year, but it was odd, because the man was sick every year.

Cheri:

Oh no.

Amy:

In the first year I was a new wife and I was sweet and took care of him. The second year not quite as much, the third year I was downright irritated. By the fourth year I'm muttering things under my breath constantly, "You're allergic to my family, I just know it!" You know, that kind of thing.

Cheri:

Like a compassionate loving wife, of course.

Amy:

Of course! The fifth year, well, he went to a specialist and we found out the man is allergic to everything green.

Cheri:

Oh no! You're trying to kill him by bringing in a live tree!

Amy:

My Christmas ideal was a death trap to my husband! So now we have a blessed artificial tree, I don't consider it an abomination anymore, I love it. It has lights on it and everything. So hey, we're happy with the artificial tree. But I did have to give up that ideal because in my childhood we had always gone – this was always a big family trip to get the Christmas tree. It was a hard ideal to give up but it was worth it because now Barry's not sick every Christmas.

Cheri:

Awe, poor guy! I feel sorry for him!

But you know these ideals that we have from our childhood, I think they really come up at the holidays. They have so much power, but I think we're unaware of them often. You know, I was just talking about how Anne Marie helped me get rid of these ornaments. I really grew up not liking Christmas. I'm not like most of you who adore Christmas, to me Christmas was a pain in the neck because my mother was so perfectionistic about how the tree got decorated. I mean, if you took a picture of our Christmas tree every single year and then spread them all out, you would think they were all taken at the same time because the tree looked identical every year. There truly was only one right way to decorate the tree and I hated it. It was boring. I would help decorate the tree and the next morning I'd come back out and I could tell it had been redone because things had been moved to the right place.

Cheri:

It's really kind of psychotic that there's things that we're clinging to and yet at the same time we're trying to let go of. And then you throw in other family members who bring in their own traditions and the things they loved about the holidays and the things they hated about the holidays and wow it's just so much fun.

Amy:

So where do you think grit comes in in managing all of that, especially those annoying people in your household that have a different way they want to do it?

Cheri:

That's always such a joy.

Amy:

Those annoying people in your household that want to do it a different way? That's the way I should have said that. Oy...

Cheri:

You know, I think the first step of grit is having conversations. First of all, recognizing it in ourselves and you know, realizing if I'm feeling some anxiety rising, or I'm starting to worry that something is going wrong. I mean it's a Christmas tree. It's a tree. It's decorating. It's not a moral issue, it's nobody's, well I was about to say it's not a matter of life and death but in the case of your husband it might have been.

But I mean, really we're back to talking about personal preferences, and so to have these conversations early and to kind of go back and forth on them and to have some compromise with them. And I think it's okay for a woman to say, "I really like a tree that looks a certain way." But it's okay for the kids to want to decorate it their way. So maybe a compromise is two trees, and there is the mom tree and there's the kid's tree. I think that would take grit to not insist on, "We're having one tree and it's being done one way," but to allow a variety of preferences and not insist on our own way. I think that takes grit.

Amy:

That's interesting because it's a different kind of grit. It's a grit that confronts our own inner stuff rather than – yeah, that's great. Well, and I think for me, it has been this transition of grace in my life. For me to express my own personal style, what delights me rather than trying to live up to a magazine or something external that pleases other people. Hey, if you're a listener and this year you love pink flamingos with Santa hats in your yard, this is your permission to go for it!

Cheri:

I want to see pictures of the pink flamingos with Santa hats and what I really want is pictures of those elf legs. I totally want pictures of the elf legs.

Amy:

Definitely.

Cheri:

You had a great memorable fact that we can focus on that really contrasts with our bad rule, what was that?

Amy:

The decorations in our house should delight our souls.

Cheri:

I love that. I love that word delight.

Amy:

Me too.

Cheri:

And that you're planning on not worrying so much about the magazine covers and we're not going to worry about the way things used to be done or even should be done. But we're giving ourselves permission, and when I say ourselves, we're giving ourselves and our listeners, we're all giving ourselves permission to decorate in a way that delights us this year.

Amy:

Yes, and that is beautiful because it leaves room for everybody. So I find myself wanting to simplify, but I have a friend that her house is Christmas land. And it's too much for me but I love going to her house and it delights her soul. So we should allow ourselves that room for delight.

We're going to go back to our Matthew 11 scripture from *The Message* that we've been going to. Let's just read it out loud again, it's so beautiful. "Are you tired, worn out, burnt out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me, and work with me, watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace and I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep-company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Amy:

I just think that when we think about our bad rule, that we have to decorate our house a certain way, doesn't that sound heavy? And this whole ill-fitting, trying to decorate to please somebody else. So this year let's just let go of it.

Cheri:

Whether you just LOVE decorating your home to the hilt or you're taking a more minimalist approach this year, we hope you will feel free to do what works for you.

We also hope that you head over to the web page for today's episode at GritNGrace.info — that's Grit the letter N Grace (all one word) dot info — you'll find several free downloadables, including a full transcript of this episode!

Be sure, while you're there, to print out this week's "permission slip" to remind you that you don't HAVE to obey the **bad rule** that says, **"Your house should look like the Christmas section of HomeGoods, decorated top to bottom."**

Instead, you can focus on the fact that, **"The decorations in your house should delight your soul."**

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Cheri:

We hope you've enjoyed Episode 21 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Join us for next week's HOLIDAY BREAK, when Amy and I will discuss holiday cooking.

For today, grow your grit ... embrace God's grace ... and when you run across a bad rule, you know what to do! By all means—BREAK IT!