

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #24: Alone But Not Lonely — Facing a Solo Holiday with Peace

Cheri:

What's the old saying - "A son is a son until he takes a wife; a daughter is a daughter for the rest of her life"

Amy:

Yeah I love that saying since I'm a mother of two sons!

<music>

Cheri:

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

Welcome to the 7th episode in our Holiday Break series. If you've missed any of the previous 6, you can find them all at GritNGrace.info — that's Grit, the letter N, Grace, all one word, dot info.

Today, my deLIGHT-full co-host, Amy Carroll, and I are discussing the various ways we can feel alone during the holiday season - and what we can DO about it!

Cheri:

So for this episode we're going to be talking about the bad rule that says "If you're *alone*, then you're *unloved*."

Amy:

This is really tough during the holidays. When you think about the commercials that are out there...all the ads...it's always a room filled with people. The truth is, its not everybody's going to spend thanksgiving or Christmas in a room filled with people. And it actually kind of brought a little lump to my throat to say that and I know it could be me someday. Its not right now...but it could absolutely be me, and for our listeners, it might be you. One of the things that has really helped me is quote where it said, "I'm not *by* myself. I'm *with* myself."

Cheri:

Ooh I like that.

Amy:

It really has changed so many things. I used to feel self-conscious even to go to a restaurant and eat by myself, and now I'm like, "No! I'm *with* myself!" It kind of has a little sass to it, which I always appreciate.

But it also has made me think about things differently. My husband works a lot of long hours and kind of weird hours. So we both work from home, which means that we're together a lot...but then he works in the evenings and on weekends a lot, I travel and speak on the weekends a lot...so I tend to be alone on weekends and the evenings quite a bit. It really bothered me at first, but I've come to sort of embrace it with this idea of being *with* myself; that because of Christ in me, and because of the interests that he's imbedded in me, if I switch it around and think *Hey I get to be with myself*, which means that...I mean it is an opportunity to focus, for a change, instead of what everybody else wants to do and what everybody else loves, it gives me permission to do what I want to do and what I love. So, I think if we switch up the perspective it's very helpful.

Cheri:

I think that's brilliant. And I think perspective is so much of this. I was thinking back to one of the worst Christmases in my entire life. I was in high school and I was definitely being a drama queen. The boyfriend I had been dating and I was sure I was going to marry...he had just dumped me. And so I spent the entire Christmas season- and we had been dating more than a year so I had memories of our first Christmas together and they had been wonderful and glorious, and so the contrast was so great- and I spent the entire time thinking *What does this mean about me that I'm alone at Christmas? What does it mean, what does it mean, what does it mean?* And so much of my identity was wrapped up in needing to have somebody with me, somebody to affirm me, somebody to love me. And when we ask ourselves what something like that means, we're often very mean to ourselves. We come up with the worst possible conclusions... and so of course I concluded that I was unlovable, and that I would always have miserable holidays, and that nobody would ever want to marry me...and honestly all it meant that in retrospect God was looking after me because he was not the guy for me...

Amy:

Sure

Cheri:

... I put so much into this one relationship and then I put so much meaning into the fact that I wasn't in a relationship over the holidays. And of course, all I could see was everybody who *was* in a couple all holiday long and I felt miserable because of it. Last year Ann Marie, who lives about 8 hours away from us, she told me about a week before Thanksgiving that he was considering not coming home...

Amy:
Ohhhh

Cheri:
And I did my best not to let her know, but I just about freaked out completely. And really it would have been sensible for her not to come home. It's a really long drive, and it's only for a day or two...and then she would have to drive all the way back... It probably would've been safer...but I really had to ask myself *why is this such a big deal? It's just a day?* Again it came down to, "What does this mean about me as a mother that she doesn't want to come home for Thanksgiving?" And it gave me some sympathy for people who have family members who for one reason or another, either can't be home for the holidays, or chose not to be home for the holidays, or for families where people are really being shuffled around between various family members. I thought *wow that's gotta be rough.*

Amy:
I've seen this in my own family. I grew up in North Carolina but all my extended family...aunts, uncles, grandmothers, grandfathers...everybody was out in Kansas and Colorado. So we spent a lot of holidays in North Carolina with no family, but here's the thing my parents modeled for me that I want to pass on to my children as well: they didn't feel sorry for themselves. They didn't project anger on those family members who might have chosen not to come that long distance that Christmas. Instead they folded other people into our family. Almost every Thanksgiving- we didn't travel on Thanksgiving a lot- cause Thanksgiving is one of those compressed holidays...

Cheri:
Oh yeah.

Amy:
...Christmas you have a little more time around it but nobody's driving to Kansas and back over Thanksgiving weekend. It's too long of a trip. So we had a group of other families in Greenville where I grew up that got together for Thanksgiving. So that was our Thanksgiving family. I want to embrace that. Now they deal with the same thing with my brother and I. I think I shared a couple weeks ago that we have decided that we spend Thanksgiving with one family, Christmas with the other. So it flip-flops; they are alone on one of those holidays every other year because my brother's family is on the same schedule so we can *all* be together. Its tough...and as they get older and as I get older, it gets tougher and tougher to do it that way.... to think of them, or my in-laws too, alone on Christmas or alone on Thanksgiving. But both sides have been so grace-filled and really have adopted other families into their family instead of being alone.

Cheri:

The last church we were at, they had a huge Thanksgiving potluck every year. And so anybody who either didn't want to do the family thing, or they didn't have family to do it with, or maybe they just wanted to do it the easy way and bring the whole family...and the only deal was, there was sign ups for the food so that you actually had enough of everything. And I remember the first time we went- it felt strange to be doing a potluck for Thanksgiving...and it was just so much fun, and there were so many people included, and it was so much easier than the hassle of trying to do it all at home. And I thought *what a great ministry!* And the purpose of it was to include people who might not have any place to go and might be feeling really alone.

Amy:

That's a terrific idea. Even as you said that I had this little prayer in my heart that one of our listeners that might be alone this Christmas would take on that project at their church or in their neighborhood. What a great idea.

Cheri:

Yeah. Now a corollary to the bad rule that if you're alone you're unloved is "if you're surrounded by people...well then you cant possibly feel lonely."

Amy:

Oh goodness. Well I am an extravert and yet I have this tendency to walk into a room and feel alone. It's something...I don't know where it comes from because I was so well-loved as a child, but as a little girl it was acute, and its just been something that's hard to battle against as an adult. I've been reading Lysa Terkeurst's book this year *Uninvited*...such a beautiful book about dealing with that feeling of rejection. One of the things that has really helped me is that she has some questions in her book. And she says, "Here's the secret shift we must make: Do I walk into situations prepared with the fullness of God in me, free to look for ways to bless others or do I walk into situations empty and dependent on others to look for ways to bless me." WOAHH.

Cheri:

Wow.

Amy:

That is underlined, and starred, and highlighted in my book because I realized that every time I walk into a room and I assess the situation...that even though there's all these people that I'm alone...I'm looking for something from *them* rather than walking into a room and thinking *how can I bless someone in here that feels alone.*

Cheri:

Hmmm. You know what you're making me think, Amy? I'm thinking there have been times in my life where the best feeling in the entire world has been walking into a room-

cause I know that feeling, I hate walking into a room- but the best feeling in the world is when somebody goes “Cheri! I’m saving a seat for you!”

Amy:

Oh, yeah.

Cheri:

There is nothing like having someone save a seat for you, and be *waiting* for you, and *anticipating* you, and *wanting* you to join them. And then there have been seasons in my life when I’ve been the person saving the seat. When I’ve kept an eye out and I’ve been the one to notice them, or to pull them over, or to text them ahead of time and say, “hey do you want to have lunch with me?” And so I’d love to throw out permission and a challenge: For our listeners for whom this is a season when they’re walking into any room and they’re just feeling vulnerable...permission to let someone know that you need them to save a seat for you. It’s okay to ask; it’s not only meaningful if they do it spontaneously. If you say “I need someone to save a seat for me” and they save a seat for you, it still counts. You still aren’t having to walk into that room not knowing where you belong. Because that’s what it comes down to isn’t it? Its that feeling of belonging.

And so that’s the permission. If that’s where you are this year, tell someone, ask someone, let your need be known. Now make it a safe person. Don’t tell the one person in your life who will tell you you’re crazy. That’s my habit- I get vulnerable with the one person I shouldn’t be vulnerable with and then I don’t tell the truth to the people who would actually take care of me. I’m getting better at that. But then the challenge for those of us who are in a season right now where maybe we’re feeling okay, and were not necessarily feeling like we need somebody to save a seat for us...maybe...in fact, we’re in charge of the seats in some way...I really want to challenge our listeners to be the ones to save the seat for other people and to let them know in advance that you *need* them, that you *want* them, that you’re looking *forward* to them, and that maybe you even have a task that you’d love their help with. Boy, what a wonderful gift to be able to give to combat that sense of aloneness because I think this bad rule is such a hard one- that if we’re surrounded by people we cant feel lonely, and I think that’s when we actually can feel the loneliest sometimes.

Amy:

One of the pictures that God continually challenges with me with is keeping an open circle. During the holidays it seems like this is the time that we’re with the people that we feel like we belong...whether its families, friends...so we tend to hold hands and make a circle. And God always challenges me with the picture of keeping one hand open. So keeping the circle open. Always looking for who needs to join us, instead of just completing the circle and staying closed.

Cheri:

That is an amazing image. I love it.

Cheri:

Well I want to go back to the scriptures that we've been kind of marinating in for the holiday break series: Matthew 11:28-30. "Are you tired, worn out, burned 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. 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:

So beautiful. "Keep company with me." We're never alone. Jesus is always inviting us to keep company with him. One of our interns, Kendra- this was amazing. She threw out some verses at us and I love this one...you gave our audience permission to ask someone to include them...that includes God too. And that can be one of our prayers. I had never seen this before, its Psalm 25:16 where...I assume its David, is praying, "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted." Man! It takes a lot of grit even to say, "I'm lonely. I feel afflicted. This is not fun to feel like I don't have a place to belong at Thanksgiving or Christmas." But if we will pray that prayer, that's written right in scripture, Jesus is right there with us.

Cheri:

And it takes grit to dial down the expectations for how Thanksgiving and Christmas should be. I'm thinking of all the Norman Rockwell images that we have kind of emblazoned in our heads. It takes grit to realize that there's a lot of different ways that these holidays can be celebrated. I know families who choose, and I know single individuals who chose to go volunteer on Thanksgiving day, and they help serve somebody else's meal so that they can be part of blessing somebody else rather than being at home alone feeling sorry for themselves. I think it takes grit to shake off "poor me syndrome" and I don't think we can ever shake it out of someone else, I mean I'm back to thinking about when I was a teenager and I was so miserable. Bless my family's heart, they just let me be miserable...they didn't try to tell me to count my blessings, or tell me in 10 years that I'd be glad I had gotten rid of the guy, or anything like that. But I think its something we can look at ourselves in the mirror and say "Do I really want to stay in this place? Can I take one step towards getting out?" and also to realize that, you know, on any given day of the holidays we may be feeling two things at the same time. We can feel lonely and we can choose gratitude at the same time...its not just one, or the other. But it does take grit to move out of the misery of loneliness and start moving towards gratitude, and towards generosity towards others. How about the grace piece?

Amy:

Well it's so true that we can feel two things at the same time. I think grace needs to be extended to ourselves as well as to others...that on that day, if you feel lonely along with feeling thankful, don't beat yourself up; it just means that you're human. On the other hand I think, these are times of the year that bitterness can become very entrenched

towards others. So the grace has to be extended to others, that they are not with you for whatever reason, so that bitterness doesn't build up and the relationships start to break down...

Cheri:

Good point. Good point. You have a great truth that we can use to replace the bad rule that says if you're alone then your unloved- what was that?

Amy:

Well the beauty of this time of year is that we are celebrating Jesus who is also called Emmanuel. So because Jesus is Emmanuel- God with us- we're never alone. Gosh it made me tear up to say that! It's a wonderful truth.

Cheri:

It is...it is.

Cheri:

You're not alone if you feel alone during the holidays. We hope you've gained a slightly new perspective on how you can respond to these very human emotions.

If you head on over to the web page for today's episode at GritNGrace.info — that's Grit the letter N Grace dot info — you'll find several free downloadables, including this week's "permission slip."

Print it out and post it as a reminder you that you don't HAVE to obey the bad rules that say

If you're alone, then you're unloved. And if you're surrounded by people, you can't be lonely.

Instead, you can focus on the fact that

Because Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, we are never alone.

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We hope you've enjoyed Episode 24 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Join Amy and me for next week's HOLIDAY BREAK, when we'll be talking about managing our own emotions during Christmas season.

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!