

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

*Episode #26: Prioritizing our People:
Loving Well When Others' Feelings are Front-and-Center*

Cheri:

So today we're talking about people who are just being normal, goodhearted, broken people who make mistakes. And also whose preferences don't happen to align with our preferences and whose way of doing things don't happen to match with our ways of doing things.

Amy:

Well what's wrong with them? I'm just kidding!

Cheri:

Oh I'll give you a list...trust me...you really want to know?? Oh wait- I am not supposed to think that way anymore.

<music>

Cheri:

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

Welcome to the 9th episode in our Holiday Break series. If you've missed any of them, you can find them all at GritNGrace.info — that's Grit, the letter N, Grace, all one word, dot info. Well last week, my deLIGHT-full co-host, Amy Carroll, and I talked about dealing with our own feelings during the holiday season.

Today, we're talking about how to respond to other people's emotions.

Cheri:

The bad rule for this is that everyone else's peace and joy depend on *you*, and how well *you* _____ *fill in the blank*...find the perfect gift...decorate the perfect house...make the perfect dinner...etc. One wrong move and Christmas will be ruined! Now I want to start by being clear that today we are only talking about others' emotions that actually need grace. Sometimes others' emotions are expressed in ways that need boundaries; and sometimes its very firm boundaries. Amy and I aren't trained counselors, and every situation is different, so lets just be really clear form the outset

that we're not talking about any behaviors or emotional expressions that fall under *abuse or addiction or adultery, abandonment, or apathy.*

Amy:

I am SO glad you made that caveat. Just last week I had a blog post about giving freely. But in some of the responses that I got, it broke my heart because they were clearly thinking that they had to continue to give freely under one of those 5 A's and I never want to lead somebody to that place. So thank you for that.

Cheri:

I'm remembering back to early, early on when we were first married, I was doing the little Suzie Homemaker thing and I cross stitched all of my gifts that Christmas for the women in the family. And I was so excited to give one particular one, and I framed them. And as this particular person was opening it, she opened it from the back so she saw that it was something framed...and she said "Oh! A family photo! FINALLY. I've been looking forward to finally getting one of these from you for years!" and then she turned it over...and looked at 25 hours of my time in a frame and it wasn't what she had wanted. It took me years to realize that the other person's disappointment was neither my fault, nor my responsibility. Because back then whatever anybody felt in the room, as an HSP I could sense it quicker and more intensely than most people, and then as the perfectionist and people pleaser I assumed it was entirely my fault *and* that I needed to do something about it.

Amy:

Yes yes. As we prepared for this I couldn't think of one big story, but I just thought *wow it was 100 little failures every holiday* that made me feel like the- and I put "hot failures" in quotation marks- my perceived failures....that made me feel like a failure by the end of the holiday. And I realized that there are two things that I was doing that added together were just a lethal combination. One...is I had these pictures of perfection, that I've talked about, in my head of what *is* perfect. And they were these very narrowly defined pictures of perfection combined with the fact that I constantly read the room. I don't necessarily know that I fall definitively in the HSP category, but I care so much about people that I'm constantly trying to read people, read faces, read reactions, and those two things together, were just really, really bad. This weekend I was speaking and I was talking about one of my favorite women in the bible, who is Martha...I love to look at Martha and I've talked about her in the past, but I love to look at all three of the episodes that she's mentioned in, the last one just very briefly. But in that first episode when she's in the kitchen stewing while Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet, there's this key passage that just encapsulates how I have approached the holidays in the past. And Jesus, when he says, "Martha, Martha you're worried about so many things," but she said she was in the kitchen doing all the things that *have* to be done. That was part of the scripture. And I thought *How many times have defined the things that have to be done, incorrectly? By my own pictures of perfection, and by trying to figure out what*

other people need and want. She missed the joy of Jesus because she misread the situation. I've done the same thing!

Cheri:

What if she had asked? What if she had asked what Jesus wanted? And you know that's one of the things I'm thinking of for the holidays here. I used to think that I was just supposed to automatically be the expert on what everybody needed and wanted and how they ought to feel. And I finally figured out a few years ago, that actually trying to set other people up to feel a certain way so that I can feel good...is actually called manipulation. I'm not going to say that word very loud because I don't like it very much. Allowing other people to need what they need, want what they want, and feel what they feel. Part of what I'm learning to do is ask in advance before we go to an event or like we're going to be traveling to southern California, and not obsessively trying to plan and control every detail, that's another extreme, but just to kind of talk through it and find out what their needs are, what their expectations are...And years and years ago I kept trying to make Daniel happy. I finally expressed my frustration to him, that I couldn't seem to make him happy. And he finally let me know that happiness wasn't a goal to him. He didn't even consider it a worthy goal. To him duty is everything.

Amy:

Wow

Cheri:

And I finally realized his personality type is actually happiest when they're a little unhappy. He actually heard me say that when I was speaking once and he was like "Yeah, that's actually pretty true, yeah."

Amy:

Oh wow! So he wasn't offended that you thought that?

Cheri:

No! No. Really it kind of took me a little off the hook. Trying to make some personalities happy is like nailing Jell-O to the wall, I mean just get out your hammer and make some Jell-O; it'll be a lot easier. So it gave me permission to quit trying so hard. I'm not saying I've completely quit, but it helped me understand that the more effort I poured wasn't going to give me the more results. I could try a little, and if worked, great. You know like as a wife, I love making him laugh. But the likelihood that I can really make his day better, or his week better, is really pretty low actually. And it's kind of freeing to realize that.

Something else I'm realizing as- the one-year anniversary of my mother's passing is actually today- Saturday was actually kind of a harder day, because she died on a Saturday. I don't think of today as the one year, so much as I think of- Saturday felt like the one year. And one of the things I kind of regret is I didn't take the time to really

listen to her perspective. I just was so wrapped up in my perspective, and what I needed, what emotions I needed from her, what emotional reactions I was craving from her...when we were looking for photos for her memorial service, we found the scrapbook she put together as a Home Ec. major for her senior year of college. And I kid you not, Amy there were *pages* on how to stage a corner...Of a house...Like how to make a corner look beautiful in your home. And oh my word! My first thought was *my poor mother lived with Philistines*. I didn't care what the house looked like; my dad didn't care what the house looked like; my brother didn't care what the house looked like. Her natural God-given personality was to care about what even a *corner* in a home looked like. And so holiday meals she would decorate the entire table- there were little place cards to tell us where to sit...this was just for a family get together, not a formal gathering- well every gathering with her was formal. And she would make a HUGE center piece. And our idea of fun was when she would go to the kitchen to bring in a new dish, we would hide the centerpiece, because we wanted to see each other. We couldn't talk over the centerpiece it was so huge, and without a word, she would go find it, put it back, and then a little later she'd go back to the kitchen, we'd hide the center piece again. And this was our idea of holiday entertainment.

Amy:

Oh my goodness!

Cheri:

I mean because the three of us were the sanguine-expressive personalities, and so we got a huge kick out of it. And only in seeing that scrapbook of hers and realizing we made fun of something she cared deeply about. And I never took the time to ask her or understand why it mattered so much to her. Because it didn't matter to me, I assumed it didn't matter...a very self-centered, self-focused perspective. And so one of the things...and I know its not easy...and I'm saying this alone in my house right now...but I'd like to try to put myself in another person's shoes and ask them as they're having an emotional reaction to something or expressing emotions about something that maybe I don't feel anywhere near the same way about...what could I learn about why they're having that reaction? What might I learn about why that makes them angry or hurt or sad or whatever it might be.

Amy:

Cheri, that's so beautiful. It reflects such maturity that you're willing to say it about yourself. It also just reflects just such the character of God. There's so much grace, and compassion in that, so I'm absorbing that and wanting to do that now at Christmas as well and I hope some of our listeners are. I love that.

Well one of the things that's been really great for me is that several years ago or maybe 4 years ago at She Speaks...one of our amazing executive directors for Proverbs 31...she

set a new rule for us at She Speaks that has become part of the ministry. She said you can come to me with any problem, *but* when you come you must also bring a *solution*.

Cheri:

Oh that's so good.

Amy:

It has been fantastic! It has solved so many things for me. Because it used to be that I was pretty open about wanting to talk through things, but mostly it was just complaining.

Cheri:

Yes. I am very familiar with that routine.

Amy:

So I would come and I would complain, but I didn't necessarily have a way to solve the problem. So it's really freeing to have a strategy of how to solve the problems when we bump into somebody else's emotions.

Cheri:

That makes total sense. And I'm willing to bet that our fabulous intern Kimberly will come up with an amazing Digging Deeper download to put up on our website. I have an acronym for using anchor verses from the Bible. And I have a A-N-C-H-O-R; each means something else, so when I'm in the middle of a situation I already have a verse either memorized or in my purse, preferably memorized so it's always with me, to help me stay anchored instead of being bulldozed by the "emotion ocean" we talked about last week. Because it's an "emotion ocean" whether it's my emotions or whether it's somebody else's emotions. And to be able to stay anchored firm, is far preferable. Because like you've pointed out repeatedly, holidays are a time when we bring a ton of people together...and everything is just heightened and intensified because of that. And the opportunities for joy are amazing but so are the opportunities for the more negative and difficult emotions.

One thing that's been really important for me, and again, I just thank the creators of Pixar's Inside Out, is realizing that we can experience two seemingly opposite emotions at the same time. Because I used to think if I was angry at somebody, I no longer loved them. Or that if I was sad about something, I could not also be grateful. And part of what I've come to understand, and *especially* at the holidays is we end up with all of these happening at once. And it's not the typical perfectionist one extreme or the other...they can all be true at the same time. And that's part of what it means to be human.

Amy:

That's terrific. So let's take a look at Matthew 11 once again. This is verse 28-30 from The Message.

"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."

So how do you see that in perspective to other people's emotions, Cheri?

Cheri:

What's striking me in this is the "unforced rhythms of grace." So much of life is seasonal. And so much of life is like the ocean- the ebbs and the flows, and I think as humans we want to reach for only the positive. We want to just grab the best, the good, the part that we want. But the rhythm part says we're going to have both. We're going to have both extremes and we have to be willing to accept that as just a natural part of life on this planet. When I used to complain to my dad that something hurt or made me mad, he used to say, "Sweetheart you were born on the wrong planet..." that I have the ideals of Heaven but the reality of Earth. I think that ties in strongly to the grace piece...for offering grace to ourselves, like we talked about last week, but also especially as we think about and pre-plan to offer grace to others at the holidays, one of the things I know I have to be careful of is in my head I can look at what somebody else is doing and how they're expressing their emotions, and I can become very judgmental and think *well at least I'm not the kind of person who would ever _____ fill in the blank. I would never say anything like that or say it that way or with that timing.* And the grace piece for me says I have to remind myself I may not do the exact thing they're doing but I do it in my own way, and I have to remind myself that I'm just like them. I am just like them. As much as I want to distance myself and say, "No no...them and me...we have nothing in common..." Yes we do. We're both humans. We're both in need of grace.

Amy:

Yes. Well I think, too, that this kind of rolls up grit and grace... is that we need to realize for our own emotions and for other people's emotions that they're just amped up during this time of year. And it really ties into that HAULT acronym: hungry, angry, lonely, and tired... all of those things converge *at once* in the holidays. So grit is recognizing that in ourselves and in others. And then grace, I think, for others is also thinking about how can I help them and how can I help provide for their needs. So even just simple things like having snacks around that gets everybody's blood sugar leveled out...because even little things like that make a difference; having some nuts and cheese and crackers, peanut butter on some celery, or something beside candy around. Also just building in some downtime every day for everybody. Whether it's just snuggling, depending on the age of your children- I don't think my 22 year old or my 20 year old

will snuggle with me this year but you know...I could try one more time! But playing a family game or something quieter, less demanding....Just having grace and realizing that every body's got needs in this situation.

Cheri:

Also, being aware and pre-planning to excuse yourself for a few minutes if there is a volatile situation, and you have that urge to stand your ground and prove that you're right...yesterday I heard the best quote. This person said, "I've never learned anything when I was right."

Amy:

Whew! That's good.

Cheri:

I know! And so if I'm busy insisting that I'm right, how much am I learning about this other person that I care about, or love, or at least am related to? And so taking that break, taking that time out, could really dial down and deescalate the emotional reactions that are happening. So you had a great truth that we could focus on to replace the bad rule that says...

Amy:

...That we can ruin *everything* in a moments notice. WOW. Like we have *that* much power? You know? Ha!

Cheri:

It's true. The idea that everyone else's peace and joy depend on you and how well you do whatever it is. What's the truth that we can focus on instead?

Amy:

Well this turns that bad rule on its head: it's letting everyone *own* their emotions lets everyone be responsible for the joy. So part of my issues is my over-developed sense of responsibility that I'm responsible for everything- the whole world-the way everybody responds. But if I let everybody own their own stuff and I own mine too... joy will increase.

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

It's reminder that you don't HAVE to obey the bad rule that says

Everyone else's peace & joy depend on you.

Instead, you can focus on the fact that

Letting everyone own their emotions lets everyone be responsible for the joy.

We hope you've enjoyed Episode Number 26 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Join Amy and me for next week's HOLIDAY BREAK, when we, and some very special guests, will be talking about how, in the midst of Christmas craziness, we can keep our focus on Jesus, the real reason for the season.

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!