

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #103: Flawed but Fabulous: Mentors Who Help Find a Better Way

Amy

When I think of people that I admire, one of the first to come to mind is Mona. And I think I've talked about Mona on here before. She's our church secretary, and so, thus she ran the world. But when I think about what I admire so much about Mona, it's really two things. Number one the way she knows scripture is just incredible, and I want to be a woman who knows scripture like that. But the other thing that she was so amazing at was that she thought about and measured every word before she spoke it.

Cheri

Uh, what?

Amy

Oh my goodness, yeah. Well not MY strength.

Cheri

How do you do that?

Amy

And so, I just watched her in so many different situations, and I could tell. I mean she likes to talk as much as I do, I think, but she listened so much better. And she thought before she spoke, so that was something I really admired. How about you?

Cheri

One of the first people who comes to my mind is actually, her name is Kathi, and she was my kids' first and second grade teacher. The thing that I admired about her so much when I first met her is she had kids who were teenagers when mine were younger and she obviously and unabashedly adored them and they adored her. She never spoke anything but positively and glowingly about the experience of being a mom. And she gave me so much hope that as my kids got older that I could look forward to the teenage years and beyond. She just thought the world of both of my kids. And I don't naturally think the world of everybody. And so I remember thinking, "Wow, she finds something good to focus on in everyone."

Amy

That's so awesome. So did you ever see her be human?

Cheri

The closest I came was during Christmas programs when the stress was on and she was trying to herd the cats, you know, get all those little first and second graders to behave and not cry and to stand where they were supposed to. I think I saw her sweat a few times, but even then she was really, she was grace under pressure. How about you with Mona?

Amy

Well, I remember one time I ran into Mona in the Christian bookstore, and she barely spoke to me. I was devastated. And I thought, this was a moment for me, of learning, because I thought, what did I do? Why is she mad?

Cheri

Of course you did!

Amy

Of course, because of over-developed responsibility. But then I realized, no, she has bad days just like me. I haven't done anything. And of course, the next time I saw her she was her regular self again. Sure enough, it was just, she was having a bad day, and I was like, oh, I need to remember it's not always all my fault. Other people have their stuff, too.

Cheri

You mean it's not all about us?

<LAUGHTER>

It is so natural for us to look at others we admire and to struggle with wanting to be like them, wanting to be like someone else. I know that I've done that throughout my life. One of our listeners sent us an email that said, "As a teen I wanted to be popular. As a new wife I wanted to impress my husband and be like June Cleaver. As a young mom I wanted to be the most ambitiously loving mom around, able to juggle 4 kids, ministry, frugality, keep a home like Martha Stewart, and cook like Julia Child..." She clearly doesn't have any issues with expectations does she? She goes on to say, "As an empty nester, I want to serve, to hang out, and be available to friends and family. Lastly, as a sufferer of a chronic illness, I want to be strong and joyful, and not complain. I want to be the model patient that others admire. So I guess that what I'm saying is that my struggle with perfectionism is the phrase 'want to be' and it's always followed by a way to impress others. Instead, I need to accept and want to be who Jesus created me to be; the best me I can be."

Amy

Well, you know, I just think about that God has given us mentors. People to admire. And there are women in the bible to admire, but even those women in the bible didn't lead perfect lives, as much as we want to be like them.

Cheri

Well, this is Cheri Gregory.

Amy

And I'm Amy Carroll.

Cheri

And you're listening to *Grit-n-Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules*, the podcast that equips you to love who you're not, love who you are, and live your one life well.

Amy

Today, we're talking to Debbie Wilson, author of *Little Women, Big God*. Debbie is an ordinary woman who has experienced an extraordinary God. Drawing from her personal walk with Christ, 24 years as a Christian counselor, and decades as a bible teacher, Debbie speaks and writes to help women discover relevant faith. She and her husband live in North Carolina with two standard poodles, and their grown children are their best friends.

Amy

So I want to start by telling our listeners about Debbie, because I did the formal introduction already, but Debbie is a friend in my every day life. She was introduced by a mutual friend, and she has been such a gift to me! And you guys are in for a treat, because I have sat in Debbie's kitchen, and first of all she's an amazing cook, but also, she brings scripture to life for me. Every time I talk to her, I had to share her with you all, because every time I talk to her scripture comes alive. She has such insight, and so I'm excited to share her with everybody today. Oh, and by the way, maybe we can post pictures along with the podcast, but she has two standard white poodles named Max and Cosette. And so that's the other treat about going to Debbie's house. We'll post pictures of Max and Cosette with Debbie.

Cheri

We both admire anyone that can cook, don't we?

Amy

Oh yes, we do!

Debbie

My family would laugh at that, because I don't do it very often anymore!

<Laughter>

Amy

Well, okay, so we'll couch that in when Debbie cooks, it's a treat. Debbie you've written a wonderful book called *Little Women, Big God*. How did you come to write this book about the women in Jesus' lineage?

Debbie

I have an ongoing bible study with women that meets weekly, and one summer we thought let's do something kind of fun and different. And so, I read the names that Matthew lists. He lists 5 of the women listed in Jesus' genealogy. And so I wrote down 10 questions for each woman and looked at their backstories, and we looked at these women from their perspective as if we were they. Something happened as we read those stories from their perspective. It was like we saw them in a whole new light, and they just resonated with us. And so, I taught them again with a different group and each time I taught them the commentary grew. And all of a sudden we had a book, but it started with just a light summer study. And God surprised us as we got into these women's stories.

Cheri

Of the women that you studied, Ruth seems like she's practically the perfect woman. She did it all right, but she did face extraordinarily difficult circumstances. So what did she face that's similar to what we might face today?

Debbie

Well, Cheri, to me, she lived my worst nightmare. To think of losing your husband when you're young. Losing your source of financial security. She lost her home. She had to move to a foreign place. She had to take on a role she had never had. She lived my worst fear.

Cheri

So you say that God uses every day situations to propel us into his perfect plan. Sometimes we need the perspective of time to recognize God's hand. So how did this truth look in Ruth's life and how did you see it play out in your life or a friend's life?

Debbie

Ruth is in Bethlehem. She and Naomi are hungry. They are in poverty, and she's hungry. And so because she's hungry, she goes to look for food. And the laws in Israel allowed for those who are poor and widowed and those that were foreign to be able to glean in the fields of the Hebrew citizens. She doesn't know it, but there's another provision in the Hebrew law, and a close kinsmen can marry the widow of a close kin and redeem the widow and the land and provide for that family. Well, she's hungry. She's just looking for a place to work. So she goes out. I can imagine she's saying, "I'm looking for a place to work," and people point to this field and go "Well, Boaz, he lets people work in his field." So here's Boaz. He fears God, and he honors God, and because he had a kind and gracious heart, Ruth goes to his field. And she doesn't know what God has planned for her there. I love that, because it's a picture of God's sovereignty, but her taking responsibility to do what she could do and how God brought something so much bigger than Ruth could have ever done. She gets a husband and a place in Jesus's genealogy. In the book, I tell a story about a friend who God used illness to get her where she needed to be. She was in Sri Lanka with her husband visiting his family, and they had planned this wonderful day at a beach resort, and it was going to be the highlight of their trip. And she got stomach cramps, and so she went to the emergency room, and they gave her something but she did not get relief so they had to cancel their trip to this beach resort. So that's a big disappointment? That was the day of the big tsunamis and hundreds of thousands

of people were killed on the every beach they would have been at. So God used a stomachache and a disappointment to save her family's life.

Amy

Wow, that's so powerful. So one of my favorite chapters in your book was about Tamar. Because Tamar is somebody — I think we avoid her story because it's so smarmy.

<Laughter>

Its kind of rated R, you know? I remember reading the Old Testament with my sons and their eyes would get big over these kinds of stories. I think I loved Tamar, because I call myself a rebel rule follower, and she was kind of that, too. She was a rule follower until she wasn't.

Debbie

Right!

Amy

So tell us a little bit about Tamar.

Debbie

Oh, she is a really X-rated story. But Judah is the great grandson of Abraham, and Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah. So we have these certain expectations for Judah. But at this point in his life, Judah is not walking with the Lord, and he moves away from his family and into Canaan. He marries a Canaanite woman, and they have 3 sons. And he arranges a marriage for his eldest son with Tamar, and Tamar has been raised in a pagan country. They worship false gods, and she's marrying into this family that is supposed to worship the God of Abraham. So we don't know what her expectations were, but her husband, I think you say his name Ur, he sounds like an error. And he did evil, and we don't know what that looked like. How could she get out of that relationship? There wasn't a way out really, because women were basically taken care of by their husbands, and they didn't have legitimate ways of providing for themselves. It was their families. And so God takes the life of Ur. In that culture, then, the next son would take the place, because she now belongs to Judah's family. Once you marry, you belong to the husband's family. Well, the second son knows that the child that they have will have the name of his older brother and inheritance, his inheritance. So he doesn't want Tamar to have a child, so he does not allow her to conceive. So her uses her for sex but keeps her from getting pregnant. God sees this and takes Onan, takes his life, too. Well, Judah is looking at, you know, both of these sons were married to Tamar. What's the common denominator here? And he blames Tamar! Now, we know it was his sons, and he may have known, but he blames Tamar. So he sends her to her family and says stay in your widow's garments. So basically, he saying you can't marry someone else. You're still a part of my family, but you're not part of my family. I don't want you even living here, but I promise you when my youngest son grows up, you'll be able to marry him. Well, the youngest son grows up, and it's real obvious Judah is not going to give him to Tamar. So someone tells Tamar, your father-in-law is coming to town. His wife has died by this time. And so, she puts on a veil, and a veil sounds modest, but it was a symbol that

she was a religious prostitute. So he approaches her. She becomes pregnant. And somebody tells Judah your daughter-in-law is pregnant. She's been paying the prostitute, and so Judah, remember it's his child, but he doesn't know that it's his child, says bring her out and have her burned.

Amy

I just love one of your quotes from the book. You say that it's not wrong to want the things that Tamar wanted. She wanted a family. She wanted a child. She wanted the provision that was due to her. But you say, "Troubles comes when instead of bringing our longings to God, we rely on our own understanding. God's wisdom agrees with His word. His ways don't violate His moral standards." So how can we apply the lessons from Tamar's story to our lives today?

Debbie

What I see in Tamar is God's grace. Tamar had been smart enough to ask for his staff and his cord, and so she knew what Judah was like. When she's being brought out to be burned, she shows the staff and cord and says I'm pregnant by this man, do you recognize it? And Judah, he could have been prideful and said, "No, I don't know whose those are." But he humbled himself and said she is more righteous than I am. And I can't help but believe that that was God's grace to Judah to say look at your sin. I hope and believe it was the turning point of his life, because when we get into the story of Joseph, Judah is a different man. And he's willing to stay in prison to protect his brother Benjamin and to protect his father. And for Tamar, she was given twins, even though what she did was wrong, and the way she went about it was wrong. I see God's grace there. To me, Tamar represents us, because God rescued Tamar before she even knew him. Tamar did not know God, and he rescued her from two bad marriages. And he rescued her in this. Romans says that God rescued us while we were his enemies, and so, to me, she is a beautiful picture of salvation, and how he came to those who are underserving. And he rescues us and gives us a new future and new identity.

Amy

That's good news for us control girls, right, Cheri Gregory?

Cheri

Who are you talking about Amy Carroll?

<Laughter>

Cheri

Now, I'm just ready to go through and reread that entire story. So all that happened before the situation with Joseph in Egypt.

Debbie

Yes, Joseph had been sent to Egypt by his brothers, but this little chapter is wedged right in between. It's before the famine, and Joseph is in Egypt all this time.

Cheri

I'm sure you're right! That's evidence of Judah's transformation and character change. Wow. I need to go read the whole thing now in context, all in row. I've never — I think I was, I don't remember any flannel graph stories about Tamar.

<Laughter>

I missed that little piece.

Debbie

I said I didn't set out to write a book on sex, but every single one of these women were involved in a sex scandal.

Cheri

All right. Well, you say in your book that, "Mary is special, not because she's given a nature better than the rest of us. She's extraordinary, because in spite of her humanness, she practiced unwavering faith. Mary demonstrated the poise available for us in emotionally challenging times." One of my primary ministries is to women that are highly sensitive and it sounds to me that Mary had a tender response of heart. I wonder if she could have been a highly sensitive person. And what do you think were the key elements of her unwavering faith? Sometimes I read her story, and I'm like well goodie, goodie gumdrops for her. I'm just not made of that kind of stuff. I mean she had such strength. Tell us what you've learned about Mary as you've developed your study.

Debbie

I love the insight that she might have been a highly sensitive person, because I didn't know about that. I just learned about it, and I think I'm one of those people so I appreciate that insight. That's great! When Mary responded to the angel, when the angel shows up unexpectedly, calls her highly favored and then tells her that she's going to conceive and carry and give birth to the Son of God. She's a virgin. See, I'm the kind of person that I want to know how is this going to happen? And why? And what's my part? And what am I supposed to do? And I start wanting to figure out how I'm going to make this happen. Well, Mary could not make this happen, and so Mary asked how could this be since I'm a virgin? And he says God's got it covered; God's going to do it. And she immediately surrenders, and says let it be done to me as you said. And I think the key is surrender. And I think she was able to surrender, because she knew who God was. She trusted his character and in her song of praise, it wasn't a song of desperation, of, "Oh no, how am I going to do this? What is Joseph going to say?"

Cheri

That's my song! I am familiar with that song!

Debbie

That would have been my song! But Mary is praising God that she has been chosen for this, and praising God for who he is. And she refers to Old Testament scriptures over and over again. So

even though she was probably only a young teenager, she knew God's word. She had an accurate view of who God was, and she could surrender to this God. When I remember who God is, and I remember his character, that helps me to surrender. And I think that is the key. And we see her throughout her life pondering. You know, she would observe, and she would ponder and treasure things in her heart. And sometimes I ponder the wrong things. I ruminate and chew on the wrong things. But she is pondering and chewing on the right things about who God is. We had a solar eclipse that came through here this year, and North Carolina was one of the states that got a good view of it. The sun is 100s of times or 1000s of times or millions of times bigger than the moon. I don't remember. But for a short time the moon covered the sun. And our problems, no matter how big they are, they're so small next to God. But if we ruminate and ponder and think about those problems, they become so big that they cover our view of the Son of God. So that is one of the things that I see from Mary as she pondered the right things and surrendered.

Cheri

That's a drop the mic moment, right there.

Amy

Yes it is. That's a great application. So Debbie, as we wrap up, I want to ask you a specific question, because I know you. That picture that you just gave us of the solar eclipse is stunning. That will stick with me forever. Tell me how that came into play in your life as your book launched.

Debbie

Oh, yes Amy, you were with me. You know. I'll just throw in this. I say be careful what you name your book because you have to live it. And the byline of my book is: *It's not the size of your problems. It's the size of your God.* And the month my book launched, my doctor sent me for a sonogram and an MRI. I had a mass around my ovary, and she thought I had ovarian cancer. And so all of my family, my extended family, are like we just need to know what this is. Is it cancer? What stage cancer is it? If it's cancer, and if we know what the name is of what we're fighting is, we'll know how to fight it. It's so easy to focus on what's the name of my problem. The day my book signing at Barnes and Noble's was the only day the oncologist could see me like in a 6-week period, and I'm like I don't want to see an oncologist right before I go to a book signing. It might be bad news, and I'll be upset. The oncology building at recs is this real tall building, and I felt like a little woman going against a huge giant. And that picture took me to David and Goliath, and I went back and I read that story of David and Goliath. And you remember the story, David's a youth, and he's going against this warrior. He's a seasoned warrior. He's huge. He terrifies the armies of Israel. And here's this little shepherd boy that's going to go against him. Now Goliath is coming out, and he's got a sword and shield and an armor bearer. David, he comes out with this slingshot, and he picks up 5 stones. But this is what spoke to me. He said you come against me with sword and a shield. I come against you in the name of the Lord. He wasn't focused on the name of his giant. And I thought I've been focused on the wrong name. And I realized it didn't matter what my illness was. God is greater, and even if it ended in death, he is the resurrection, the life. I lost both my parents to cancer. But he

is the resurrection, the life, and I have a reunion waiting for me. It's not the size of your problem. It's the size of your God. So I did have to live that, Amy.

Amy

Debbie got good news in that appointment that day that it was not ovarian cancer. And all of us who love her are thankful. But we know that some of our listeners have gotten the bad news, but the truth that Debbie shared with us still applies.

Debbie

Yes, yes. Like I said, both of my parents died of cancer, but God was with us through that. And we all are going to die. We are all going to die, but we don't die if we know Jesus.

Amy

So Debbie how would you like to encourage our listeners in closing?

Debbie

For all of us, and I have to tell myself this every day with something. Last week I woke up, it was a long day. It was like I started early, had stuff all day and had stuff late that night, and I didn't sleep well the night before, which always happens when you have a big day, right? And I woke up thinking, "Oh, this is not going to be a good day, and I can't do this." And this little nudging in my heart said, "What did you just say? What are you believing?" And I thought, I'm believing that the quality of my rest can quench God's spirit. And the verse came to me, "It's not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord God." And thought, that's right! That's right! Lack of sleep is not bigger than God! And so, it doesn't have to be in a big thing. It's in every day. I would challenge your listeners as they challenged me. What am I focused on? Am I focused on my problem, or am I focused on the size of my God?

Cheri

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode103.

Amy

There you'll find this week's transcript, our digging deeper download, the bible verse art, and you'll have a chance to enter to win a giveaway of *Little Women, Big God*.

Cheri

As much as Amy and I love doing the *Grit-n-Grace* podcast together, we actually do have separate lives on separate coasts. Amy's website, if you'd like to learn more about her, is amycarroll.org and mine is cherigregory.com

Amy

Make sure to join us next week when we'll be processing together what we learned from Debbie.

Cheri

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...

Amy & Cheri

Break it!

Outtakes

Cheri

You know what to do, go right on ahead and...

<Laughter>

Cheri

Grrrr!

<Laughter>

Cheri

Stop laughing at me. For today...