

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode #108: The Relief of Knowing “It’s Not About Me”

Cheri

I want to hear your worst horror story – like, stare in the mirror horror story - from when you were a pre-teen or teenager.

Amy

Well, when I was – I think I was a pre-teen – I had this really hot guy who cut my hair. And girls of our age might remember Hall and Oats, *Your Kiss is on My List*. And my hairdresser looked like John Oates.

Cheri

Oh my word...

Amy

He did!

Cheri

How often did you go get your haircut, every two weeks?

Amy

As often as my mom would pay for it, and so I would lay there and the good smelling shampoo around my head and the good smelling man standing behind me, you know, but I look back at some of my haircuts and they were horrific! Oh my gosh. And one of them...y’all I had a mullet.

Cheri

I want a picture!

<Laughter>

Amy

I cannot give you pictures of me at that time. No. I *will* not distribute pictures of me at that time. Terrible.

Cheri

Clearly I need to come visit and rifle through your attic next summer.

Amy

Did you make it through the teen years without any horrifying moments?

Cheri

Oh no, no, of course not. In fact I was debating, well, do I talk about the green eye, sparkly eye shadow. No, really, the worst one I can remember is I got this acne medication, and it was brand new, and you were supposed to put it all over your face. And then you waited a certain amount of time and it did magic. I tried it once, and it seemed to work. And so, I had a big event, a big formal coming up, and so I thought if I just like double or triple the amount of stuff and time, then it should work twice or three times as well. And then I also thought I would try adding some heat to like activate it. I used warm water and steaming towels, and let's just say that I went to the formal looking like a lobster because I basically gave myself a chemical burn.

Amy

Oh my gosh!

Cheri

But isn't that like a total perfectionist thing to do? Like, the all or nothing. We can't just do what the label says. It's like no, no! I am gonna have to do bigger and better and more! It was like I was trying to get extra credit out of my acne medication. I want a 110 percent. But no, I got a big, ole F in the form of a big, red face.

Amy

Oh horrifying. Those were the days we never want to repeat.

Cheri

No. Those were the days when everything felt like it was all about us. Isn't it so nice that those days are over?

<Laughter>

Amy

Now I really have the giggles.

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 lose who you're not, love who you are, and live your one life well.

Amy

Today, we're processing what we learned from our interview with Sharon Hodde Miller, author of *Free of Me*.

Cheri

So the first thing that she said that really hit me was as she was describing what she means by the sentence, "It's not about me." I'm so glad we interviewed her.

Amy

Me, too.

Cheri

I would have ended up with such a horrible misconception about what her book was about because I had such issues with, and I still think it's valid to say I want to be free to be me, but she did a really good job of explaining what she meant by it's not about me. And so I was thinking, well, what are some things that you or I and some of the women we know or some of our listeners might put in that sentence in terms of it's not about me.

So for me, I think many of our listeners know that when I was in junior high school I had a best friend, she turned on me, decided she hated me. And when a mutual friend said, "Well, don't you feel bad that you're losing your friendship with Cheri?" She said, "I'm not losing anything. I'm throwing her away because that's what you do with trash." And all of that, it turns out, is not about me. But at the time, it felt so much like it was about me. But her rejection of me, her throwing me away, was not about me.

Amy

So good. Well, one of mine was a childhood thing, too, that in high school my childhood best friend walked away from our friendship. There was none of that nastiness for southern girls though...

Cheri

Of course, you are...bless your hearts.

Amy

My friend from North Dakota says southern girls are pink Sherman tanks. So that was kind of the deal, she walked away from our friendships. When we were reunited as adults, I had really come to think over the years that it was my fault that she had walked away, and I apologized to her. And I said I am so sorry that I was so self-righteous that you felt you had to distance yourself from me. And she said, "Girl, what are you talking about? I just didn't want you to see all the stuff I was doing. She goes, "You don't have to apologize, you aren't anything. I was hiding from you." It was this light bulb moment. I do think that some of it was my fault, but it wasn't all my fault, right?

Cheri

Umm, one of the most important it's not about me moments for me was about five years ago when I discovered that my mother had suffered from depression for pretty much my entire life. She went into a post-partum depression. And it wasn't until Alzheimer's had kind of taken a fair chunk of her memory, and she began to relax and be happy again that I was like hang on there's a different version of her that my brother and my dad thought was very familiar to them. And I realized wait, all of my life I thought it was my fault, I hadn't tried hard enough, I hadn't accomplished enough. Between people pleasing and perfectionism I had never been able to make her happy, and realizing no, no, no, this was depression. It wasn't my fault. It was so incredibly freeing.

Amy

Gosh, Cheri, that is a huge realization to have. One of mine is a little lighter than that that we were on a family beach trip - an extended family beach trip. So we had made family teams to be in the kitchen, and my dad called me out 'cause he was like, "Why aren't you in the kitchen helping?" And I said, "Because she has to be in charge of the kitchen so she can have it!"

<Laughter>

So, this is somebody I love, but I thought I was able to identify that that's not my deal that she needs to dominate the kitchen, so I am going to excuse myself.

Cheri

I love it. And I have a lighter one as well, although it did take me years to recognize this one. And that is Daniel will ask me if I've checked the doors and lights. And then he will go downstairs and he will check all the doors and lights. And I used to think it was because he didn't believe or trust me. Now I know it's because that's what Daniel does. Like he won't sleep if he doesn't do it. It's not about me. And once I realized, he's going to ask me, and then he's going to go do it and that's just our routine. It means nothing at all about me. Again, it was just really freeing. It was like, oh, there goes Daniel doing what Daniel does. Cool.

Amy

That's great. Well, he's the protector of the family, and that his role he's taking, yes.

Cheri

I think we can encourage our listeners to kind of make a list of their own. Ever since our interview with Sharon, I found myself thinking this more often and starting to react to a situation and going, wait, what if this isn't about me. What would it look like, what would it feel like, if this wasn't about me? And then found myself able to transition more quickly into, this probably isn't about me, so let's just go straight there and skip all the extra, unnecessary drama. That was very helpful. Well, one thing that happened early on in our interview is you told her point blank we were wrong, you were right. Which reminds me of my *I was wrong list* that I've been working on. And I had a really interesting example of that. This weekend Kathi Lipp was giving a keynote on marketing at the writers' conference that I was at. And there was a moment in which she had a video to play and it was a really important video that was going to

set up the next point she was going to make. And as soon as she clicked her clicker, I realized something had gone wrong. There was piano music playing on top of the video, and the video had music in it. So it made it hard to hear the video and my recovering perfectionistic brain is like, “Ah, everything’s ruined! This is terrible. It’s the end of the world. A chicken little, you know, the sky is falling, the sky is falling. And I tried to stay present, and I thought is there anything I can do? But from where I was positioned I could not go to the sound booth and tell the sound person please turn off the piano track. Because that’s what it was. It was the instrumental music he had playing, and he didn’t realize they were playing on top of each other. And I just sat there and tried to stay calm and, Kathi, of course, being a professional, she narrated what she wanted people to see and hear even though they couldn’t hear it very well, and so she guided them through it. And I thought good for Kathi. But you know what it’s like as a recovering perfectionist when things don’t go the way they’re supposed to, there’s just this grief.

Amy

End of the world.

Cheri

For what was supposed to be. Later that evening, my roommate, who had been helping with the event and she was also taking pictures. She gave me her perspective, which was so different from mine. She said what she saw through her camera lens, ‘cause she was taking pictures of the audience as they were listening to Kathi, she said through her camera lens she saw most people with tears in their eyes.

Amy

Wow.

Cheri

Here was a moment that I felt everything was being potentially ruined, but in reality what most people were actually experiencing was exactly what they needed to experience. And from the feedback we’ve heard since then, they got exactly what they needed to. That’s going on my *I was wrong list*. Now, I didn’t freak out as badly as I used to, but it’s just another confirmation for me that not freaking out is a good thing to do. Realizing this probably isn’t the end of the world is a good thing to do. Things may well be going better than my natural gut instinct tells me they are. So that’s one of those where I’m glad. I was wrong, and I’m thrilled.

Amy

Well, I’m having a situation right now where I’m just like laughing about how wrong I’ve been, because we are doing some renovations on our house and the reason we’re doing it is it’s almost 20 years old. And we have been here for quite a long time. When we moved into this house, I was convinced that we would be moving out within a year to five years. Like, I thought this is a short term. We’re going to be moving away. We’re not going to be here long. I felt, I believed I had heard that from God, and now I’m laughing, because here we are 14, 15 years later. And I thought what was that about? You know, why was I wrong? Because I was

convinced, like, this is temporary. I was compensating because I didn't want to care too much, because we had just moved from a home that I loved. We had worked on it from top to bottom. Home is really important to me, and it was heartbreaking to leave that home where I thought we'd be till the end of our days, truly. And so when I moved into a new place I had to compensate for those feelings and not get attached, I think. And so, it's just funny to look back on those things and think, well, I was wrong. And why was I wrong? What was the thinking behind that?

Cheri

Oh! You're taking it to another level, Amy Carroll. I don't know. I'm just keeping a list. I haven't been keeping the reasons. Maybe I need to add a column. Oh, that's good. Alright, well, another thing that Sharon said that was really one of those paradigm shifting things. It wasn't that she needed to focus on herself more positively, but she needed to focus on herself less, just like think about herself less. And I was like, oh, for us girls who just live our lives inside our heads; this could be a bit of a challenge.

Amy

Absolutely. And I processed that and what you just said, because we do live lives inside of our head, but Cheri Gregory, that is our profession.

Cheri

I know.

Amy

Like, the podcast, we have to really live inside of our head for that. Our writing, we have to live inside of our head for that. Our speaking, all of it. You know, we're always processing, but I realized in this last year when I turned 50...

Cheri

50 is so clarifying, isn't it?

Amy

It is. it is. And I had to say something in front of a bunch of people. I started with, you know, I've realized that all of my internal processing has become naval gazing. And it's become negative, and so in my 50s, I'm going to do the work that needs to be done and live that examined life without letting it turning into naval gazing.

Cheri

Mmm. Well, you know one of the things I'm discovering? I'm 20 days into the fixing fast that I've got a bunch of women doing with me and I realized all the fixating that I have a tendency to do is so *megotistical*. The majority – the vast majority of the things that I find that I want to not pick and fix, they don't need to be fixed. All that needs to happen is I just (I put "just" in quotation marks) I just need to adjust my expectations and be present. That's how I can fix the

situation. I don't need to fix the external; I need to fix the internal. And then everything will be so much better for all of us.

Well, another thing she said - Sharon said, and I think we heard this from Shannon as well, is she said that it's easy to be a slave to people pleasing but anoint it as if we're doing something for God. So do you think this word slave actually fits or are Sharon and Shannon being overly dramatic?

Amy

No, I think it's totally true. And I mean I went immediately to this time in my life where in some ways I was doing the most I've maybe ever done for God. And it was when I was women's ministry director, and I loved that. And I think I did a lot of it well, but I think one of the things I fell prey to was becoming a people pleaser in some ways, 'cause I was playing the role of women's ministry leader. And it's sick. I mean I look back at pictures of those days - I wasn't even dressing like myself. I look at pictures and go who is that woman?

Cheri

What were you wearing?

Amy

You know, I like some funky, Cheri.

Cheri

You weren't in a suit, were you?

Amy

Uh, well, yeah, actually I did. I had a suit. But I - the one I particularly think about and, you know, motherhood I also played the role and I had this one outfit that I had that I just thought was so beautiful at the time. But I thought it was so beautiful, because I thought it made me look like a mother. I don't know what that meant, but anyway. When I look at the picture now I think I would never pick that out now, and I wouldn't have five years before either. I think it probably manifested in a thousand other little ways. But even the visual of me during that period of time I thought, "Wow, I really caved to what I thought people wanted me to be." Now I think they probably weren't even thinking of me at all. I mean, if we've learned anything from all these interviews, people don't think about us nearly as much as we think they think about us. And so they weren't probably thinking of me at all, and I was caving to my perception of what I thought they thought. That's nuts!

Cheri

It sounds exhausting, but it sounds familiar also. It sounds so familiar. Well, Sharon also talked about our mirror reflex, and I loved that story. I could tell where it was going when she shared that story of her talking to a friend who said, "Is there a mirror behind me? You keep looking past me." and I was like, oh, that statement you keep looking past me is going to really stick in

my head. So do you have any examples of how you've done that kind of thing? Or are you exempt? Have you never looked for your reflection in somebody else?

Amy

Oh definitely. And one of the things is that as a speaker coach when I go speak I feel like everybody's expectations of me are raised because I coach for some reason, which has added to the insecurity. Which is again, nuts. I'm just telling all my nutty thinking today.

Cheri

The last thing I wanted to bring up that Sharon said that I thought was so good was when our thoughts are spinning out of control; we have to have a way to stop the train. And I don't think she said this, but I'm gonna say, we need to stop the crazy train.

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

And we gotta be able to focus on truth, and I found it so fascinating that the truths she wanted to focus on weren't necessarily truth about us, although that's certainly good. But she said let's focus on truth about God. So I thought it would be kind of fun for us to just kind of go back and forth a little about truths about God that are important to each one of us. Just to kind of practice it and maybe role model a little for our listeners. 'Cause I think it seems to be so instinctive if we're gonna try to change our thinking to try to focus on thoughts about ourselves.

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

So I think is new for me. This is a different way of doing it. It sounds good, but it's gonna take some practice.

Amy

God is the source of wisdom. So I don't have to figure it all out.

Cheri

God fights for me. I don't have to defend myself, because he's my defender.

Amy

Just recently Lysa TerKeurst three little sentences have been helping me this week so much. And as she said, "God is good. God is good to me. God is good at being God." This was a reminder to me not try to be God and do his job.

Cheri

Oh, I need that reminder, too. And that one led me to think God is here right now in every moment. We don't have to go searching for him; we don't have to wait for him to show up. There's nowhere we can go that he isn't already there. He is Emanuel, God with us.

Amy

Beautiful. Well, our scripture for this week is Exodus 20:2-3 where God says "I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, you shall have no other gods before me." And when I thought about Sharon's book, in the end I thought, we make ourselves idols. We make ourselves idols. And in the end it's slavery, you know? And God says that the way we get free from that is by acknowledging him as God.

Cheri

So what's the bad rule from these two episodes and then the truth that we can focus on instead?

Amy

The bad rule is I can solve my insecurity issues by focusing on them. And the truth is I can address my insecurity issues by focusing on God. What's the grit in that, Cheri:, for you?

Cheri

Oh, that's so easy for me to identify I am so problems-focused. I love to analyze problems, which means I love to analyze me, because I am a problem child and that's where the naval gazing comes from. So for me, grit really is to say, "I'm gonna read only so much psychology. I'm going to only read so much self-help, and then I'm gonna process and pray-cess all of it through the filter of scripture and prayer, but I need to make sure that the bulk of my time, whether it's reading or thinking is focused on God. Not on what man has written or studied or come up with. And it's good stuff. I mean you and I have talked a lot about how scientific research is backing a lot of what's in scripture, but it's no replacement for what's in scripture. So for me the grit is to tear myself away from the problem, which is human-focused, and focus on the solution, which is God. How about you? What's the grace?

Amy

Well, and the grace is so related to that but just really letting go. You know, letting go of trying to fix myself, trying to do it all right, and let God be God and focus on him instead of trying to do his job for him.

Cheri

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode108.

Amy

There you'll find our transcript, this week's digging deeper download, the bible verse art, and a giveaway of *Free of Me*.

Cheri

Come join our Facebook page and group, where we'll continue this discussion of what it means to be free of me. Just do a search for grit-n-grace girls on Facebook. We'd love to see you there.

Amy

Join us next week when we'll be talking to Katie Reid, author of *Made Like Martha*.

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!