

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode #139: Moving from Hidden Hurt to Hope-Filled Healing

Multi Voiceover:

- I try so hard, but I'm not even sure anyone even notices.
- I hate disappointing people.
- I feel like I have to be the perfect friend.
- Perfectionism is paralyzing.
- **It's easy to feel close to God when life is good, but when I'm hurting, it feels like He's abandoned me.**

Cheri

Do you ever hear these kinds of voices in your own head?

Amy

I sure do! And usually at 2:37 in the morning.

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

If this is your first time listening in, this is a podcast for women who love Jesus and long for the abundant life he's promised.

Cheri

But some days, maybe even most days, you feel kinda like a puppet with perfectionism and people pleasing pulling your strings.

Amy

If nothing you do ever seems good enough.

Cheri

If you try too hard to do too much for too many for too long with too little.

Amy

If you exhaust yourself spending time to keep everyone else happy and your own needs go unmet.

Cheri

If you struggle with the C-word, control.

Amy

We get it. And you're in the right place, girlfriend.

Cheri

Grit 'n' Grace brings you weekly encouragement from wise, witty women ...

Amy

Because we have the best guests!

Cheri

We do! Women who come alongside you and equip you to replace the exhaustion of self-made goodness with the rest of God's grace.

Amy

Every week we kick culture's bad rules to the curb, so that we can follow Jesus' good plans for us.

Cheri

The Grit 'n' Grace podcast is made possible because of the team of amazing dedicated interns.

Amy

Shout out to Shantell Brightman, Kendra Burrows, Iris Bryant, Jennifer Bryant, Shannon Geurin, Jeanette Hanscome, Rachel Latham, Melissa McLamb, Kristin Milner, Chris Moss, Sarah Marie Sonoda, Vicki Stone, and Lori Young.

Cheri

Right now we're looking for a few new interns to join our team to help us with social media and graphic design.

Amy

And our book launch.

Cheri

If you, or someone you know, might be interested in the Grit 'n' Grace intern program contact us on our webpage, gritngracegirls.com

Amy

Today, we're talking to Melinda Means, author of *Invisible Wounds: Hope While You're Hurting*. Melinda loves speaking, writing, and caring for women as she shares the healing power of the Father's incredible captivating love. Melinda is the women's director at her church, wife to husband Mike, and mom to two very entertaining young adults.

Melinda, we're so glad you're with us today. Tell us a little bit about *Invisible Wounds*. What led you to write this particular book?

Melinda

Invisible Wounds is the book that I say that God had been preparing me to write for 20 years, but I just didn't know it. Just to give you a little background, on the day that really should've been one of the happiest days of my life, the day that my daughter, my first child was born, a genetic switch flipped in my body and my body began to attack itself. And of course, I didn't

know what had happened to me until years later. All I knew was that I started getting sicker and sicker, and it started with a terribly torturous bladder condition called interstitial cystitis. And I always say that autoimmune disease is the gift that keeps on giving, because it will start with one thing and then it just morphs and just continues to give other things.

What started there then progressed into crushing migraines some that would last a week or more: chronic fatigue, joint and muscle pain, chronic anemia, hypothyroidism. I say it was like playing Whack-a-Mole. I would get one thing under control and then something else would seem to pop up. Over the years that just really wore me down. And yet I was a good girl who stuffed her pain. No one could tell from the outside how much suffering I was in; no one could really see that. I only really shared that with a few people that were close to me, but even they didn't really know the depths of my physical and emotional pain. And one of the things that I think was hardest for me, most painful for me, was I didn't even feel like I could share this with God, because I was supposed to be the good girl. I had grown up with a very legalistic view of God, and so, I had to perform for him, too.

Actually, this was about three years ago, I was planning a women's conference for my church, and actually Susie Eller of Proverbs 31 was my guest speaker. The theme of the conference was Live Free, and I was supposed to speak at this conference as well. The months and weeks leading up to this conference, I was as broken physically, spiritually, and emotionally as I had ever been. And so, here I am, supposed to be planning this conference Live Free, and I felt as in bondage. The two weeks that were leading right up to the conference, I was bedridden. I could hardly even walk across the house without extreme fatigue.

As I laid there thinking about this inspiring message that I was gonna give, my pain just began to pour out on page after page after page. And I just knew that this was what I was supposed to share with the women at the conference. And it felt really good, but at one point I'm like, "Well, God, you're gonna have to give me some hope, because there's no hope that I'm seeing on these pages." And I remember laying there and it was just like the Holy Spirit just said to my spirit, "Do you trust me?" For the first time, I think I started to get really honest with God, and I was just like, "I don't know. I don't know if I trust you. I'm laying here in bed, I'm trying to serve you, and I don't know."

And that legalistic little girl was expecting a not nice answer back, but what I got was this sweet soft voice that just said to my spirit, "You can trust the one who died for you." And I know that sounds so simplistic, and yet, for the first time that truth made it from my head to my heart. And I went, "Oh, yeah. I can. I can trust you. You, Jesus, are my hope. You are my only hope. I've been looking for it in all the other avenues: doctors, supplements, people. You are my only hope." And he just began to open my eyes to all the ways that he had been so sweet to me in my pain journey, how he'd been providing for me and walking alongside me, and that's where the hope began to flow into that message. And I shared my story publicly for the first time from that stage, and it was called Invisible Wounds. And the book was kind of the product of that experience and all the years leading up to it.

Amy

Wow!

Cheri

Boy, just the whole idea of a good girl getting honest with God. I don't know, Amy, I need a paper bag to hyperventilate into already. Well, you open the book by talking about the difference between the woman that you see in the mirror and the woman that everyone else sees, so can you paint that picture for our listeners? And then maybe talk to us about why we, especially we who are these good girls, hide the truth from others.

Melinda

Well, the thing that comes to mind is that, like I said, I had this seed of legalism that was planted very early in childhood, and I think those views of God, those things that are planted in our hearts when we are just forming our views of God, can be so hard to uproot as we get older. And so I had the legalism, and then I also had some painful seeds of rejection. I just think that is a really dangerous combination, because the rejection kept me from wanting to experience that pain again, so I tried to make the outside palatable, acceptable to other people. I didn't want to experience that pain. And then I had the legalism, which told me that I needed to be the good girl who was performing because God's love was conditional. It would go up and down depending on how I was performing at any given moment.

And we can know those things are lies intellectually, but it's a whole different thing to know deep in our heart. So, I think I spent most of my life believing things in my head that I didn't really believe in my heart. So, I projected that image of I was altogether, I looked like I was perfectly healthy, and not only physically, but emotionally. That's what I tried to project. You asked, Cheri, why that we do that, and I think there are so many different reasons we do that. I think it was not just one reason for me, obviously, rejection and legalism, but also I think we can really minimize our pain and say, "Somebody has it so much worse than I do. I don't have any reason to feel this way. I'm being a baby. I'm weak. I'm weak." And I think, also, I didn't want to be identified by my pain, if that makes any sense.

I didn't want that to be my identity, that people saw me as, "Oh, she's the sick girl." This was a big one for me. I was in a tremendous amount of emotional pain, and I so badly wanted to be understood, but at the same time, the only thing that I could think of that might be worse than this feeling of not being understood was if I shared my pain, and I still didn't feel understood. So, I just, I weighed the risks and I thought, "It's not worth risking it." But as I said before, I think we don't just hide our pain from others, we hide our pain from God. So, I think God had to bring me to a complete place of brokenness where I was like, "I don't have any choice but just to be honest. I am hurting, and I don't understand, and I'm mad at you, and I don't get it."

And as I began to do that the barrier began to drop between me and God, and God began to lead me more and more to the Psalms where David just poured out his heart to God. And a lot of it was just raw, unfiltered junk. Just, "I don't get you. Where are you? All my enemies are surrounding me, and I don't see you." But yet what God began to help me to notice was that

every time that David had, every Psalm where David did that, he would always come back to, "But I know you are good. I know you are faithful. I know you love me. You are wonderful." He began to show me, "Your emotions are not your truth, Melinda. You have to come back to what you know to be true about me."

Amy

You share stories of several other women throughout your book, and so, what are some of the commonalities that you see, Melinda? What responses to pain do you see among women who have people-pleasing tendencies, for example?

Melinda

I think, from what I've seen from other women, and just from my own story, is that ... and this is just kind of a generalization, but it tends to be into two categories. We tend to be fixers and stuffers. And I actually think the two are related. Like I said, us good girls stuff our pain, because we're trying to look good from the outside, avoid pain, perform, all those things. But I also think then we begin to look at circumstances and people around us, and we begin to try to fix. Because, I don't know if you guys have ever noticed this, but good girls like things to fit into a neat little box.

Amy

We might know this pattern, Melinda.

<Laughter>

The laughter is not because it's funny, right?

Melinda

Exactly. And so we want to get rid of that angst and that uncomfortableness that we feel by the messiness by trying to fit people and things and circumstances into this box. And also, I think when we are trying to fix, it kind of distracts us from our own pain and the own stuff that we don't want to have to deal with. And another aspect though, I think, is that so often there's a longing in us to give to other people what we have not experienced ourselves, or what we have wanted so much for ourselves. And what I have noticed is that can quickly turn into enabling if the Holy Spirit is not guiding that process.

But on the flip side of that when we begin to turn that over to God and say, "I want to give other women, I want to give other people the things that I have so longed for myself to have," then that, I think, is where the beauty comes from the ashes of our circumstances.

Cheri

Okay, so I just have a dozen notes for us to talk about when Amy and I process all of this. 'Cause I'm seeing this never ending loop, because we come from legalism, but one of our solutions to fixing is to put things in boxes. Then to put things in boxes, you need a good rule, which is

supplied by the legalism that is somewhere in us, so it just, it's a self-reinforcing cycle. I think Amy knows what you're talking about real well.

<Laughing>

Melinda

You don't, though, Cheri? Right.

Amy

I do, from listening to Cheri.

Cheri

Yeah. Well, Amy and I are constantly talking about two C words on this podcast. We talk about control and comparison. How would you say that pain amplifies both of these?

Melinda

Pain fits outside of the box. Pain is messy. Pain does not fit into that little box. And so, I think as soon as I started having this pain, I just was so hyper focused on finding answers. I wanted so badly just for the pain to stop. My quest was, "I just need to fix this. I just need to find the right doctor, the right formula, the right supplement, the right diet, and I can fix this, because it's all up to me." That's what the legalistic girl thinks, is that "It's all up to me because I can't really trust God's love for me and his care for me. So, if this is gonna get fixed, it's gonna have to be me that's gonna fix it."

What God is so loving and wonderful to do is he won't let us walk that road forever. Eventually, I was just running out of straws to grasp at, and I got to the point, right around the process that led me to that point where I was talking earlier about the Live Free conference, was that, I got so confused about what the right thing was. I would look at one source and it would say this, and I would look at another one and say, "That's the worst thing you can do." I had all these voices coming at me telling me all these different things to do, and I just went, "I will never figure it out. I will never figure it out. It is hopeless." And that's where I think God had to bring me to say, "Yeah, that's right, Melinda. I'm your only hope. It's me. I'm the only one who can figure out this mess."

I think that speaks to the control issue, but I think you're also asking about comparison. And, you know, I think, I realized that I'm a little schizophrenic about the comparison thing. I don't know if you guys can relate to this, but there are times when I have gone, "My pain is just nothing compared to hers. I'm gonna minimize my pain, because I'm gonna sound whiny compared to what other people are going through." And then there are other times where I've heard people complain about things and I'm like, "She just has no idea. She just has no idea what pain really looks like. And if she just only walked a day in my shoes..."

And then God began to have to show me, "You know what, Melinda? It's not a contest. It's not a contest. I don't minimize your pain. I don't want you to minimize your pain; I don't want you

to minimize anybody else's pain. What I want you to do, what I want to show you is how to walk through it with victory and with joy, and just show you that that is possible, as impossible as you think it is."

Cheri

So good.

Amy

One of the great longings that we have as women particularly is to be known and to be loved, and one of the quotes from your book says, "As close as we may be to friends and family, they often don't see the real us. Parts of ourselves are some times too raw, dark, or embarrassing to reveal." That feels so true to me just reading it. How do we resolve the tension between wanting to be known and loved versus recognizing the parts of ourselves that we don't want known? Or maybe even shouldn't be known by another person?

Melinda

I'll tell you what comes to mind and what I believe that God has really shown me over the last three years, and especially over these last 18 months, is that the more that I allow myself to be open, to open my heart to God, he begins to show me how known I am by him. That he knows me so intimately, and the more that I have internalized that, not just in my head, but in my heart, as he's opened my eyes to how incredibly personally he knows me ... I'm not saying that it's not important for us to be known by other people. It is. He wants us to be known by other people and to encourage each other. But what I have found personally is that my need to be known by other people has diminished as I have had more of an internalization of how God knows me.

And I can be much more content with maybe just being known by a handful rather than having to be known by a multitude. By every person that I meet, handing out my empty cup and saying, "Can you please fill me up and make me feel better?" That has diminished. But at the same time, we do need to be known. That's important. But I think that's just a real discerning of the Holy Spirit as to who we can be that vulnerable with, because it's not safe. It's not safe to be known. And it's not only not safe for us to reveal everything that we're feeling or thinking, it's also often not safe for other people around us to tell them every thought and feeling that we have.

Cheri

Okay. We just had some church, Amy.

Amy

You just have no idea, Melinda.

Cheri

Well, speaking of revealing ourselves, at the end of *Invisible Wounds*, you share some steps and resources that God has used powerfully in your own healing process, and one of them is

support groups. Could you give us some ideas as to what to look for in a support group and what to avoid?

Melinda

I highly recommend looking for a support group, and that may not be exactly what you think it's gonna look like. It may not be a formal, like has a name, and you go to it at a certain time. It may be just those two or three people that you feel like the Holy Spirit has said, "These women are safe for you to be real with." So, I guess I would say begin with asking the Holy Spirit to lead you to whatever that support system looks like and to not put God into a box of what that support might look like.

I feel like safety is one of the biggest things to look for. I was just talking to a friend yesterday and she lost a child recently. She was sharing with me; she was sharing her pain with someone who she looked up to and she said, "But Melinda, so often I feel crushed or not understood, or stupid after I have these conversations." And she goes, "I know that's not her intention, but that's the way I feel." And I said, "You need to put your running shoes on and go. I'm not making any judgments about this person, but she is not safe for you to process your pain with. You need to find somebody who can speak the truth to you in love." That doesn't mean always just patting us on the back and saying the things we want to hear, but somebody who can couch truth in a loving way.

And then that kind of leads into what to avoid: Judgment. And again, that goes back to the fixers thing. I know sometimes the things that we talked about before, why we hide our pain. Some of the reasons why I think we hide our pain is because we maybe share it with somebody and they say, "God's gonna bring something great out of that," or "It's gonna be okay and what doesn't kill you makes you stronger," and all those platitudes. And some of them are rooted in scripture and are very true. But you know what, they're just not helpful when you are in the depths of despair.

Cheri

Preach on. Preach on.

Melinda

I think avoiding people who have easy answers for problems that, and pain that, is not easily fixed. I think for me that's a big red flag, of again, not judging the person, but saying, "This person is not gonna be safe for me to gain support from."

Cheri

So good.

Amy

Melinda, what closing words of encouragement would you like to leave with our listeners?

Melinda

You know, Amy, I think that the desire of my heart that has probably been in an incubator for my whole life, but the message that I believe that every time I have a chance to share it, is that I want women to know how much God loves them, that he is absolutely crazy in love with you, and I think that can be so hard for us to understand when we have a legalistic background, when we have been through a tremendous amount of pain, or we're walking through current pain that just doesn't seem to end. That's so often I just couldn't understand how a God who loved me could allow me to suffer like that. And what He began to show me was that, " You live in a broken world. Sometimes pain just happens and there is no good explanation for it.

So often I think we can think, "Well, he wants to teach me a lesson," or "He wants me to learn this or that," and what God's showing me is, "Yeah, I may teach you lessons along the way, but you know what? More than anything in the world, through your pain, I want you to understand more of who I am. I want you to feel more deeply my love and my care for you because that is what is gonna change everything for you, when you understand how deeply I love you."

You're still gonna maybe have pain. Probably. Guarantee. But now you can view that through the lens of, "I may not understand my circumstances. I may not understand my pain. But what I know to the depths of my soul is that my heavenly father loves me. And I am not having pain because I am not loved." And that, knowing that truth in my heart absolutely was what began to change everything for me.

Cheri

We hope you've enjoyed episode 139 of Grit 'n' Grace, good girls breaking bad rules.

Amy

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode139. There, you'll find our digging deeper download, a printable resource that helps you to apply what you learned in this episode, our show notes where we'll have a link to Melinda's powerful book, *Invisible Wounds*, and the transcript.

Cheri

If you aren't already a member of our facebook group, we'd love to have you come join the conversation. Just search for Grit 'n' Grace girls on Facebook, and you'll find us.

Amy

Join us next week when we'll be processing what we learned from our interview with Melinda.

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!