

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #99: Building Faith that Deals with Disappointment

Amy

I ran into a situation a couple years ago when there were some people who thought I hadn't done a good job on a project that was really important to me.

Cheri

Uh-oh!

Amy

And separating disappointment and defensiveness was really, really hard.

Cheri

I can go straight to defensiveness so fast and whether it's people who are disappointed in me, and then, in order to redeem myself I start picking on them. Or if I'm disappointed in them and they resist me telling them that, hey they let me down, then I can become really, really defensive because they're not receiving what I have to say to them particularly well.

Amy

One of our listeners said, my biggest struggle with perfectionism and people-pleasing is guilt when I feel I don't measure up to my standards. I imagine how much I have disappointed the person, whoever it is, my husband, or boss or friend, and then I get defensive about it. I just think that's a natural human reaction. Don't you?

Cheri

Absolutely.

Amy

The harder thing is when we are disappointed with God.

Cheri

Well, I'm 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 are talking to Diane Dokko Kim, author of ***Unbroken Faith: Spiritual Recovery for the Special Needs Parent***. In 2004, Diane's first son was diagnosed with autism and ADHD at age two, triggering profound personal, professional, and spiritual crisis. Diane empowers

weary parents to experience the timeless relevance of God's Word applied to the gritty realities of special needs family life and to view their journey as a unique opportunity for spiritual growth and discipleship. Diane and her husband, Eddie, live in the heart of Silicon Valley with their two young sons.

Cheri

So, if you've ever struggled to reconcile faith with disappointment, Diane has wise, hard-won wisdom for all of us today.

Amy

So, Diane give us a little back story. How did you come to write ***Unbroken Faith***, and why do you feel like this book is needed now?

Diane

Well, it's funny, because I had never planned to write a book. And when Marson was diagnosed, to be honest, I was furious. I was furious at God. I was furious at my son. I was furious at the world. And I just felt like I just needed a safe place to just park my ravings. And so, at the time, we were serving in ministry and my husband was the worship leader, so he would go up there and exhort the congregation to worship and praise God. Meanwhile, the wife of the worship leader is sitting on the back pew feeling like I'm not down with this. But I felt this sense of I had to fake it till I make it. We're in ministry, and so I felt like I had nowhere to go. So, where do I go? I just parked all my ravings into a password-protected document and that literally became like my place, my Mount Peniel, where I wrestled with God. And the funny thing is when you throw down with God and the Word of God He usually wins.

So fast-forward about five years of this wrestling and dumping and raving into this document and, eventually, God had healed my heart, and if he didn't heal my son, He chose to heal me. In 2010, He called me to lead a support group for others special needs parents. And what was really neat was as I got to know each of the families. I mean there were diagnoses that I'd never heard of. Last names I'd never heard of. Family and marital statuses that I'd never even heard of. So I was really intimidated, but the really neat thing was, as I got to know each of the families and their stories, no matter what the diagnosis or family background, we struggled with the same, pretty much five questions.

And those questions were:

Why did this happen? Specifically, why did God let this happen? Is He going to fix this? How am I going to get through this? How can I trust Him? And really, what does God and the Word of God have to do with this?

So, ironically, I would end up going back to that password protected document; un-password protecting it and just sharing some of the insights and the comfort that I had received from God, and that I knew that I was called to comfort and share with others. And after a lot of one-on-one coffees that started to get really expensive and inefficient. That's when God laid it on my heart, okay, you can't have one-on-one coffees with every special needs parent in the world. There is just so much caffeine you can have in your system. And that's when He started laying on my heart you need to write this down, you need to start

blogging, and I want you to write a book. And I said, "Write a book?" I am the last person to write a book. I never even turned in a paper on time in college.

And so, I fought him and fought him and fought him. But you know when the Lord has His thumb on you for a particular assignment, good luck trying to get out of that, and so that was the genesis of this book.

Cheri

In the book, you ask the question, what more could I have done? We had done everything we could to prepare perfection for our child, so why did we get disability instead? Can you take us back I think it was 2004, 2005, 2006, as this was happening and just kind of unpack this for us.

Diane

I think every expectant parent, whether you're birthing your child or by adoption, you have these tremendous expectations. You prepare to the hilt, right? You prepare for perfection. You go over everything and go over everything again. And, we have this expectation that we're going to get a pretty fair return on investment. For how much I've put into it, I should be getting back. But life on a broken planet has a way of not cooperating with that sometimes. And especially when you have invested, and you have all of these dreams of what your child's future is going to look like. You have pictures in your mind of prom dates and mother-son dances at the wedding, but when you get a diagnosis, a life-changing diagnosis of a disability all of those dreams get completely shattered. And I absolutely love that God understands that. Because in Genesis 1 He splashed out big. He prepared perfection. He prepared paradise for His children, and He didn't get a return on investment either. And so, He understands what that feels like for us, because His kids didn't turn out as expected, and we know that His heart was filled with pain. And so, I'm so grateful that I have a God who understands our heartache and what it's like to have dashed expectations, because He prepared for perfection, and He didn't get what He expected either.

Amy

That is so grace-filled.

Cheri

One of my favorite lines in the entire book: you say is, "This is not the way it's supposed to be." I so appreciate you for putting this into words instead of using the pat phrase, "Oh, don't worry, God won't give you more than you can handle?"

Why is it so important to acknowledge that this is not the way it's supposed to be?

Diane

First, it reflects God's heart, because He expected and intended perfection for us as well. So, it's okay to acknowledge that we expected perfection. In fact, I think it's absolutely vital for us to acknowledge that in order to grieve and to be authentic and to acknowledge I didn't get what I wanted, and I'm really messed up about it. Because if we can't be honest, we can't heal, we can't move on. And if we can let go of past hurts or disappointments then we have no room in our hearts to receive the new blessings that God has in store.

Cheri

Okay, I'm trying to feel my toes getting stomped on here, Diane. You talk in the book about writing your own psalms. Why was this an important process and practice for you? And, how might we figure out how to do this for ourselves?

Diane

Well, I was really surprised and blessed to find out that the Psalm is actually one of the biggest books in the Bible. And if God dedicates so much real estate in His scripture to honor and validate our human anguish, then it behooves us to do that now. And so, writing psalms was pretty much a way of giving myself permission to grieve and to grieve well. Because if we don't grieve well and grieve up, we will grieve out. And I found myself leaking bitterness and resentment and envy and all these emotional toxins. If I don't heave heavenward they will leak sideways and poison other people, and unfortunately, it's usually going to be the people that are closest to me and that love me most. I had to choose to heave heavenward, because God is the only one big enough and magnanimous enough that will not hold my sins against me.

Amy

So good. Well now, one of the things you talk about in the book is all the "helpful" comments and suggestions that you received. A little unsolicited advice. And people expected you to respond to these suggestions with a big smile on your face. Tell us a little about that.

Diane

Thank you for asking this question, because I know people mean well. We're naturally wired to care. And it's a good thing, and so people mean well, and they say things because they don't know what else to say. But unfortunately, sometimes these well-intended statements result in unintentional bruising. Based on my experience and other families that I've talked to there's like five statements that make the rounds.

Number one among the faith community is: God only gives special kids to special parents.

Amy

Oh, mercy.

Diane

I guarantee you that every one of us is thinking I don't feel so special, this doesn't feel special, and I certainly don't feel qualified for this. I know it's meant to affirm, but it feels a little bit crushing and burdensome.

And, the second would be: Special needs children are a blessing. Now years out from that, I affirm, and I absolutely, that's my conviction that indeed special needs children, children with different abilities or anything hard that the enemy intended for harm, God can redeem into a blessing. I can say that now, but when you're fresh from a wounding, that doesn't feel like a blessing. Divorce doesn't feel like a blessing, Single parenthood doesn't feel like a

blessing. Cancer doesn't feel like a blessing. God can redeem them into a blessing, but at the time, that's not what you want to hear when you're emotionally bleeding.

And I would say the third thing is just pray. God will answer your prayers. Just pray. And I'm thinking, okay, so if I insert enough prayer-tokens into the machine, then I will get healing, right? And I'm just going to be completely honest with you that's what's going through my mind. I may not say it. I'll put my Sunday face on. I'll say, yes, you're right. I am praying. I am praying, but honestly that is how I am feeling.

And the fourth would be: have you tried 'fill in the blank'?

Amy

Oh.

Diane

We probably have. We've probably spent a lot of time thinking and remediating and researching, we probably have tried it.

And the fifth is, and this is a zinger, is there any hidden sin in your life that may have caused your child's disability? Again, it's that broken system of return on investment that if we have something like this happen to our child, then something in us looks back and says, "Well, it's probably because you did something or you failed to do something." But we know in God's Word, in John chapter nine, when the disciples asked Jesus, who sinned that this man was born blind, Jesus responds, neither this man or his parents sinned, this happened so that the work of God could be displayed in His life. And so, I would say that is probably the top five questions that are meant to be helpful, but lands in a different place sometimes.

Amy

Thank you so much for being honest about that, Diane, because I think I've probably at one time or another, have maybe asked one of those questions, and I wouldn't ever want to repeat that and hurt somebody that I wanted to help or that I love. Well, how has being the parent of a special needs child changed how you view things like comparison or approval seeking or people pleasing?

Diane

Now I like to say that disability and autism and special needs has been the sharpest tool in Heaven's drawer to shape, break, and remold me. Starting with even trivial things like I actually suffered and struggled with being approval seeking and people pleasing for a good twenty years of my life in my twenties and thirties. Even from the most trivial things like, our son has autism, so he may lack a certain social awareness. So when he's out in public, he may hum or make noises that are fairly atypical. And we'll get looks, we'll get stares, we'll get comments and that would have bothered me before, but now we just blow it off, and sometimes we find the things that he does just hysterical, actually, so instead of being offended or embarrassed we just think they're funny. So that's a trivial thing.

And there are definitely more significant blessings that God has brought into our lives through disability. I think the biggest thing is this need to fit in. And there's the struggle of

why can't we live like everyone else? Why can't we have it easy? Why did they get that, and we got this?

We get visited by these what I call ghosts of grief specifically at other children's weddings, at graduation season. Because that ghost of grief comes back to haunt and teases into my ear, your child will never have that. Your child will never be that. And, so that ghost of why can't we live like everyone else comes to haunt every so often. But because of disability, God has also brought unique blessings that we would have never experienced if it was not for this unique situation in our lives.

Number one, he's humbled me. I used to think that it was my mission to help fix the child. But God completely flipped the script, and God is using this challenge to fix and sanctify me. God also spared me from what I call country-club Christianity. And now, I really didn't care. I mean, I grew up in a comfortable family background. I did the right thing as an Asian-American. I went to college. I married somebody. We both worked at Silicon Valley in high-tech and had the 3.2 in the suburbs, went to church, and served faithfully, but this really shattered me and remolded me. And, now the things that break God's heart also break mine. Whereas before I really would not have cared as long as I had my shiny things I was good.

And ultimately the thing that I thought would drive me away from God is what drew me to Him. And all the claims in the Word of God that I threw down in that password protected document and wrestled with God over for five years, I said, Lord this is either going to drive me away from you, or I'm going to cling to you like never before. And so, I would say that is the greatest gift and the greatest reformatting that this has brought into our lives.

Cheri

You're making Amy cry, Diane.

Amy

I feel like we need a Selah right there. Like just, I have a question written. I can't quite get it out.

Diane

Praise hands right here. This is tough to find.

Amy

Thank you. Thank you for that, 'cause we can apply what you just said to all kinds of suffering. So, anyone who is listening whether you have a special needs child or another area of suffering, man, there's some rich application there. Press rewind. I'm going to. So, you say that the Lord spiritualizes a spiritual IEP for each of His children. What do you mean by that? Well, tell us what an IEP is first. I'm an educator so I know, but explain for our listeners.

Diane

IEP is an insider term in the world of special education, and it stands for Individualized Education Plan. So, in general education, I'm talking about children who are not in special

ed., every grade has like a standard curriculum. I'm talking to teachers right now, but for those who are not teachers. All third graders learn the same stuff. All fourth graders learn the same stuff, and they have the same targets.

Well, when you are talking about a child in special education who has unique abilities, it's completely reformatted. It's reverse engineering, so instead of applying a stock curriculum to a child. You will take stock of that child's unique abilities, limitations, learning styles and create a plan, targets, and goals that are unique and appropriate for that child. So that's what's called an IEP. And every parent that has a child in special education is familiar with this. We spend a lot of our lives around this topic.

I've applied this to our spiritual lives, too. That God has a spiritual IEP for each of His children. And I'm not talking about the one with a disability or not. First of all, I think we are all disabled in some way, but we'll get to that a little bit later. He knows how each of us are individually wired. He knows each of our individual strengths and assets, and He's going to incorporate the exact challenges and tests and testings that He knows will ultimately grow our character, our faith, and our witness.

Cheri

I'm going to ask you a few questions under the HSP category. But I've never asked if you yourself consider yourself a highly sensitive person.

Diane

I think before disability, I would have said no. You can edit this out if this is not appropriate, but before disability came into my life, I would have considered myself a Korean Paris Hilton.

<Laughter>

Amy

Oh no, that's staying.

Diane

As long as I had my shiny things and my needs were met, I was good. And so, I would not have considered myself a sensitive person, because all my needs were met and I grew up in a family that pretty much adored and spoiled me, but after disability, oh, definitely. Everything about my personality, my character, my hardwiring, my spiritual hardwiring was completely remapped. And you have to be, especially, I have a child with autism. Most parents, they go into a situation, for example you go into a church, you drop off your child and you just assume that he's going to have a great time and you come out in 90 minutes. Not so when you have a child with autism. The minute that I walk into any building I'm immediately scoping out where the exits are, and I've already come with a three-page dossier, so yes and no, by nature, no; but by lifestyle, yes. I've definitely become a much more highly sensitive person.

Cheri

When we were emailing a little while ago, you told me this about special needs parents. You said, “They never feel they are doing enough as parents.” Also, the world tells them that their children are broken and will never be good enough, accepted, or worthy of love. Hence they feel guilty, weary, and hopelessly inadequate. Now, the HSP women that I work with typically have a sense of being broken. For me, growing up, it was this sense that I was defective that there was something wrong. What would you say to any of our listeners who feel broken or defective in whatever way it might be?

Diane

Hold onto your seats. I would say you’re right. You are broken and defective, but you’re not the only one. We all are. Every single one of us fall short of the glory of God. We all have some kind of disability if it’s not on the outside physically, then we have some kind of emotional, spiritual, relational, or hidden disability of the heart. Because we all live on a broken planet and none of us are exempt from getting nicked or scuffed or pierced by its jagged edges. So, we are all broken in some way. We all have some kind of special needs. It’s just that some of us hide them better than others, but that is also why we all equally need a Savior. I think those of us who are constantly stricken by this sense of self-lacking. We’re actually ahead of the game compared to folks who think they are fine; they don’t need God. I’m actually grateful for the life that I have where I do have to be more sensitive. Sometimes, it’s not even a matter of I need to be, I just am, because folks like us, we are actually predisposed to appreciating grace.

Cheri

Oh, I love that perspective. So what scriptures? And I love this about your book. It is absolutely packed with scriptures, and they all are just so beautifully applied. It doesn’t feel like you went to BibleGateway.com and went, “Oh, I need a scripture for this chapter.” I mean, it was clear that these scriptures have been your lifeblood, but what scriptures have you found helpful when you are feeling guilty or weary or helplessly inadequate? What are your go-tos?

Diane

There are so many. I think I’ll just force myself to just a few. I would say, Second Corinthians, chapter three verse five and that reads, “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.” And related to that, this is a verse that I actually spent a lot of time in, in the book, it comes from Acts 4:13, “They saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men. They were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” Now these are the disciples, who changed the world, but they were originally ordinary Joe Shmoe’s who screwed up a lot, but their only qualification and credential is that they had spent a lot of intensive hours logged with Jesus. And the last verse I’ll share is Romans 8:37, “We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” And I love this, because conqueror doesn’t mean fix or alleviate or make better. It means you go through it, but that you have the power of Christ with you as you go through it.

Cheri

So how can we, how can our listeners, use scripture as a tool to battle discouragement when we’re already feeling disappointed and defensive? Those of us, again, who are

recovering perfections and people-pleasers and maybe HSPs. How can we really use scripture as our go-to tool?

Diane

This is actually a really personal and meaningful question and concept to me, because I struggle so much, especially in my twenties and thirties and still now as a special needs parent always feel inadequate that the spiritual warfare, the playground is in my mind. The enemy knows, I think particularly for women, I know certainly for myself how my emotions and my reasoning is intertwined. So, if I feel like the world is coming to an end, and everyone hates me, and everyone thinks I'm terrible then that's the truth. And, if I just let the enemy run loose in my mind and have a playground in my head, he's won me. He's won me. And so, to counteract that, I'm a firm believer in being saturated in the Word of God and even raising our kids to have, even if it's a matter of rote memorization cause that's how we learned as children if you grew up in the church, is just memorizing verses. Being familiar with scripture, but the Holy Spirit has a way of bringing those things up at just the right time. That's the job of the Holy Spirit. And so, we really need to replace these broken systems and these repetitive patterns of thinking and make them captive to Christ, and one of my favorite verses about that is from Romans 12:2 about renewing our thoughts, renewing our mind. So replacing these voices of accusation, because that is the enemy's job to prowl and to accuse. I've just got to seal off my mind and replace that playground with the Word of God to renew me.

Amy

So, Diane, what closing words of encouragement do you have for our listeners?

Diane

I think it's contained in the title of this podcast, Grit n Grace. My life as a special needs parent. I am constantly pushed beyond my capacity every day. Being overwhelmed is a lifestyle for me; it's not just a state. It's a **lifestyle!** And I have to muster up every bit of grit every day just to keep us alive. And its wash, rinse and repeat daily. And I still know it's not enough. And every morning that I wake up I'm another six months behind on my to-do list. But when the ceiling of my utmost efforts hits the basement of God's grace that is when the really cool stuff can happen. When I am just tapped out and I've given all I can give that is when I'm on the threshold of like God you've got to do this, 'cause I'm done and I've got nothing else to give. And I think those of us who tend to drive ourselves to the hilt. We have a greater tendency to trip and faceplant. And that striving nature can be an asset, because it lands it quicker into the realms of needing God's grace. And so that positions us to let him do the supernatural. So we need both our utmost grit, and we also need to fall into God's grace. Again, we are predisposed to appreciating God's grace.

Cheri

Head on over to www.gritnegracegirls.com/episode99.

Amy

There you'll find this week's transcript, a digging deeper download, the bible verse art, and you can enter to win this week's giveaway of **Unbroken Faith**.

Cheri

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Amy

Next week, we'll be processing together what we learned today from Diane.

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 break it.

Amy: & Cheri

Break it.

Outtakes

Amy

Girl, is this your first interview or not?

Diane

It is.

Amy

You are incredible! I am not kidding.

Diane

This is too much coming from both of you guys!

Amy

I can't wait till we air this, so I can sit and take notes instead of just trying to listen. Wow! Wow! Wow! No joke. Cheri I don't do this at the end of every interview, do I?

Cheri

She doesn't. Actually, I've never heard her do that.

Diane

Praise God.