

## ***Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules***

### Episode #01: The Secret to Disappointment-Proofing Your Marriage

Cheri: I feel like every time I let go of expectations they find a back door, they put on a disguise and they sneak back in looking like something else.

Amy: I realized recently how little empathy in 26 years with this man that I adore, that I've extended towards him that I would naturally extend towards my friends.

Kathi: Boy, your husband's life is about to get a whole lot better.

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Cheri: Hey, this is Cheri Gregory, and you're listening to Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Today, we're talking with Kathi Lipp, author of *The Husband Project*, which is this summer's pick for the Proverbs 31 Ministries Online Bible Study. As we start our conversation with Kathi, my delightful co-host (and fellow recovering perfectionist), Amy Carroll is describing the project that she's working on in her life, specifically in her marriage.

Amy: What I've been realizing, about the last five years, is that my greatest gift from my husband has been just the fact that he lets me be. He doesn't critique me. He doesn't have these high, unreasonable expectations for me. He doesn't criticize me. He just truly lets me be. Lets me be myself and affirms me. And I have not reciprocated that, to be quite honest, over the years.

As a perfectionist, my expectations have damaged our marriage over the years. My goal that I expressed to Cheri and to the world now on the podcast — oh my goodness, accountability, right? — is to let go of the expectations and let Barry be. I have made some steps in that direction, and it's incredible how the happiness quotient has gone up in our household.

Kathi: Wow.

Amy: Amazing. I can't wait for The Husband Project and doing it through OBS with Proverbs 31.

Kathi: You know, I'm so thrilled, one, to hear this, because I don't know that a lot of women would admit that their perfectionism has really had that kind of impact on their marriage, but once you understand the issue, it's so much easier to be able to actually address it. Can I give you one little shortcut, Amy, one little piece of advice?

Amy: Please. Yes.

Kathi: When it comes to perfectionism in our marriage it's so easy to see everything that your husband isn't doing. One of my favorite stories is when I went to go buy a minivan. This was 17 years ago. (And this is how we roll. I'm still driving the same minivan.) It's the beater. Somebody told me, "Get a Toyota Sienna," and I was like, "I have never heard of a Toyota Sienna." (Remember, 17 years ago.) They said, "It's the most popular minivan on the road," and I thought, "Okay." Well, I went to the Toyota dealership. I got the Sienna. I drove it home. I didn't see one Sienna on the way home, I saw six, and that's because I was looking for it. I think when we are so focused on what is missing, what our spouse isn't doing, we completely can miss everything that our spouse is doing.

I'm writing an article right now, and I'm thinking you've got the woman who's at work and her husband sends her flowers and you're so jealous. It's like, "I wish my husband would send me flowers." What you don't know is that women are silently sitting there saying, "I can't believe he wasted money on flowers. We are in debt. We may be losing our house." It's so easy — we can sit on the front porch of each other's marriages and compare them but we don't get invited into the back room.

Systematically seeking out the good that your husband is doing and calling it out in him every single day is one of the best things that a perfectionist can do to combat, "Well, but he doesn't, but he doesn't, he should be," all of those kind of things because when you start to recognize all the good that your husband is doing. It's amazing how it can combat all of that.

Amy: That is fantastic advice. I'll put that into practice today.

Kathi: Excellent.

Cheri: I know that with *The Husband Project* so much of what you are having us do, in terms of the daily projects, gets us out of our heads and gets us into action with our hands so that our hearts are transformed. Can you give us, maybe an example or an idea of how this is going to help somebody who just gets so stuck and so fixated on, maybe what it is that the husband isn't doing, to the point of feeling like every other husband in the world must be doing it?

[laughs]

Kathi: Well, I think when you start to really understand the truth about relationships and Husbands, you realize [that] each of our husbands brings completely different gifts to each of our marriages. When we can start to recognize that ... I think so often we fall in love with the person before we're married and we fall in love with all the things that are so different than us. "He's so much fun. He's so carefree. He can act like a little boy."

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You just fall in love and you adore that. And then after the marriage, "Uhhh! He's so irresponsible." It totally gets turned on its head.

We each grow up, hopefully, during a marriage. And there are a lot of things that I need to grow up with as well. For some reason, our society thinks that women come to a marriage fully grown and that men come as little boys that need to be trained, need to be tutored. It's just not true. We're growing together. And oftentimes for me, it's been having to slough off those rough edges, the critical spirit ... The Bible warns so often about a woman and her critical spirit, and you think, "But if you knew my husband you'd understand why I need to be critical." It's just not true in most cases.

There are that 10% of marriages that absolutely need 24/7 counseling. It just is, but oftentimes, if we are changing our attitudes, if we're lowering our expectations, and that doesn't mean I don't expect to be treated well. It doesn't mean that I don't expect to be loved and honored. But it does mean, "I don't expect him to read my mind." That's one of the big things.

One of the things I had to look at, I was getting very critical of Roger at one point. Let's say, we'd be in the kitchen. We'd both be waiting for something in the microwave, and I would unload the dishwasher. I would wipe down the counters, and Roger would be waiting for something in the microwave, and he'd stand there and it drove me crazy. It absolutely drove me nuts. It wasn't because he was being lazy. He is not a lazy person. It just never occurred to him. People are like, "Well, I want him to be able to do it without being asked."

You know what? If I asked Roger, "Hey, Rog, could you unload the top rack of the dishwasher?" He'd be like, "Of course," and he would go do it and he would ... no problem with it. Why was it so important for me — for him to do it without me asking? He wasn't making me treat him like a little boy, he just needed to be reminded. I always think, "Brilliant people have other things on their mind. They just need to be reminded about the garbage." When I came to him with that attitude it changed everything.

Amy: My mother at one point really helped my marriage by just saying, "Amy, they really don't see it."

Kathi: They don't.

Amy: They don't see it.

Kathi: They don't.

Amy: I was like, "Oh, okay." Then it made asking not so bad.

Kathi: Amy, one time, this is before Roger and I were married. He had his little boy, Jeremy, who was just a little baby in arms, and Roger went to the church nursery to pick up Jeremy and Jeremy wasn't there. And he started to freak out. He started running around to people, "Have you seen Jeremy? Have you seen Jeremy?" He was getting ready to call the police. And then our pastor's wife, Kim, took him by the shoulders and said, "Roger, is it possible that Jeremy is the child in the snuggie on your chest?"

[Laughter]

Cheri: Oh my goodness.

Kathi: They don't see. Your mom is a very wise woman.

Cheri: Well, it's easy for us as women to think, "Oh my goodness, I would never do that," but we do "that" in our own ways. There's things that are obvious to them that don't register for us.

Part of what I'm hearing you say, and this is another thing I have to try to be aware of as a highly sensitive person, is that I can get so caught up in the ideal. I idealize things and build this whole world in my head. The difference between the ideal and the real is often very, very disappointing to me, and yet, that's part of growing up, is dealing with what's real and living my real life rather than this ideal fantasy life.

Maybe I should have become a novelist rather than somebody who writes nonfiction. It's fun. It's fun to imagine what could be. But soon as we start going into what should be and what would be, if only the man was cooperating, we slide so quickly from having this creative imagination into bitterness and resentment which is-

Kathi: It's so true. I see so often women taking offense at their husbands who, these husbands would rather die than hurt their wives, but there is offense taken when none should be. I can think of about six people, "I would rather die than hurt their feelings," but I know sometimes I do stupid things that are either, one, I didn't understand how the other person would receive it or it was received in a way that it was never intended. So there's offense taken in 360 degrees when none was meant.

If we assume the best about our spouse, if we assume the best about each other... There was a quote that went around, I think it was Patsy Clairmont, who said, "Assume the best, you'll live longer." It's so true. It's so true. When I'm offended by something that Roger is doing, I need to say, "Okay, is he doing that to hurt me or is there something else going on that I'm not understanding?" I've come to really try, and it happens like almost 5 times out of 10 that I will ask, "I don't understand what's going on here, can you explain this to me?" Instead of taking offense, I'm trying to assume love until I'm proven wrong.

Amy: Now I hear empathy in that, too, because I realized recently how little empathy, in 26 years of this man that I adore that I've extended towards him, that I would naturally extend towards my friends.

Kathi: Boy, your husband's life is about to get a whole lot better.

Amy: You are right. I hope that's true.

Kathi: I'm excited for him.

[Laughter]

Amy: Me too. He's kind of excited as well, I got to tell you.

Kathi: I love it.

Amy: Kathi, you've given us some really great tips, but if you had to give one tip for a woman to do today to make her marriage incrementally better today, what would it be?

Kathi: I would say think of something he's done in the past 48 hours that, maybe he unloaded the dishwasher, maybe you had to ask him, but he did it. Maybe he picked up dinner, maybe he mowed the lawn. Thank him for it. If you have kids in the house, thank him in front of the kids. Just to be recognized for what he's doing can go a long, huge way to making your husband feel like, "Wow, she recognizes that I'm providing for her. She recognizes that I'm protecting her. She recognizes that I love her." Maybe in ways that we haven't received love in the past. Maybe we've always wanted chocolates and flowers that sounds old and trite. (Those still work for me, let's just be super clear.)

But to say, "Roger, thanks for going to the car rental place with me yesterday and not whining about it, 'cause I think a lot of husbands would whine about it. I just need to tell you how much that meant to me because it made my day so much better that I could just know that you would do it, and you would do it with love." It's a simple thing, but calling it out, and thanking them for being them, that's a huge, huge thing that you can do, and it makes you feel better about your husband. You feel more loving towards him. It raises your love level and it raises your husband's love level. It's a win-win.

Cheri: I'm going to play devil's advocate. I know that there are women listening who are thinking, "Okay, Kathi, that's a great idea but how do I thank my husband when he didn't do it the way I asked him to or he did part of it but not all of it? I don't want to reinforce it if really, it was a partial failure." How would you respond to a woman who feels like she has a reasonable concern about reinforcing ... now I'm not talking about anything horrible ...

Kathi: Right, of course.

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Cheri: ... she asked for A and B, but she only got A. How does she thank?

Kathi: I would say this: I would say that, you know we talked earlier about sometimes our husbands just don't notice. Are you trying to reinforce the outcome? Are you trying to reinforce the love in the relationship?

Cheri: Hang on a second, say that again.

Kathi: Are you trying to reinforce the outcome? Or are you trying to reinforce the love in the relationship? If everything is outcome-based you're going to be disappointed a lot. Because let me guarantee you, you're not doing the things he wants in the way he wants either. Outcome is for my business, outcome is for training up children. But I want my relationship to be, be the thing that is affirmed.

I want him to know that he is deeply loved. I understand, it's frustrating when you sent him to the store with a list of five things and he brought back five things and none of them were on the list. I get that. I think there's ... The first thing you're saying, "Thank you so much for going to the store." Then another time saying, separated from the act of love, "Okay, I need to get these five things. What is the best way for me to do that for you? Do you want me to send you a text on your phone? Do you want me to send you a list? What is going to help you to get what I need?"

Because let's be honest, sometimes there has to be outcome-based results. When you're paying bills you can't just do it with love, it has to be done in the correct way, but I think there are oftentimes when he gets you flowers and he gets you carnations and you hate carnations. I don't want to hear about it. I want to hear, "Thank you, baby, that means the world to me that you thought of me." There's no outcome-driven results that need to come from that. When he picks up the kids but he forgets their cleats, I think, yes, there is an outcome that needs to be addressed later on, but for now just receive it with love.

Amy: "Love over outcomes." That is the takeaway of this day for perfectionists. I got to say!

Cheri: Kathi, thank you so much for being with us. You have given us so much to think about.

Kathi: Well, you guys, this is a total privilege and I can't ... I'm going to be your first subscriber, because even though I'm not a classic perfectionist, I'm a pocket perfectionist. This will help me deal better with the people in my life, and to assume love even when I'm taking it as judgment. I'm thrilled to be a part of this, guys. Thank you for letting me be on your show.

Cheri: For full details on the Proverbs 31 Ministries Online Bible Study focusing on Kathi Lipp's book *The Husband Project*, checkout [kathilipp.com](http://kathilipp.com), [cherigregory.com](http://cherigregory.com), or [amycarroll.org](http://amycarroll.org).

Now each week Amy and I would like to give you some insights about why we started this podcast in the first place, where we got the words grit and grace, and what this whole thing is about, "Good girls breaking bad rules." Today, we want to focus just on the word grit. We were throwing names around and you came back with the idea of grit. Where did that whole concept even come up for you?

Amy: I feel like as a Southern girl I need to clarify that a little bit first, because this is grit with no "s" on the end versus grits, which is a Southern thing that other people outside of the South cannot seem to really understand why we would eat such a thing. I just wanted to clarify before I move on to grit, that grits are loved in the South because they're a vehicle for butter and salt, just saying.

Anyway, about grit... Grit is something that is being talked about a lot in our culture today, and it's kind of this unidentifiable something that allows people to rise above their current circumstances. I have a friend who is friends with a woman who is a CEO of a huge company, and she came out of poverty, abuse, seeing her mother murdered in front of her, just terrible circumstances. My friend and I were talking about, "What's the difference between a woman that was in that circumstance and rises out, and a woman who is in that circumstance who stays right in the middle of it her whole life?" We decided that the difference was grit, and it's this unknown quantity, but I think that it's something that we all have and that we need to learn how to tap into.

How about you? How would you define grit?

Cheri: Well, I'm just listening to you and I'm thinking, "Perfectionism and grit don't go together," because, at least for me, perfectionism gave me one chance, you get it right or you're a complete failure. There's no rising up. Failure is the worst thing in the world and mistakes mean that you failed, so it's the end. My entire life was pretty much all or nothing, I either had the 110% A++ or I couldn't even try.

Grit says, "We're going to try then we're going to try again and we're going to try again, and we're going to learn from mistakes," which for so many years I couldn't even do because I couldn't even acknowledge mistakes. Failure was such a horrifying thing. We didn't talk about it in my home growing up. You either succeeded brilliantly or there was silence.

I'm excited to talk about grit but to also find ways to continue practicing it in my own life, 'cause it's a fairly unfamiliar concept to me. I know I watch other people who have it

and I used to envy them because I thought it was just a quality they were born with that somehow I missed. I'm starting to understand from the research and the reading now that I've done, that it is a skill. It's a skill that can be learned.

Amy: That's terrific and that's encouraging too that it can be learned and/or tapped into. I was actually trying to think in biblical terms, "What is grit?" It's this idea that you just said about doing something over and over and over again, and the word that came to mind was perseverance. I was looking at Romans 5:4, and there's three characteristics here that I thought, "Oh, these are the elements of grit," and it's perseverance, character, and hope. I really love that, but then I looked back at verse 3 and here's the bummer, verse 3 tells us that we get perseverance, character, and hope through suffering. I was like, "Oh, great."

Cheri: Sign me up! NOT.

Amy: But you've kind of talked about this too in one of your blog posts that I love so much, is that one of the things perfectionists do is they try to create situations where they have avoided suffering actively.

Cheri: Absolutely. Well, my mother's rule, now she would never have actually said it, but in retrospect, I recognize it was, "If I do everything right nothing will ever go wrong and there will be no pain."

That is this episode's bad rule, "If I do everything right nothing will ever go wrong and there will be no pain." It's so tempting to apply this rule to our husbands and think, "Well, if he would just do everything right and if he would just never do anything wrong, then I would feel no pain." It is a bad rule because it doesn't work; in fact, it actually causes more pain to our relationships when we think that way.

The key to breaking this bad rule and developing more grit in our marriages is grace to extend more grace to our husbands and to receive the grace that God is always offering to us. The truth is mistakes simply mean that we're learning. And we all learn and grow best in an atmosphere of grace.

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Thank you so much for listening to the very first episode of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules, with Cheri Gregory and Amy Carroll. Today grow your grit, embrace God's grace, and when you run across a bad rule, by all means, break it.