

***Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules***  
Episode #02: How to Squash the Love-Killers in Our Marriages

Cheri: We're going to talk about some specific expectations we've each had and how they have ... Hang on, I can hear the water running in the kitchen.

Amy: Oh yeah ... some dishes.

Cheri: Daniel?

Daniel: yes.

Cheri: I'm recording. I could hear it.

Daniel: You're going to hear a little bit of everything with that microphone.

Cheri: Okay. All right.

Amy: All right.

Cheri: I will try not to have the expectation that he should know.

Amy: Okay. (Laughter)

Cheri: (Laughter) All right, so lets talk about...

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Hey, this is Cheri Gregory and you're listening to Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Last week my delightful co-host, Amy Carroll, and I interviewed Kathi Lipp, author of *The Husband Project*. This week Amy and I sat down to kind of discuss what we both learned from Kathi and what we're applying to our own marriages.

So let's talk about the expectations that we each had in our marriages, specifically about our husbands, and maybe some of the ways those expectations have been damaging. I'll let you go first.

Amy: Well one of the things that Kathi said that was so interesting and made me giggle also was that it's sometimes the very things that we loved the most about our husbands when we met them that drives us the most crazy after we get married. That was certainly true in our case because not only am I a perfectionist but along with that goes that I'm a rule follower.

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Cheri: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Amy: But my husband, the thing that I love about him and that makes me laugh every day is that I tell people that he is reverent about God. Everything else is fair game. So, it is unlikely that I will know what's coming next out of his mouth, which was loads of fun when we were dating, but for some reason after we got married I felt responsible for everything that came out of his mouth. I'm making it sound like he says horrifying things and he doesn't. As the perfectionist, I have these pictures of what's perfect in my head and so I tend to parse what he says. We even had an argument last night. We've gotten a lot better over the years but he kind of said to me, "Hey Amy, you can't police everything that I say."

Cheri: Oh no.

Amy: That's one of the things that I had to give up, is deciding as he speaks whether that's appropriate or not. That's one of my expectations I'm letting go of.

Cheri: I love it, being the appropriateness police.

Amy: Exactly. That's so ugly when you say it out loud.

Cheri: Well okay. I'll admit that I identify with that. I'm thinking about when we were first married and when Daniel and I were dating I didn't realize what an introvert he was because when we were in college together we hung around a lot of his old friends that he had been friends with since elementary school so he was really, really comfortable with them. Once we got jobs, moved away, we were invited to a birthday party for a friend of mine and we're getting ready to go and he picks up a book and I'm like, "Well what are you going to do with that?" He's like, "Well I'm going to read it." "We're going to a nice restaurant." I decided not to make a big deal about it. I'm like surely he's not going to read the book at the restaurant. Wrong. We all get seated at the restaurant and we introduce ourselves and he starts to read his book and I think I kind of blocked the memories of what I did or said but I can guarantee you that my attitude was ten times more of a social indiscretion than anything that he had done. Most mature adults can adapt to the people around them and I wasn't acting like a mature adult because I was just so - you just don't do that.

Amy: Right. [Laughing]

Cheri: Those of us that who are perfectionists and people pleasers, we're really clear on what it is you just don't do. Just ask us. We're the experts.

[Laughter]

Amy: Exactly.

Cheri: Ay, caramba!

Amy: Same here though. I think so many times people probably in the room would have laughed if I hadn't been grinding my teeth audibly while Barry was talking.

Cheri: Yeah. The expectation that I've become more aware of is the expectation that Daniel thinks about me as much as I think about him that whenever we're not together he's planning ahead, how much he's looking forward to seeing me again and wanting to make sure it's going to be a really good time so he's going to save his energy. He's going to say no to other things and make sure he's in a really good mood so that whatever it is that we do together is going to go well. Year in and year out I've kind of felt like okay, well that's not been happening but it should be happening because of course that's what's going on in my mind. It wasn't until I read the book *Triggers* last year that talked about how many people do what's called tunneling, which is if it's in front of them they think about it. If it's not in front of them they don't think about it. It occurred to me that when Daniel and I aren't together he's actually not thinking about me. He's not doing all of this fancy planning. Pretty much all the time and energy that I had poured into being frustrated and disappointed, it was all wasted. What I should have been doing, what I'm learning to do is show up and say, "Hi, I'm here." When I do that he's happy to see me and spend time with me. What I used to do is just wait at home and then I'd be resentful and then he'd walk in the door and I'd be sullen and quiet because he was late. He'd head to his office to have some down time and I'd feel rejected. I was making all these stories up about his motives and there were no motives whatsoever.

Amy: That's so much like me because I referred to these pictures of perfect that are in my head. So many times they only have to do with me and my wiring. What you're talking about is how differently the two of you are wired and Barry and I are too. In my marriage, this is so sad to admit, but it's shown up in some really small petty ways like my parents had a great marriage. Growing up in their household I knew that they weren't perfect but they were pretty close. In my head the way they did things was the perfect way that married couples behaved. One of the things that they always did was make the bed together in the morning. Well, that is so sweet, isn't it? Well, Barry and I have never done that. Barry actually is the night owl and I'm the morning person so Barry often, we don't even go to bed at the same time or get up at the same time. So year after year, after year I'd make the bed by myself in the morning. That seems like a small thing but it really eroded my content in the marriage because I didn't define ours as the perfect marriage because we didn't make the bed together. How crazy is that? Yet I didn't even really realize how something so petty could just erode just my general happiness over the years.

Cheri: So is this a bad time to tell you that Daniel and I make our bed together every morning?

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Amy: Oh yes, yes. Well, Barry every once in a while will do it with me now but he's like, "How could you be unhappy about that for 15 years and not even tell me." This is part of the problem right.

Cheri: Okay you have nailed it right there. It's the having all this going on inside the head but not actually saying anything out loud about it.

Amy: Exactly. Well we have these pictures, these expectations in our head but other people are just supposed to know, right?

Cheri: Exactly. Well a good person would know.

Amy: Exactly. A good husband.

Cheri: Yeah, exactly.

Amy: Our poor guys. Everybody is listening to us feeling so sorry for our husbands.

Cheri: Oh my goodness I can't tell you how many times when I speak at a women's retreat and I tell some of the stories that at the end of the story I look bad. They come up to me and say, "You do not deserve that man." I'm like, " You're right. You're so right."

Amy: He might agree on some days.

Cheri: Oh my word. Well, when we were talking to Kathi, I think you and I both had this amazing reaction to her saying, "Are you trying to reinforce the outcome or are you trying to reinforce the love in the relationship?"

Amy: That was the big 'aha' light bulb moment for me. It was! How do we get there?

Cheri: Yeah. I was going to say, "So, Amy, how's that been going in the last week?"

Amy: Well, it actually has been a lot better in the last 5 years. I talked about it in that interview. Barry's [gift], his gift to me of letting me be. I really, really have been working on that. I think part of that is that's what true love is. Jesus loved us that way. He didn't come to us and demand changes before He gave love to us. He gave love to us, and we do change out of reaction to Him. I think every couple changes over the years. We try adapt and please each other, but it's not because one is standing with her hands on her hips demanding. It's because those changes and those adaptations and those becoming as a couple that comes out of love. Kathi's point was amazing.

Cheri: Yesterday Daniel needed to run an errand I wasn't in the mood to go anywhere and more than anything I just couldn't see the purpose. I don't like running errands. I'm very checklist and schedule driven. His phrase is, "Well I just like being with you." I'm like, what does that even mean? I told him I wasn't going to go with him and then I changed my mind, which was confusing to him, because I normally stick to the schedule and he was about to leave and I was, like, "Hang on. Let me throw on jeans and I'll come with you." I decided, you know what, I'm just going to test this theory that he enjoys being with me without a definite purpose or end result that has to happen. So, I hung out with him while he did his errands and we came home. I have nothing grand to report. It was fine and I'm going to try it again.

Amy: You lived through it. What a sweet compliment, Cheri. I think probably some of our listeners that are listening are thinking, "I would kill to hear my husband say that." Here we are thinking, "I don't have anything on that list, why do I need to go?"

Cheri: Exactly. Exactly. I think that's one of the things that I'm realizing perfectionism does is make everything into a list or make everything have to be measurable. Can I measure what the value of running errands together was yesterday? Can I check it off a list and the answer is no but it was an investment. For me, I came home feeling more relaxed and that's actually a good thing for me.

Amy: Yeah. I would think the connection factor would be strengthened too.

Cheri: Absolutely. Let's talk about the woman who wants to change and have a more positive approach to her husband but her brain just is stuck in negative gear. What are some things that she can do to shift out of constantly focusing on her husband's faults or failures or her expectations for him and the resulting disappointments and shift into more focus on love rather than those results. What have you found works for you?

Amy: Well I think for me one of the main things is starting to identify these places and be really honest about these places of unhappiness and then examining them and trying to decide where they come from. Just for example, the bed situation, I thought, when I really started being honest, because first of all, a perfect person wouldn't be that petty so I don't want to be that honest about it. When I started realizing, this is really chaffed me for 15 years, a good 15 years, what in the world, and where is that coming from? Then identifying where that comes from and where the places of unhappiness are and then starting to replace that with, "Well he doesn't make the bed but he does mow the lawn every week. He does take out the trash for me." One of my love languages is acts of service. I started making a list of other things that he does do for me that show care for me and then the bed didn't seem like such a big deal. It's a five-minute task, you know?

Cheri: Got you, so kind of a substitution.

Amy: Yeah.

Cheri: Well, one thing I'm hearing in you that I don't know if you hear in yourself, I think underneath that harping, that 15 years of harping on the bed making, there is a longing for a good marriage. There's a part of that that is valid and valuable. I see this so often in my fellow perfectionists, is we want something so badly but then we grab on to what we think is going to be the thing that makes it happen as if this is the secret to getting there. Often it's kind of a shortcut that when you say it out loud like, "Oh I think if we make the bed together every morning we'll have a great marriage." No, actually you don't think that.

Amy: Right. That is such a great insight. That is a great insight that we boil it down to the wrong things sometimes.

Cheri: Yeah.

Amy: Absolutely.

Cheri: In my case, to follow up my illustration, if I went and ran errands with my husband once a week and just chillaxed — that's a California term for just chilling and relaxing at the same time.

Amy: Love it.

Cheri: That probably actually would be a really good investment in my marriage, way better than any of the million expectations that I've silently seethed about over the years. I just want to throw a little bit of empathy in here, not to justify or encourage perfectionism but for me at least, when I'm finding myself starting to go back down that road again and get back into that old groove ... Okay, what's leading me there? There is a real longing and desire, a valid longing and desire that I'm trying to meet the wrong way. If I can figure out what it is I can then redirect into a much more positive, healthy direction.

Amy: That is so true. I think that really extends into all our relationships. I know we're focusing on marriage today, but really, I think that perfectionists, our bottom line is that we think that we can earn love.

Cheri: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Amy: And earn acceptance. It's a longing for relationship that we're just filling in an unhealthy way. When we start saying, "Okay, so what would really build this relationship? Not this expectation that I have, but what would really build it?" That's so insightful and to think for you two it's to run errands together, how simple and yet profound.

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Cheri: Well, one of the things I put down in terms of what I notice in myself that helps me change from the expectations to focusing more on building the love in our relationship is that I try to shift from furious to curious. I can get so wound up in my frustration and just really dwell there. If, instead of getting so mad, instead of getting furious I start asking questions about the situation. Why did he see it that way? Why might he prefer to do things that way? We had a situation a couple of days ago where he needed to buy something. In my head I was like, "That's a waste of gas. That's a waste of time. It's just going to make him tired." I told him I could buy the same thing on Amazon. We were starting to go back and forth on that. I knew I could get it here overnight and that would be so much better.

First of all, it turned out I couldn't find the same thing on Amazon. Then I tried to step back and go, "Okay, let me be curious. What if he likes running errands?" There's a whole new thought right there. I realized, "Hang on a second, my concern for him using up all this time and energy really is me taking what would be true for me and acting as if it's true for him." I've never asked him, "Do you like running errands?" Realizing it wasn't that big of a deal for him. It was a big deal to me. I would rather order something on Amazon and then go out and buy it, but that wasn't true for him. I was like, "Wow, we've been together for all these years, and it never occurred to me that to him it's no, it really is no big deal.

Amy: That's amazing. When we think about perfectionism it is so black and white. We're trying to figure out the right way to do everything but then to realize this is only right in my perspective. There's not really a black and white about to run errands or order from Amazon.

Cheri: Exactly.

Amy: I don't think that's in the Bible anywhere. I think we have to start saying, "What are the scriptures that speak to that?" One of them is, "Don't think of ourselves more highly than we ought." That we're supposed to prefer others above ourselves, and so, wow, that messes with your marriage, right?

Cheri: That's a good one to apply here because I've always thought well I don't think of myself more highly than others. Well, except when I pay more attention to my perspective than someone else's and then I start arguing for it and then I can just go so fast and dig myself in so deep on something that doesn't matter. I mean we're literally talking about running errands here. We're not talking about a moral issue at all.

Amy: Exactly.

Cheri: You're right. That verse applies really, really well. The Bible verses Amy was referring to was Romans 12:3, "For by the grace given me I say every one of you, do not

think of yourself more highly than you ought but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” and Philippians 2:3-4, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.”

Speaking of grace, that's the part of our podcast name that we'd like to explore with you this week.

Amy: The element of grace I think is something definitely we need from God but it's what we don't want to extend to ourselves as perfectionists and people pleasers. I think that's been the hardest thing for me is knowing and realizing that I don't extend grace to myself so I don't extend grace to other people. That's what was damaging my relationships the most is that my expectations were very high for myself but goodness gracious they were high for you too.

Cheri: Mm-hmm (affirmative). One of the things that I've had to realize over the last few years as I'm starting to recognize how bad perfectionism really is, is that I've been trying to get permission to be human from other people. I'm seeking grace from them before I get it from God and before I am able to extend it to them. There's key relationships in my life where I've literally gotten angrier and angrier because they aren't giving me grace when they've never been able to. It's not been a part of our relationship. It's back to a reverse form of people pleasing and perfectionism of demanding something that I now recognize that I need but from a completely inappropriate source.

Amy: That's powerful stuff. Yeah, it comes from God first and then we have to learn how to appropriate it to ourselves and our own lives.

Cheri: If you're feeling like you'd like some practical ways to get better at receiving God's grace and extending it to others in your life, especially your husband, we would love to have you join us for the Proverbs 31 Ministries Online Bible Study this summer, focusing on Kathi Lipp's book, *The Husband Project*. You'll find all the information you need at [cherigregory.com](http://cherigregory.com) or [amycaroll.org](http://amycaroll.org). I'd like to extend a very specific invitation to all the HSP wives out there, those of you who are highly sensitive people. I've started a Facebook group specifically for HSP women who are going through *The Husband Project* with Proverbs 31 OBS this summer. You'll find the information you need in the show notes.

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We hope you've enjoyed this episode of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Today, grow your grit. Embrace God's grace. If you run across a bad rule, you know what to do: go ahead and break it.

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