

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #14: Choosing the Joy of Peace-Making Over the Angst of Peace-Keeping

Cheri: Sheila, I was telling Amy that you like going off the cuff, and we both hyperventilated into our respective paper bags. [Laughter]

[Music]

Hey, this is Cheri Gregory, and you're listening to Grit 'n Grace, Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Today my deLIGHTful co-host, Amy Carroll, and I are talking with Sheila Wray Gregoire, prolific blogger at To Love, Honor and Vacuum, and author of *Nine Thoughts That Can Change Your Marriage*.

[Music]

Cheri: The first chapter I wanted to talk about is the chapter on being called to be a peacemaker, not a peacekeeper. This feels like we're at the hairsplitters' convention. What's the difference between a peacemaker and a peacekeeper?

Sheila: Well, I like to think of it actually in terms of war, because I think that's easier to picture. If you picture Israel and Egypt and the people who were stationed on the border there for so many years before they signed the peace treaty, technically the two countries may have been at peace, and there wasn't outright war, no one was actually killing each other, but it's not like they felt like friends.

If you picture Canada and the US, I'm Canadian ... Well, actually, I'm both, but I live in Canada. I would consider Canada and the US very much at peace because we are friends, we have so much in common, we like to learn from each other. We know that we're not the same, but we definitely don't feel animosity. That's the difference. A peacekeeper is someone who knows that there's these two warring factions, and they're just trying to keep the lid on. They don't want anything to erupt, so everything needs to be stuffed down below the surface. A peacemaker is someone who wants to actually create this relationship where the two sides feel like they're at peace, that there is true friendship and there is true love between the two of them.

Amy: Wow. It sounds like we all would want to be a peacemaker, then. How do you become that person? What kinds of things do you do to make peace instead of just keep peace?

Sheila: I think it all goes back to your childhood. I mean, don't most things go back to your childhood?

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If we picture our childhood and we ask ourselves, "What was the environment when I grew up?

Did I grow up in a peacekeeping environment or a peacemaking environment?" A lot of us grew up in very peacekeeping environments. A lot of us actually were the peacekeepers, even as children. You didn't want to set off your dad. If he had a real temper, you learned how to walk on eggshells and how not to say the wrong things, or how to avoid him at certain times so that you wouldn't set him off.

Or, maybe you saw your parents having this very polite relationship, but that's really all it was. It was a very surface thing, and there wasn't any real intimacy. If you grew up in that, your tendency is to think, "Okay, if any fighting breaks out, if there is any conflict, that's a scary thing, and so I need to make sure there's never any conflict." The problem is, the only way to get peace is through conflict.

Cheri: Aww.

Sheila: I know! Isn't that just lousy? That is just lousy!

Cheri: Say it isn't so! Oh my goodness. Are we going to have to put that on a Facebook meme and see if people share it?

[Laughter]

Sheila: Even if you look at the Bible, if I could bring up a Bible story for a minute here.

Cheri: Oh, yeah.

Amy: Oh, yeah.

Sheila: There was one time when Paul and Peter were together. They weren't together very much because Paul was off on all these missionary journeys, but they had all gotten together and Peter was refusing to eat with Gentiles. Paul got up and got right in Peter's face and said, "What you are doing is wrong. You are being hypocritical. You are hurting the Gospel, and this isn't okay." Peter agreed, and then you see in the story later on, Peter is the one who was introducing Paul to speak to everybody else and to explain how we're going to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul made peace with Peter, but he did it by confronting Peter on something Peter was doing wrong. He didn't yell. He didn't throw things. He didn't call names. He just simply laid it out the way it was.

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Amy: What are some practical steps for peacemaking, even in the midst of conflict?

Sheila: I think we first need to understand that conflict and fighting are not the same thing, because we often think that they are, and that any conflict is, therefore, necessarily a fight. I see a fight as something, which is far more emotional. That's when you're starting to yell, that's when you might call names, that's when you might load up your arsenal with everything wrong he's ever done and let the cannon fly all at the same time.

That's not what I'm talking about. A conflict is simply where you have a disagreement about something and you hash it out and you work it out. You say, "You know what? I want to be on the same page as you because I love you." It doesn't need to be something which has yelling at all, and, in fact, the healthiest marriages are marriages where there is some conflict and where they learn how to handle it well. If a marriage never expresses any conflict, that marriage is way more likely to divorce. My mom was married for six years before my dad left, and she still says to this day that they never had a fight. They never had any conflict at all.

Cheri: Wow.

Amy: Wow.

Sheila: Yeah. She thinks that was part of the problem, is that she never brought things up when she saw that they were going in a negative direction.

Cheri: One of the things I noticed that you put in this chapter that interests me, especially since you started talking about our childhoods ... You said, "Nothing is wrong with having psychological trauma or physical issues. There is something wrong with refusing to deal with these things."

I came back home from our son's college graduation this weekend and people asked me how it was, and it took about the third time of me saying, "It was wonderful, nobody yelled at anybody," to realize, wow, that is still my baseline, my gut check of how to decide if a situation was successful or not. I was like, "Wow, that goes way, way..." When our family saw the movie *Inside Out*, I realized that I interpret anger as pain. There's this direct connection. Anger equals pain. What you're saying is we can have these childhood issues. In my case, I'm a highly sensitive person, so I am naturally more reactive than perhaps the average person would be, and so what's not okay is refusing to deal with it. What would you say to a woman who recognizes that she's a peacekeeper, she wants to learn to be a peacemaker, but she's terrified? Maybe she has some family background issues and she just ... I think another place, you said that

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sometimes women will use Scripture as an excuse not to learn how to do a better job of dealing with conflict. What would you say to a woman in that situation?

Sheila: Don't we all do that? "You just need to leave it at the foot of the cross. You just pray and put it in Jesus' hands, and don't you pick that burden up again! Once you've left it down, you just leave it there." We do these things.

Cheri: You do a pretty good imitation of a Southern girl there. I'm impressed!

Sheila: We think that all we need to do is pray. What if God is saying to you, your heart's desire is to feel intimate with someone else, to feel like they get you, like they understand you, and even with understanding you, they still want to be with you? That's a beautiful thing, and isn't that the heart cry that we all have? Yet, how can you ever experience that if you don't let your spouse see what's really inside?

When we are peacekeepers, we're keeping all this stuff inside, and that's not real intimacy. It's never going to be real intimacy. What I would suggest is, when you do have a conflict, when you feel like something's just off with your spouse, here's a really good way of talking about it. Sit down with your husband and say, "You know what, Sweetie? I am feeling like we're just not seeing eye to eye on this issue, or I'm feeling hurt right now, and can I tell you what I need right now, and then I really want to hear what you need right now." Instead of saying to someone, "You are doing this wrong," or "I'm mad at you for doing this, just tell them what you need." Here's an example. Let's say that he's ... What's a common one? He works a lot, and doesn't ever take time to talk to you, or something like that.

Cheri: Sure.

Sheila: Okay, let's do that one. Instead of saying, "I feel—I think you don't love me," or "You work too much and you're never home and the kids are growing up without you and you're ruining the whole family."

Instead of saying that, say something like, "You know what, Sweetie? I really love you. I love you and I want us to feel close, and what I need is just to spend half an hour every week talking about some important stuff. Can we find half an hour we can talk about some important stuff?"

Tell him what you need, because you know what? Guys are actually quite open, often, to meeting our needs, but when we just attack them, then they don't really like that. To tell someone, "You know what? This is what you need to do to make me happy," that's

empowering. Talk about that, and then ask him what he needs. He might say, "Well, I feel so stressed. I need some time to exercise," or "I need you to help me work through something," or whatever it might be. I don't know, whatever his issues are.

If you can share your needs rather than just attacking each other, often you can find that you get on the same page much easier.

Amy: One of the things that I've seen in conflict, both with my husband and with my friends, is that on the other side of that conflict, the relationship is so much stronger. Can you speak to that?

Sheila: Oh yeah, because here's the neat thing. When you actually talk about heart issues, you feel so much closer because you've let them in. That's real emotional vulnerability. That is one of the biggest tools that we have for building intimacy. The cool thing is that that's actually highly linked to libido, too, which is why makeup sex is a real thing, okay? It is the real thing! After these conflicts, that's often when you most want to jump him because you have let him see who you are, and you've been emotionally raw, and he still wants to be with you and you've worked something out. When you feel much closer like that, then everything else in your marriage goes so much better.

Cheri: Yeah. I'm listening to you say, "Tell the other person what your needs are," in this case, we're saying your husband. What about the woman who either ... I'm thinking of the people-pleaser, whose entire radar is for other people's needs, and she has no practice even asking herself or even feeling like her own needs are valid, 'cause of course, that would be selfish, or the perfectionist, who has no needs because that would be weak? Do you have any advice for women who would be willing to tell their husband what they need but they don't even know how to figure out and then put it into words because this just hasn't been modeled for them or they haven't perceived it as being something they're allowed to do, perhaps, in the Christian culture?

Sheila: One of the interesting things to do as a parent when you have children, let's say they're two, three, four years old, and they start to get angry or they start to feel overwhelmed, is, they say that parents are supposed to say to those kids, "I see that you look really angry right now. Are you feeling angry?" Or, "You look really frustrated because you can't get those blocks to line up. Are you feeling frustrated?" And help them identify what they're feeling, because kids are so overwhelmed with emotions, and they don't have words for it. It's important as a parent to give kids words for these emotions.

I think a lot of women have never given ourselves words for what we feel. I think that we honestly don't know how to recognize some feelings. It's a learning curve, right? Sometimes we don't even know how we're feeling, but really ask God to show you, because there's so many emotions in the Bible. Emotions are good things. If we can start to identify what we're feeling, it's much easier to identify what you need. You'll never figure out what you need until you know what you're feeling.

Amy: My Sunday School class of women at church, we're going through a book about emotions, and it was so interesting on Sunday because the leader said, "Name some emotions," and we came up with about 20. She had a list of 150 that she had gotten off of the Internet. Then, she had us go through the Psalms and underline one of the Psalms and just underline all of the emotions written there. It was so many more than we even thought of.

Sheila: You know what? I like that. Okay. What if we were to take a list of emotions? What if you had that list handy so that throughout the day, you could look at that list and say, "Oh yeah, that's what it is that I'm feeling."

Amy: Yeah, exactly!

Sheila: Because sometimes I really think we can't ... We can't put a word to it. But, if the words are there and you're choosing, it's like, "Okay, that's what it is. I'm feeling defeated." Sometimes I'm just feeling relaxed, which is good.

Amy: Mm-hmm (affirmative), right.

Cheri: The next chapter I was looking at last night was "Being One is More Important Than Being Right" -- that oneness is more important than winning. Talk a little bit about that. I love the fact that you're kind of a competitive, debating, winning-oriented kind of person, and yet you've got this really strong, vibrant marriage. How did that happen?

Sheila: Well, a lot of my issues when I got married, of course, were due to my childhood. I came into marriage with tons of rejection issues. I think I had this idea, which I never actually told myself, but looking back, I think this is what I subconsciously thought, is that every time we had a conflict, if I could just convince Keith why he was wrong to feel the way he did, then he wouldn't leave. I just had to show him why he was off his rocker to feel unloved, why he was totally wrong if he was upset at me. I approached, every time that we had this conflict, as "I need to win and prove that he is wrong."

What I found out is that if you're going into every conflict trying to win, then you're going to end up married to a loser, and nobody wants to be married to a loser. We need

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to start saying this in a different way, because I might win the conflict, that particular round, but I didn't have my husband. He didn't feel close to me.

Let's just totally take a step back and say, "How can we do conflict differently?" Here's what often happens, and I share this analogy in my book, I share this story, because I think it's quite typical. Let's take a woman, and she's pregnant. Six months pregnant, she's got twins coming, and she has a toddler. She is just ready to be exhausted. She's overwhelmed. She's scared. This is going to be a really hard period in her life. Her husband is thinking, "Okay, our family's about to go from three to five. We need to get our financial life in order, and there's a chance to buy a house and it's a good deal." And so, he is convinced that he really wants to buy this house. She's thinking moving right now is too overwhelming to even think about. When they have a conflict, what's the issue there? What are they going to be talking about? They're going to be talking about whether or not to move, right?

Cheri: Sure.

Sheila: As soon as you frame it like that, you're framing it as "someone's going to win and someone's going to lose."

Cheri: Yeah.

Sheila: Because there's no other way to come out of that. If that is what you're going in with, "Are we going to move or not," then someone is going to win and someone is going to lose, because as soon as you start asking who is right in this situation, you're simultaneously asking who is wrong. And you're looking at it as a win-lose thing. This is why most conflicts don't get resolved and most people end up miserable after conflicts, because they're approaching it in totally the wrong way.

What I would say to this couple is, "All right. Forget whether you're going to move. Forget trying to decide who's right and who's wrong, and instead, let's take a big step backwards and say, 'What is it that you need right now from me? What do you need?'"

She could say, "Well, I'm just exhausted. I need to feel like I'm going to get some sleep in the next six months. I need to feel like I'm going to have some help. I need to feel like I'm not going to fall apart," all of this sort of thing. He could say, "Well, I need to feel like we're financially secure and like we have a plan, and like I know that in ten years we're not going to be bankrupt and we've made some wise decisions and we have some savings." If you look at it that way ... Let's say that they've even written that stuff down. Here's what she needs, here's what he needs. Then they can start looking at these pieces of paper with their needs and they can start brainstorming how we can meet those needs. Maybe you can ask some friends to make some casseroles to fill up the

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freezer before the babies come, maybe we can hire a housekeeper once a week. Whatever. You can figure out ways to help her not feel exhausted, and you can figure out ways to figure out a financial plan, how to budget, whatever it is. Some of that might involve moving, for sure, but maybe you'll come up with other things you've never even thought of. When you frame it as "Here's what I need and here's what you need," and you're brainstorming how you can meet each other's needs, it's just a totally different dynamic.

Amy: I think that's terrific, because what I hear you saying is instead of opponents, they're now on the same team, and that makes all the difference always.

Sheila: It does, yeah. It just makes you feel like, "Okay. We're in this together. I'm not trying to beat you over the head and get you to see it my way. We're in it together."

Cheri: There's something about writing things down that makes them feel more objective, like they're, instead of swirling ... At least for me, instead of swirling around my head and I'm having to spew to get it out, writing it down feels like I'm in school and I'm taking notes and I'm being more academic and taking a much more unbiased approach to it. I think that probably has some benefits as well.

Sheila: I think the other thing that writing down does is it says, "Okay, we're identifying the issue, and the issue is what's on this paper. The issue is not you."

Cheri: That's so good.

Amy: So good.

Cheri: Do you have any closing comment that you want to say on these two particular topics, the peacekeeping versus peacemaking and being one versus being right?

Sheila: I guess maybe on a bigger picture, I would just say to all you people who are perfectionists and people-pleasers, those stem from a good heart, right? It stems from a genuine desire to see life go well for other people. Even if you're a perfectionist, what you're trying to do is to create a life, which is good. These are good desires. You've just learned to do them in a negative way, which is really too bad.

If we can just have the courage to say that maybe what God wants for us isn't always these perfect things that we hear in church and all these cliches and pat answers that we hear in church, but He wants you to do the hard work. Don't be scared by that because, yeah, it's hard, but it is so much fun and it's a real adventure when you learn who you were really created to be. Don't be afraid of going against the pat answers and

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don't be afraid of reaching down deep and seeing what God's really saying to you, because even though it might be scary, there's nothing to compare to that wild ride.

Cheri: Aw, thank you for the empathy! I feel all the feels now. [Laughter] Thank you so much, Sheila. We will have to have you back on again to tackle even more.

Sheila: Thank you! Good to talk to you both.

Amy: Bye, Sheila!

Cheri: The bad rule that comes to mind for this episode goes like this: "It's worth a fight to make him admit you're right!" And I'd lived for many years like that in my own marriage. I just thought as long as I could—I thought that if I could finally get him to see things from my perspective, he would then finally admit that I was right. I loved how Sheila said, "But if somebody is right and somebody is wrong, it means that the person who is right is married to a loser. And nobody wants to be married to a loser."

And also there was just the complete fallacy that some other person really could ever see things from my perspective. My husband has his perspective. I have my perspective. And in so many situations, neither one of them is the right one. They're simply different.

So the truth is that being one is more important than being right in a marriage. And in any of our relationships, being loving is much more important than being right. Head on over to the webpage for today's episode at CheriGregory.com — that's C-H-E-R-I G-R-E-G-O-R-Y-dot-com and you'll find links to some great resources from Sheila. You can also enter to win a copy of her book, *Nine Thoughts That Can Change Your Marriage*.

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We hope you've enjoyed episode #14 of Grit 'n' Grace -- Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules.

Next week, Amy and I will be back talking about what we've learned from Sheila and how we're applying it to our everyday lives.

For today, grow your grit ... embrace God's grace ... and when you run across a bad rule, by all means, BREAK IT!

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