

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

Episode #167: How To Unleash Your Personality to Change the World

**Cheri:** Hey, 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 love who you're not, love who you are, and live your one life well.

**Amy:** Today we're talking to Karen McNary. Karen is a native of Kentucky now living in the Charlotte North Carolina area with her husband and three active sons. She's passionate about God's word and has spent time equipping the church through organizations such as Bible Study Fellowship International and Brownicity. She merged her career in Human Resources and her love for God's word as she joined Proverbs 31 ministries. Currently, she serves as the director of Human Resources and occasionally teaches for the first5 app. When she's not working or teaching, you'll find her uncovering overlooked jewels at the local thrift store.

**Amy:** Karen, it has been such a pleasure to have a growing friendship with you, and I can tell our listeners that you are a multi-talented woman. You're a Bible teacher, you're an HR expert, but you have this story that I've gotten to be on the sidelines for that is amazing, so fill us in.

**Karen:** Sure, so I had an interesting growing up experience. So I'm not super young, I'm 52, I don't mind sharing that. And my family was the first minority family to move into the neighborhood. So I've always learned or known how to navigate different spaces. And, doing that, I had to learn as a minority at a majority school, and then because I was at a majority school but I was at a primarily black church, I had to learn how to navigate that. So I just grew up, I call myself bicultural because there are certainly different cultures within this state, and so I've learned how to navigate that. I feel like that's just

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been my story. It was how I grew up, it was where I went to school, from elementary to high school to college, every job that I took, I say I have always been the brown face in the white space. So I have just learned how to navigate, what it means, to navigate differences. So I see differences differently than other people because I've just – it's the water that I have been swimming in for so long. So I think it's given me the unique ability to see things and see people and see a way that we can be united but not necessarily be uniform.

**Amy:** Beautiful. Now you recently had a trip that brought a lot of the issues that you've been kind of wrestling with over the years into focus.

**Karen:** I did, I did. So I had recently done some research on my family background. I had only been able to get as far as the last in slave Africa. He was born in 1865. And I saw that they were in Virginia, but through DNA, I actually found that my roots go back to Benin in Togo, West Africa. So this past – actually, Amy, you connected me with The Repentance Project, and we did a pilgrimage to Virginia, and we were able to kind of trace the root from Benin to Virginia and then through – I know how my family got to Kentucky. So it was just – and I also have, 2% of my roots come from England, so I was actually able to see the English side of my family, 'cause they are my family, these slave-owners, and then connect with those who were enslaved and to really walk the path that they walked. So it was – it was very spiritual, it was very humbling, but it was very healing. Because in the midst of all that, I really could see just God's provision and God's grace and just to see that He really is sovereign. That he was never outside of, he was involved in every aspect. So it just – it sounds kind of weird, but it was a really very humbling experience for me.

I posted pictures, and I actually wrote – and I'm not a blogger, but I actually wrote a blog after that, and it was posted on several websites. But I did, I kind of tried to chronicle it, it was just – I mean, seeing chains, then you see, you know, this white pharmacist who took his money to purchase the enslaved and freed them, so you talk about cost – he could have been killed for that. So, in the midst of great ugliness, God showed Himself. So that's what I loved the most. That God, He was there. If you intentionally seek Him, you'll find Him. So it was just very, this affirming that God was always present.

**Amy:** Karen, because, one of the things that was so important for me – I had gone through The Repentance Project during Lent and I was moved every day, but the whole tone of it was lament, and was repentance, of course, and I had this sense that I was somewhat removed from it. That I was – that – I would have some teary moments as I

was reading these devotions every day throughout Lent, but I felt a little removed. But it was your blog post that really broke my heart wide open, because I love you, and to hear the emotion of what you went through on that journey, I finally really wept. And felt like I lamented the sins of our country's past with slavery, and so can you – can you give us just a picture, like a short, like a moment on that trip that just really impacted you.

**Karen:** We started with at the Jamestown River (James River at Jamestown), and the backdrop was a huge Confederate statue. So I was immediately like “Really? Are we really gonna start here?” But, listening to our guide, who was an African American minister, he gave such a great perspective and he talked about sacred stories, and how important it is to be able to sit with sacred stories even if you don't agree. So when he looked at that statue – he grew up in Virginia, so he grew up with segregation, remembers, you know, “colored” water fountains, so he remembers that, but what he said was that that statue represents people's lives that were lost. And so, regardless of the reason behind it, those were men. They were fathers, they were brothers, they were husbands, and that's their lament. So it just kinda gave me a different perspective, and so would I like to see the statue gone? Yeah. But I respect the fact that they had loss, as well. And then the second most impactful was seeing the Jamestown River. We actually walked the path that some of the enslaved came when they got off the ship, and it was very impactful. It was just because – we walked – we kind of held hands – so, you're on this long narrow path, and he just talked about it being at night, and they had been on this ship for months, and how they had to come off at night because they didn't want to offend the people, to see them. So I thought “Wow. So you're – you don't want those to have been offended to see what needs to happen for them to have this great comfy lifestyle.” So it was very impactful to me, but I just thought – and just again it made me think, “Wow. These were my ancestors, and I'm here.” You know, I have – their blood is running through my veins. And so, I just thought about tenacity and faith, and what did it take for them to survive. So again, God's grace. You know, only God's grace, because so many didn't make it off the ship. They either died or they jumped off because they didn't want to have to live a life of servitude. So I just thought, even in a quirky way, just God's grace that I'm even here, that I can stand and say these were my people and they survived.

**Amy:** I love to hear you using your story and your ancestry, but also your personal story to speak into this racial reconciliation space.

**Cheri:** So Karen, part of this series that we're doing on seed-senders is, we look at seeds as these things that God has given us, so gifts, calling, personality, parts of our story – so what seeds do you see that God has given you to create impact?

**Karen:** I thought a lot about that question, and I really see connectedness or being a networker as a seed. Because I think a part of my personality really is to see how the dots connect. So, how, like three of us are connecting. What common ground can we find? And I think because I grew up having to do that to survive, that's just the way that God has gifted me. So I really do just see the ability to connect as a seed that really helps, and obviously that's what we need to do more than ever now, right, is to kind of connect. So I think that just that innate desire to connect people, and to network, and to see – to find the unity is what God has gifted me, and I think that's what helps me with the work I'm doing now.

**Amy:** The way that we connected, Karen, is that we are both with Proverbs 31 Ministries and we're in a group that's been going through Lucretia Berry's curriculum *What Lies Between Us*. We've had Lucretia on Grit 'n' Grace, and we love her. So lemme ask you this: as you work in Proverbs 31 Ministries, and as you go through this curriculum with our group, how have you been praying for our ministry but also just for the women that Proverbs 31 Ministries affects?

**Karen:** I think for the ministry, I've been praying for the heart of all of our staffs to be opened. Because I think that the challenges that we see, it's a heart issue. And I often say that I'm not the Holy Spirit, it's not my job to do that. So I just pray for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of everyone, for everyone to open their eyes to see like you've seen. But God has to do things with His people in His time. So I just pray that people will come with an open heart and allow the Holy Spirit to work. So that's how I pray specifically for our staff. And then for the women that connect with us, I just think – there's so much – God is the originator of diversity. If you think about the garden, it's diverse! There's so much that we can learn from each other, and just that people would not fear what's different, but will they learn from it and grow from it. I just got back from Jamaica and – just short of being Jamaica – but just the different food, the different people, the different languages... I mean, there's just different plants, and the flowers, there's just so much more than our own little world if we would just not be afraid to engage. So that's what I want for our women, just to be able to see differences as something that can add value and not fear, like, if there's something then I'm gonna lose. Because I gain when I learn about people who are different than me. That's been

the biggest benefit of kind of being in a majority space, 'cause I learn so much more than I would have, rather than being in my own little world.

**Cheri:** Tell us one “seize the yay” moment, a joy-filled God moment that you’ve had in the last month.

**Karen:** I was in Jamaica, I was just looking at the ocean, I was looking at just the variety of plants and trees and shrubs and looking at the people and I was thinking I was just seeing – this is Creation. You know, that God has already told us how it’s gonna end. He’s given us a picture of nations, tribes, and tongues being together. So, it’s already been spoken, but we’re not yet there. So I felt like as I just sat there, God was just showing me that this is – it’s happening now, you know. We won’t see the fulfillment until He comes again, which is great, but for now it’s happening. There are people that are – we’re talking, we’re gathering, we’re learning, we’re having joy with each other. So I feel like I just got a glimpse of what God is doing. Sometimes when we’re in our own little worlds, we can forget that there’s so much more than what we see, and I felt like this past weekend God just gave me a visual of “This is what’s happening now.” You know, it’s happening, and you know, I could turn off CNN and Fox News because if you look at that you’d think that nothing good is happening, but there is. That God is still moving in the lives of people. He is bringing us, He is uniting us, despite the differences. So. It was such a God week for me.

**Amy:** I just love that. And I asked you, Karen, and I think – I don’t know, a couple of months ago when we were talking I said “Ok, is God at work, or is this something that’s been ongoing, and I’m just new to it?” And Karen, you said to me “No, God is at work. This is a new thing.” And I was so excited to hear you say that. I’m so excited that God reaffirmed that for you as you looked out on His Creation –

**Karen:** Yes.

**Amy:** – that we are part of a movement and this is a place where the church should be leading, so hallelujah, we are!

**Karen:** And Amy, I feel like we are. But I think if you think about the church, the church has always been a remnant. You know, and I think we just expect – it never looks like we think it should, so God just confirmed that the church – because the church is people, it's not a building, we are, we're the church – we're engaging, we're in our own cultural context, we are doing what God called us to do, and that's what He asks us, you know, and then we can do our part, we can trust that He's going to do his part. And I don't have to see it, but I know that God is moving. So to me it was just a great reminder that it's God's purpose. It's not mine. You know? They're His people. They're not mine. So I've got a small part to play, and I'm gonna do my piece and trust that one day I'm gonna see the fruition of this. So. That much I do know.

**Amy:** The Holy Spirit is invisible –

**Karen:** Yes.

**Amy:** – but he's sending the seeds out into the world.

**Karen:** Absolutely. And we get to see glimpses of those seeds! You know, we get to see them. So it's not as if it's blind faith. He gives us little glimpses of what He's doing at the larger level. I'm so grateful for that.

**Cheri:** We hope you've enjoyed episode 167 of Grit'n'Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules.

**Amy:** Head on over to [gritngracegirls.com/epiosde167](http://gritngracegirls.com/epiosde167).

There you'll find the transcript, our Digging Deeper download, and a link to Karen's blog post about her trip to Virginia.

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**Cheri:** So another dream has come true – the audiobook of *Exhale* is finally available and I am here to testify that no matter what Amy says, she does not sound like a hick. It is so much fun to hear her read her own words. So there, Amy Carroll!

**Amy:** Well, we are so excited, and we hope that you enjoy hearing *Exhale* in the voices that you're so used to hearing here on the podcast.

**Cheri:** And once again, thank you so much for making that book even possible in the first place.

**Amy:** Next week's seed-sender is Cindy Finley, a woman who's sending her seeds to help children on another continent.

**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!