

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

Episode #168: Pulling Together the Strings of Your Life Into a Beautiful Tapestry

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

**Amy:** Today, we're talking with Cindy Finley. Cindy is the Executive Director of RiverCross, a ministry that builds bridges to hope for the world's vulnerable children. RiverCross harnesses the power of story and the strength of partnership to equip and empower local leaders to protect the vulnerable, restore the traumatized, and build hope and a future for all their children. Cindy has been married to Bill Finley for 28 years and together they have seven children and a golden doodle named Zuri. Cindy shares a key for stepping into seed sending today, so make sure to listen for it.

**Amy:** Well, Cindy, thank you so much for being with us today. I have had the pleasure of watching some of this story unfold right before my eyes, but fill us in, tell us your story, and how God is using your life to impact others.

**Cindy:** Well, I'm a mom of seven, and for years my primary thing that I did was that I was home with the kids, and raising the kids, and homeschooling the kids, and doing all the kid stuff. My husband was church planting, and I was alongside him in that. And then in 2008 we traveled to Ukraine to do a ministry trip. We were doing marriage conferences around Ukraine, and we were staying with a host family, and while we were there this woman that we stayed with – her name is Albina ... she's a young mom, two preschool children, job, all of this, and she was welcoming addicts into her home who had just met Christ and taking care of them. And this was just her lifestyle. And she was taking such good care of us. And so we came in one afternoon after having been out at a

Episode #168: Pulling Together the Strings of Your Life Into a Beautiful Tapestry

local church doing this conference, and she was fixing something in her kitchen, and I came in and I said “Albina – this smells wonderful! What is it that you are cooking?” She had this big pot on the stove and she said, “Well Cindy, I’m fixing my chicken soup.” And I said “Well, it smells incredible, Albina!” She said “Well I’m fixing it for my neighbor who’s dying of bowel disease, and she’s going to die, but she likes my soup.” And I remember I’ve seen her pouring herself out again and again and again, and I stood there with my American self on, and I said “Albina, you can’t do—” and then by God’s grace I took what I say is a holy pause, and I breathed in, and she turned around and she looked at me with this wooden spoon in her hand, and she said “Nothing. I know, Cindy, we can’t do nothing.” And that changed my world. I became a person who no longer was overwhelmed by the 140 million orphans in the world and said, “I can’t fix it all, so I can’t do anything.” to a person who said, “I see this, and now I can’t do nothing.” And so that launched me into a journey of being engaged with justice issues, with orphans and vulnerable children – we ended up adopting our youngest from Ukraine – and then eventually, as my children grew up, I came into working in the nonprofit world, and one thing led to another, by God’s grace, and now I get to lead this incredible ministry called RiverCross that is involved in helping. Well, what we do is build bridges to hope for the world’s vulnerable children, particularly those who have gone through extreme trauma.

**Amy:** Tell us a little bit more about that, because you said that so succinctly and it’s beautiful, but tell a little bit – RiverCross is such a fascinating ministry. It’s so unique, Cindy, and in the way that you do ministry, tell us just a little bit about that.

**Cindy:** So with RiverCross, we believe that the world’s vulnerable children need a bridge to hope, a bridge to Christ. What they’ve experienced – all of them – if you’re an orphan you’ve experienced extreme trauma, and then science tells us that one trauma typically leads to another to another to another, and without an intervention it’s gonna result in death or perpetrating violence in other’s lives, or just continuing your own cycle of trauma. But the worst thing is that when kids have experienced trauma like this, it causes their heart to close up most times. And it’s difficult for the gospel to penetrate. Now God can do anything, and He does that, but it creates a situation where the children’s hearts – how can they trust a loving Father if their own father abandoned them, abused them, if life has treated them this way? So what we realized is that they need a bridge to actually get to Jesus. You know, Jesus said let the children come to me. There were disciples blocking the way of the children getting to Jesus. And what we have learned is that trauma is like that. Trauma gets in the way of children getting to Jesus. And so, we’re addressing the trauma through the strength of partnerships and the power of story, and we do it with a community-based plan. We know that the best people to care for these children are not a team of Westerners coming over to spend a week doing some counseling stuff, but if we could actually equip the people who are on

the ground with the children, and are gonna be with them day-in, day-out from that point forward. So we produce resources. Some of your listeners may be familiar with a radio program, *Adventures in Odyssey*, produced by Focus on the Family, and so what we have done is we've taken best practices of trauma-informed care, and we've embedded them into a program like *Adventures in Odyssey*, a radio drama. And that serves as our training tool. Our writers are actually Focus on the Family writers, our producer is a Focus on the Family producer, and so it's the quality of an *Adventures in Odyssey*. And then, we have these listening groups, where they're led by local leaders who get certified as facilitators to – so we do three steps: we produce the resources, which are the radio dramas; then we equip local leaders, we do training, conduct training, so that local leaders are able to utilize this tool, are equipped and empowered to be able to go out and be change-makers; and then once we get enough coverage in a local area of trained leaders, then we initiate a broadcast strategy, so entire villages and communities can listen and their awareness is raised, they become advocates for the children, and then they become activists for the children.

**Amy:** It's such an amazing model of – of using story in a very story-driven culture. So I – I love that.

**Cheri:** You're part of what we're calling our seed-sender series, and so what seeds – and we consider the seeds to be your gifts, your calling, your personality, your own story, whatever – what seeds do you see that God has given you to create the kind of impact that you're having?

**Cindy:** Quite honestly, when the Lord called me to this, I saw so many of the strings – the strings that you think about, the tapestry of my life – that kind of converged, even things before I knew the Lord. I didn't meet the Lord until I was 21 years old, but I did commercial work as a kid, and so I was familiar – and I did Community Theater growing up. And so, being familiar with scripts and with studios, all this stuff that the Lord did way before I even knew Him. And then, for years I've been a speaker for women's retreats and so the communication side of things... I have always been told that I have leadership gifts and so being able to utilize those in this way that is for the Lord and not for worldly advancement... and then I really believe that when the Lord gives us gifts, we have a stewardship responsibility to grow those gifts, and so, I have participated in She Speaks, I have done all sorts of things to hone my communication skills. I'm a member of Christian Leadership Alliance, and so I've done all this work in order to become the best leader, communicator, that I can be for the glory of the Lord. And so, I see all these different things... and then of course having the number of children I have, and just a

passion for children, from the very beginning – my Masters Degree is in Play Therapy and so that... you know, I actually never used it. As soon as I got my Masters, I was pregnant with my first child. And so, now the Lord is using that as we develop application activities for the children who listen to our resources and I see play as a therapeutic absolutely a necessary thing for these children who have been through trauma.

**Cheri:** It's beautiful because what I'm hearing is absolutely nothing in your life has been wasted. Like, it's all coming together, even things that maybe you had forgotten –

**Cindy:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Cheri:** – are coming to the surface to be used here. I think that's just an amazing encouragement for our listeners.

**Amy:** The other encouragement that I love that Cindy said that I think is super important is not only was she willing to recognize the gifts instead of pushing them aside in kind of a false humility, but she developed those gifts. So she recognized them, and then she realized that we all start with a little talent, a little natural talent that God's put in us, but then stewardship says that we take those things, and we develop them. Those are two really powerful statements for us and for our listeners.

**Cheri:** Well, and you've set up this beautiful contrast because so many of our listeners fear that it is selfish to identify their gifts, that it is selfish to pursue their gifts, and you've set up, "No, it's stewardship."

**Cindy:** Yeah.

**Cheri:** It's not selfishness, it is stewardship. And that is – that is a beautiful mindset shift, as Amy would call it.

Episode #168: Pulling Together the Strings of Your Life Into a Beautiful Tapestry

**Cindy:** Well, one of my favorite Bible stories... well, there are plenty – many – but Numbers 12 when Moses says, when he’s – his sister Miriam and Aaron are all mad at him, and then it says Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth. And we all know who was holding the pen that was writing these words and that was Moses, of course! And so – we have this idea that humility means, “No, no, no!” It just means recognizing what God has given us and then being able to use it for the Kingdom. If we store up those gifts for ourselves, that’s actual – that’s the Enemy’s plot, ploy, to be able to make people do that.

**Amy:** Cindy, I know you just got back from Zambia –

**Cindy:** Yeah.

**Amy:** – one of the places that RiverCross is working, so I’m thinking you have a great story for us. Would you tell us a “seize the yay” moment, just a joy-filled God moment that you’ve had within the last month?

**Cindy:** Oh, yeah. And there are so many. We actually had the opportunity to – so Zambia is where we are intentionally developing our model. We have other ministries around the world that are using our resources, but Zambia’s where we are rolling out our ministry model. And so, I had the honor of traveling 15 hours from Lusaka in a land cruiser with five people and three – me being in the very center of the backseat –

**Amy:** I love how you call that an honor, Cindy –

**Cindy:** It was! And God gave us the grace for that. Which, you’re just like, “Wow.” And so we literally traveled up to North of Zambia to the border of the Congo, and we had been invited to go to a refugee settlement in a little town called Chilanga that has 23,000 refugees from the Congo. Who, we literally saw them crossing over the lake, and they come in and then they surrender themselves to the authorities, and are taken to

one of the refugee settlements where then they're processed. And we had the opportunity of going in and saying, "Could RiverCross be of help here?" and we were invited by their government to be able to do that. And while we were there we learned that there are more than 5,200 school-age children who have fled from war, who have fled from horrific things we can't even imagine – there was a mother who gave birth to triplets, and two weeks later she was fleeing for her life, on foot, to get to this refugee settlement – so, extreme trauma. And they have invited us in to be able to equip their teachers. They have 40 teachers serving more than five thousand children. And – just get your head around that – who have all gone through extreme trauma. And so they have invited us in to begin to equip their teachers, to be able to equip their community development, to be able to equip their police, and we are so honored by that. So that was just a God moment of – we can't believe – I felt like I was on holy ground with these precious children who've gone through so much, and we've been invited to come in and help them cross from the place where their trauma defines them to a place where they are defined by Christ.

**Cheri:** We hope you've enjoyed episode 168 of Grit 'n' Grace, Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules.

**Amy:** Head on over to [gritngracegirls.com/episode168](http://gritngracegirls.com/episode168). There you'll find our transcript, the Digging Deeper download and a link to the RiverCross website.

**Cheri:** Did you know that we've created a companion study guide to go along with our book *Exhale*? In this six-week study guide, you'll find space to journal your now breathe exercises from the end of each chapter in the book, questions designed to dig deeper into the scripture from each chapter, and personal reflection questions to help you apply new ideas to your everyday life. This guide can be used individually or as a group participant and you'll find it at [exhalebook.com/study](http://exhalebook.com/study).

**Amy:** Next week's guest is seed sender, Shantell Brightman, one of our very first Grit 'n' Grace interns and now a dear friend who is using the seeds placed in her hands to empower other women.

**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

**Amy 'n' Cheri:** BREAK IT!