

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #171: Secrets to Planning a Christmas That Won't Disappoint

Amy: Cheri, we're recording today in mid-September, so I just have a question for you. How does it make you feel to see the Thanksgiving and Christmas decorations in the store already?

Cheri: Oh, you don't even have to ask. It makes me want to scre ... It makes me want to pull my hair out. And here's the thing: how can it possibly be this far into 2019? Like, I feel so far behind on so many things. So, you know me, every year I want to look forward to the holidays, but right now, they just feel like one more thing that I'm going to do wrong and be behind on, and yes, I know I sound like a cross between Eeyore and Puddleglum and the Grinch right now. So, tell me Amy, how does seeing all these decorations make you feel?

[Laughter]

Amy: Well, I think you know my answer, too. I'm feeling kind of happy skippy today. It makes me want to put up my tree right now, and it's still 90 degrees here in North Carolina. And, I just put out my pumpkins. Like, I was only, I was excited about my pumpkins yesterday, and today I want to put up my Christmas tree. It's sick. It's a sickness, I know. I know. But here's the other thing, the other equivalent is it makes me feel the need for our paper bag to hyperventilate into because the anxiety of all the decorating, planning, scheduling. That is overwhelming. And most of all, I start to get anxious about all my people being happy during this joyful season.

And you and I, it turns out, are not alone in that. One of our listeners said, "People pleasing is my nemesis. I cannot get my head around the idea that if I'm happy and doing what works for me then other people can be happy and have their needs met too. I was raised to understand that as believers, we're to sacrificially love and serve those around us and how we feel about it doesn't matter so much. And if we do feel resentful, then it's just one more thing that we need to bring to the Lord to work on ... I'll do anything to make it better, even if it means being dishonest with myself and others."

Cheri: Well, this is Cheri Gregory-

Amy: And I'm Amy Carroll.

Cheri: And you're listening to Grit and 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 the one and only Kathy Lipp, the queen of clutter-free and celebrations.

Cheri: So, if you're like me and you need all the help you can get to enjoy the holiday season, Kathi is here to the rescue.

Amy: Kathi, this is such a beautiful and practical planner. I'm going to tell our listeners right now that they need to order one immediately because Christmas chaos is real and, incredibly, right around the corner, right?

Kathi: I do have to say, even if you didn't like Christmas, the book is so pretty. I just want to own it so I look like I was Christmas ready. You could just display this in your house as a decoration.

Cheri: It's true.

Amy: And you never get around to actually planning.

Kathi: Exactly.

At least you can look like you've set up your intention, which I love.

Amy: That's awesome. Tell us why and how did the queen of clutter end up designing a Christmas planner?

Kathi: I love it because I do believe Christmas is one of our biggest clutter generators, right? I think some of the same reasons that we struggle with clutter are the same reasons we struggle with Christmas.

I feel like the first thing is, it's other people's expectations, that's why we have clutter and that's why we have Christmas chaos because many of us don't sit down and say, "What's really important to me and my family?" We don't put intention behind Christmas and so we let other people's expectations of matching outfits and 12 different kinds of cookies take over and we don't get honest with ourselves about how do we really feel about Christmas. Can I just say, even if I didn't know you guys really well, I would assume that Amy is kind of all up in Christmas, am I right or am I wrong?

Amy: You are completely correct.

Kathi: Yeah.

Amy: It's my favorite.

Kathi: I don't know that I've ever really noticed you putting things on Instagram or something like that, but this is just how I know the soul of my two friends, and Cheri may be, let's just say, a little bit more resistance and maybe celebrates in a simpler way, but also there's a lot of dynamics that go into Christmas for all of us, let's just say that. Other people's expectations can really get in the way, and Amy, I know you became a new mother-in-law this year, and so that's going to bring a whole new interesting dynamic. I know nothing about your daughter-in-law, but I just know with -

Amy: She's the best.

Kathi: She's the best.

Amy: And it's still going to be a little ... It's something new, a little fraught, sure.

Kathi: Exactly. You have other people's expectations, which leads to overwhelm, which Cheri and I are experts on. Can I just tell you, when I talk about this book, Cheri, I am referencing overwhelmed all the time, because those are the feelings. If clutter is the emotional manifestation of overwhelm, then Christmas is the holiday version of overwhelm.

Cheri: I love it. You, in your planner, you recommend a holiday mission statement. That sounds almost woo woo, so how is that going to help?

Kathi: Yeah, it does sound woo woo, I get that, but here's what I also know. The mission statement is more about what you're not going to do, what you're not going to spend money, what you're not going to waste time on, than it is about creating a perfect Christmas.

So, in my mission statement, if I say that this is a year ... There have been some years where my focus has been joy and there were some years where my focus has been peace. Pretty much between the years ... like, this year my focus is joy, but the year my dad died it was about peace, and how do we create this new holiday with such an important person gone in our lives?

You just don't recycle it each year. Christmas is new every year because what's going on in your family, your friends, your life, your job, your finances, your health, is new every year. That's where you set your intention to say, "What do I want this to look like?" When you're bringing in a new family member that's when you get to celebrate. You get to do fun things, but also there is a time to say, "This isn't the year we're doing Christmas cards. Things are strained in my family and I don't need the extra burden of everybody faking it. I need to spend what I would spend on Christmas cards on therapy this year." That is a perfectly legitimate thing to do.

Cheri: That may be one of the most brilliant things I've ever heard you say, and I've heard you say a lot of them. So this sounds a lot like candid, knowing what we do and don't need for this year, and it sounds like boundaries. I love it.

Kathi: It's really understanding what is important to you and your family, and what is important to you if you're a Christ-believer. What is important to you to understand about what this holiday is. Part of what I want to do each holiday is spend less time focusing on myself and even my family and saying, "Okay, so how do we go outside of ourselves?" Because I look at my family, and you know what, we are pretty darn blessed. I heard the best quote this year that I am actually inscribing on a table at our house. It's, "When you have more than you need, build a longer table, not a higher fence."

If I feel so deeply about that that I want to inscribe it in furniture, then how do I live that out? That may be inviting people who don't have a regular place of worship or celebration. It may be donating more of what we would give to each other and saying, "Who could use this in such a better way than we could as a family this year? How do we leverage what we have and how do we be inclusive in the celebration?"

Amy: This is so beautiful, Kathi, and it makes me incredibly happy to be talking about this so early because these kinds of conversations that you're encouraging us to have and these things to think through, it is so important to do them before the rush hits or else it just never happens.

Kathi: Right. I think a lot of people say, "Okay, we'll have this conversation at Thanksgiving about Christmas." Please don't. Please, please, please don't. Be nice to yourself. That's not a good time. It's better to have these conversations on the phone or over coffee or even by email to say, "Hey, we're thinking about this in advance." It's really interesting. We have a family member who says, "Hey, I want to invite these family members who normally don't come to our things." I said, "That is awesome." Of course they would be invited. Let's think this through though, because if we invite those people then we need to invite this other person who can be super-challenging. Now, I'm not saying let's not invite them, I'm saying let's have a plan.

What we've come to understand, through these very hard conversations, is this one family member acts out when she doesn't know her role. Can we give her a role? Can we put her in charge of family games for the time that she's there? Can we put her in charge of dessert? Can we put her in charge of picking the movie? She just needs a role, and we wouldn't have known that talking about it on Thanksgiving. We need to have these private conversations to set up the situation well.

Amy: I have seriously been sitting here taking notes on what you're saying because my core family is having dinner together Wednesday night and we won't see each other again until Christmas and I'm writing down questions that I want to talk about

Wednesday night, so listeners, you do that, too. But what you just talked about with this challenging family member is setting a limit to some degree, and you discuss the importance of that in your book, which seems so counter-cultural during a season of giving. What if we ... The worst thing to Cheri and I, disappoint someone?

Kathi: Yes. Plan on it. Plan on disappointing people. Because here's the thing that we as adults-

Amy: Okay, pause for a moment for us to ...

Kathi: Okay, everybody, deep breath. But here's the thing that we as adults never talk about. There are certain people in your life that will always be disappointed. They live to be disappointed. This is this what makes them happy. And you know what, sometimes, giving them the disappointment is the best gift you can give them.

[Laughter]

It just really is.

Kathi: They probably wouldn't know how to have a conversation if they didn't tell you how many ways they were disappointed.

Cheri: Okay, Kathi you just saved me hundreds of dollars of therapy right there. I think our listeners should send you hundred dollar bills. Okay, that is now the most brilliant thing you've ever said.

Kathi: Okay.

Amy: Cheri and I are literally leaning back in our chairs cackling. But honestly, that was the most powerful permission you could have given all of us for Christmas. Thank you, Kathi.

Kathi: Here's the other big lie. We think if we go to enough therapy that not only will we change, but other people around us will change. And they just won't. They have no investment in changing because they get so much joy from being miserable.

Amy: Kathi Lipp, bringing the truth bombs today. All right.

Kathi: It's just how they're wired. We can pray for them, we can hope that they have a different life, that they see the beauty of celebration and being at peace. But there was somebody in my life who really wanted me to change how I celebrated Thanksgiving. When they said they wanted this kind of stuffing, I made sure I had that kind of stuffing plus Stove Top, because I'm sorry, there is only one kind of stuffing. It's Stove Top from a

box. When Kimberly asked me for the family recipe and I sent her a picture of Stove Top, she said, "My whole childhood's a lie." I'm like, "You're welcome."

But here's the thing, I made this special stuffing for this person and then I made the Stove Top and they were mad because I wasted so much of my time.

[Laughter]

Cheri: Wow.

Kathi: They were super determined to be miserable because it was the only thing that would make them happy. And so I gave them that gift, I gave them the gift of being miserable because there's nothing else I can do. I can go to all the therapy I want. I can have all the plans I want. Here's what I know, I can do the best that I can do that honors God and honors my family and my friends who will be there, but when I start siloing off to please one person, what I'm telling everybody else there is, "You don't matter. It's just keeping the peace with this one person that matters."

By the way, they're not going to be happy so I'm okay if everybody is miserable, and I'm not okay with that. I used to be okay with that. I used to think that as long as I could make this person happy than everybody else would be happy, but in order to make this one difficult person happy I have to make everybody else miserable, and I'm not willing to do that.

Amy: That's amazing recipe for peace this Christmas is to let go of trying to make the miserable person happy.

Kathi: Yeah.

Cheri: Absolutely. And, you're making me realize, again, re-realize that my happiness has always been suppressed to the level of the most miserable person in my life. I was always trying to make them happy so that I would have permission to be happier. If I could lift them out of their disappointment and misery, then I wouldn't feel guilty being happy.

Kathi: Right.

Cheri: This is a recipe for peace and permission to be happy, to be joyous, regardless of what others are. Oh my goodness.

Kathi: Okay. Can I just mention one more thing?

Cheri: But, of course.

Kathi: Okay. These discussions early on, one of the things that it keeps from happening is people have these secret lists of what will make them happy for the holidays. They're carrying around these secret lists and if you just loved them enough you would be able to check everything off of their secret list.

You know what? Let's make the invisible visible. If it is important to you that we have peppermint meringue cookies because you should have known, mom, that when I was five years old those were my favorite cookies and it's not Christmas without them. Let's have that discussion in October so I can find that recipe or I can order them online.

Or how about this? How about I teach you how to make them so that each year that can be your contribution to this. But let's make the invisible visible and let's find out what those expectations are and then let's disappoint people early if they can't be met or let's figure out a way together to meet them in a healthy way instead of setting it up so that, "My Christmas would have been good, but you didn't get the milk chocolate oranges that we get every year, there was only dark chocolate, and so now, my Christmas is ruined." Let's figure out a way to meet all those needs in a healthy way.

Amy: I don't know what to say. I've got to listen to this episode every day until Christmas ...

Cheri: I'm going to play it on continuous repeat 24/7. Okay, I'm really scared to ask my next question but I have to because we've been talking about dealing with other people and so now I'm going to just go ahead and make it really personal, and Kathi can just bring it on to me. You open your planner book with a message titled Elf or Grinch, You Get to Choose.

Kathi: Right.

Cheri: I've just always assumed that I just have Grinch-y blood in my veins. What makes you so sure that it's actually a choice?

Kathi: Because we get to choose every day. We do. We get to choose every day. There is so much about Christmas that can be good, but you have probably carried a legacy, and I'm not talking just to you Cheri, but I know a little about the story of your mom and how everything was done with perfection. There comes a point where we have to stop living the Christmas that our parents gave us. People may think I'm not spiritual enough talking about this, but there are so many family dynamics wrapped up in Christmas.

There just are a million and it can be so heartbreaking. We work so hard to try to please everybody. Here's what I would say to that, is to say how can you take a portion of Christmas and just this year make it 5% better? I don't expect you to go from Grinch to Buddy the Elf, but there is something that you love about Christmas. Is it the music? Is it getting two weeks off of work if you're a teacher?

Episode #171: Secrets to Planning a Christmas That Won't Disappoint

Cheri: Oh yeah.

Kathi: Yeah, exactly. Let's build on those things that we love and how do we ... Instead of spending those two weeks off being miserable because Christmas is coming, how do I put some intentional points of joy? I really think the way to do this is not to create a to-do list, but to put blocks on your calendar that say, "Here's something I'm going to do that's going to bring me some joy." For me, it's listening to Christmas music. I love Christmas music. I can incorporate that into anything I'm doing. For me it is ... There are a couple of dishes that I love to make that make me super happy and a couple of cookie recipes that make me super happy.

For me it is not going to the mall, that's my happiest Christmas joy. I go to the mall one day because there are certain things that I can only get at the mall because my daughter loves Lush. Cheri, I know you know about that.

Cheri: Oh, yes.

Kathi: Lush is a big deal in our house, and so, it's those couple of things. But for me, going and getting a Starbucks and looking at Christmas lights and listening to Christmas music at the top of the speakers makes me so, so happy. Going to church and ... we spend so much time at our church really anticipating the birth of Christ, and that makes me super happy. Getting to spend one day with a good friend and just talking because things ... The universe shifts around Christmas, unless you work retail, then I'm very, very sorry. But things slow down, at least in my business. I get less emails, I have less appointments, people are less available, and so I want to take advantage of that and hunker down and be present for the holiday.

Amy: So much good advice. Bring it home for us, Kathi. What closing words of encouragement would you like to leave with our listeners?

Kathi: I understand that a lot of people who listen to Grit and Grace are fellow perfectionists. The sooner you can put action into place, the less your ideals with everybody else's ideas are going to collide. Making what you need known early on, and not to be the Christmas diva, because I know that's not your heart, but to say what is important to me and acknowledging that and being okay with it, and then what is important to the stakeholders in my life?

Everything can't be important, it just can't be. So, you pick the two or three things that are really important and you say, "How do we as a team, how do we as a family, how do we as a group of friends, make this a reality so that we can honor God and we can honor each other in this celebration?"

Cheri: We hope you've enjoyed episode 171 of Grit and Grace, Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules.

Episode #171: Secrets to Planning a Christmas That Won't Disappoint

Amy: Hop on over to our website, gritandgracegirls.com/episode171 where you'll find our transcript, this weeks Digging Deeper download, and links to Kathi's website and the planner.

Cheri: If you've enjoyed this episode of this episode of Grit and Grace, we would love for you to leave us a review. Just go to gritandgracegirls.com/reviews and you'll find all the information you need for how to do that.

Amy: Next week, we'll be processing together what we learned from Kathy, and we'll be sharing how we're putting our Christmas project planners to good use.

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!

Outtakes

Cheri: Even Dusty doesn't like the holidays. She's complaining already.

Amy: I heard her.

Kathi: Oh, dear.

Cheri: I'm going to go get the spray bottle. I'll be right back. No. No, I'm not going to feed you.

[Laughter]

I'm going to de-incentivize you. Ugh.

Amy: She's so vocal.

Cheri: Yeah, right when I need her not to be.

Amy: Right.

Cheri: It needs to be something that's on the podcasting production list, you know, like things to deal with your animals.

[Back to "podcasting voice"] We hope you've enjoyed episode 171 of Grit and Grace, Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules.

Episode #171: Secrets to Planning a Christmas That Won't Disappoint