

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

Episode #178: What to Do When Your Friendship's a Little Off

**Amy:**

Cheri, what do you consider to be the perfect friend?

**Cheri:**

Okay, so this is going to be true confession time. I used to think that the perfect friend was someone who agreed with me all the time.

**Amy:**

Oh wow.

**Cheri:**

Yeah. Okay. So not, not the most mature way of thinking, but one of the things I have learned, especially through our friendship, is that the perfect friend is someone who loves me enough to be candid and who knows me well enough to be really intentional about the timing of speaking the truth to me.

**Amy:**

Ah, that is important.

**Cheri:**

So how about you? Who do you or what do you consider to be the perfect friend?

**Amy:**

Well, it is funny, 'cause I fit the candid one, of course, but probably there's nobody that fits the always agrees with us.

<Laughter>

**Cheri:**

I know. That's why I keep looking.

**Amy:**

Unfortunately, I haven't found the perfect friend yet. This is the problem. No!

I am a time person. It's one of my love languages. And so I, I do love to spend time with my friends. And so, I used to think that the perfect friend wanted to spend time with me at least

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once a week.

**Cheri:**

Okay, so it sounds like you had a rule for somebody to be your perfect friend. I love it so much.

**Amy:**

Oh, yes, it's one of those things that perfectionist do that we have a rule, but we just don't tell anybody what the rule is. So if you don't pass, you know, just too bad. But yeah. But now it's crazy because my life is such that I can't even spend time as often as I want to with the people that I love the most. So.

**Cheri:**

Alrighty. Well, we've talked about what we thought or have thought in the past makes a perfect friends. So how do you try to be the perfect friend?

**Amy:**

Well, this is hard in today's life for me, but I do try to prioritize time for my friends. However, the friends that I appreciate the most at this point, and really the only friendships that I can maintain the best at this point, are my friends that we just pick up where we left off. And so, you know, whether been a week or it's been two months, that we can pick up the, it's low maintenance, that it's easy, that there's not something to forgive just because life has been busy, and so, and I'm trying to be one of those friends.

**Cheri:**

Mmm. Mmm. So good. Well, I used to think that being the perfect friend for other people meant never upsetting or disappointing them. And, yeah, that didn't work so well. So now I know that it's being open to having hard conversations like apologizing, but, and this has been hard, just apologizing, not melting down and making it all about me. 'Cause you know, those kinds of apologies that go on forever and you're like, I'm so done with it. And you know, I have a tendency, this is the people pleaser in me to keep trying again over and over again to make up for whatever I did, like they've moved on and I'm still trying to prove myself.

And what I really value is being able to just check back in, circle back around, and then learning to trust that we are moving forward together without being, I think you said, you know... I'm trying to learn to be more low maintenance and not so high maintenance. And I used to think that all that other stuff was evidence of caring, but really it just made me really high maintenance.

**Amy:**

Well, it sounds like we're both maturing into having fewer strings attached to our friendships, but friendship is difficult. And one of our listeners said, "My biggest perfectionism struggle is feeling like I have to be the perfect friend. Always available. I'm naturally very compassionate,

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caring, love investing in people and developing deep friendships and connections. So that makes it even harder to understand how and what my healthy boundaries should be.”

**Cheri:**

Amen, sister.

**Amy:**

Oh gracious, boundaries!

<Laughter>

**Cheri:**

That word!

**Amy:**

Especially during the holidays.

**Cheri:**

No kidding. You know what? I think we've moved from the C word to the B word, Amy. I think so.

**Amy:**

We have, Oh, except, yeah, not the other B word.

**Cheri:**

Boundaries. The boundaries word.

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 lose who you're NOT, love who you ARE, and live your one life WELL.

**Amy:**

Today, we're talking to Kelly Needham, author of *Friend-ish: Reclaiming Real Friendship in a Culture of Confusion*. Kelly is married to popular Christian singer and songwriter Jimmy Needham. She's a regular contributor for *revive our hearts* and her writing has been featured in *Desiring God*, the gospel coalition, the ethics and religious liberties commission, eternal perspectives ministries, and crosswalk. Kelly and Jimmy live in the Dallas area with their three

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children Lively, Sophia, and Benjamin.

Kelly, we're so glad you're here today talking about a topic that I think we all have trouble with at times. So tell us how you came to write a book called *Friend-ish*.

**Kelly:**

I wrote this book because I love friendship. Friends have been really formative in my life. I wouldn't be who I am today without them. My husband spent about a decade of his life on the road touring as a musician, and so, really, friends were a vital part of my life when he would be on the road.

And I also wrote this book because I saw over the years a lot of problems surfacing in maybe my own life and the lives of other friends of mine who were trying really hard to be good friends to each other, but it was just not healthy.

And so, it made me ask the question, 'What's going on here?' How do we actually fight for healthy friendship? What is healthy friendship? What does our Bible have to say about it? What does the Gospel have to say about it? And so, all those questions over years of my life is really where this book began.

**Cheri:**

And where did the title come from? *Friend-ish*. We're just curious. Both of us are former teachers and we're word nerds. So can you unpack that for us?

**Kelly:**

Yeah, why not invent a new word? Right? For a book title?

The reason I love the word "friendish" is because it implies that something is almost there, but not quite. If you see something and you say, 'Well that wall is straight-ish.'

**Cheri:**

[Laughs]

**Amy:**

[Chuckles]

**Kelly:**

You know it's not horizontal, you know, it's not maybe on the ground. It's there, but not quite? And I think the thing is we tend to think friendship—you know, bad friendship is like mean girls, like the movie *Mean Girls* and none of us is doing that. We're trying really hard to build good friendships with one another, but sometimes it's just a little bit off still.

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There's maybe jealousy and envy in our hearts towards our friends. We feel really clingy to them. We struggle with the transitions that are there, and so I think there's just some things, little things that are off sometimes in our friendships that make them 'friend-ish'. We're not quite true friends yet. And so, that's really where the title came from. How do we fight for real friendship?

**Cheri:**

Okay, you mention jealousy. I'm now very sorry I asked that question.

**Kelly:**

[Laughs]

**Cheri:**

All right. So in the spirit of full disclosure, Kelly, I was always a 'BFF' kind of girl. In elementary school, junior high and high school I was never popular, but I always had one friend that I could count on.

So as an adult I have always tried to find that one friend who would truly satisfy me. And then you say in your book you say our friends aren't even supposed to satisfy us. So can you unpack that for us? Like me. [Chuckles]

**Amy:**

[Chuckles]

**Kelly:**

I know. That statement in my book has ripped the rug out from a lot of people. I get those messages a lot. [Laughs]

**Cheri:**

[Laughs]

**Kelly:**

I think our friendships are meaningful and they do bring joy into our lives, but they cannot provide the satisfaction that most of us want.

Most of us, like you said, we want a friend who is there for us all the time. We want a perfect companion with unhindered access to their presence, and we want someone who will make us, who will give us significance and meaning. But the reality is that no one person on this earth can ever do that for us, because we're all going to fail each other at some point or the other. We're all sinners, we all have problems and those needs can't ever actually be met fully in a human being. They can only be met in Christ.

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So, really, what needs to happen for us is our friends need to be dethroned from that place in our lives and then, you know, they can actually service in the way God meant them to. You know they can actually become more fulfilling friendships because we're not expecting them to do a thing that God never intended them to do.

This idea that friends can't fully satisfy is really grounded for me in Jeremiah 2:13 where God tells His people, "You have forsaken me the fountain of living waters and you have gone to hew out cisterns," which would just be a thing that we would put water in to store it. "You hew out cisterns and they're broken they can't hold water."

And so, in that statement God says there's one fountain of living waters one place of true satisfaction for your thirst and it's me. Everything else is a broken cistern—our marriages are, our kids are, our ministries, our jobs, our friends. Nothing else can fully satisfy the soul, but God.

And so, if we look to a friend for that it might last for a little while, we might find that joy we wanted for a while, but as soon as something changes in that friendship or something interferes with it, it begins to disappoint us.

**Amy:**

That is so good. I think about as you say that how many times I've put too much weight on my friendships. You go a step further in this quote on page twenty-five in a way that I was like, 'Oh my gosh!'

You said, "As soon as a friend is meeting needs in us only God should meet it becomes idolatry." So sometimes they don't meet the needs and sometimes we start to count on them to meet needs, and 'ouch!' you said it's idolatry.

Then you say, "So what are we to do? Are we to love people less? Of course not. The take-away is not to stop loving, but to keep our loves rightly ordered." I love the way you said that. What do you mean by 'keeping our loves rightly ordered'?

**Kelly:**

Well, when you think about what Jesus says in response to people's questions about, "What are our most important commands? What are we supposed to do with our lives?" He always says the same thing, "First, Love God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength."

So really that's a way to say everything you got, every bit of ounce of effort, energy, passion you have you move toward giving all of that to God. Secondly, "Love your neighbor as yourself." So he does call us to love people. But [pause] God comes first. Loving God comes first.

For many of us we kind of flip that we go, 'Well I can't love God until I have some people in place,' and so we start chasing the people part. And then, think later on down the road then I'll get to God.

And so, that needs to get reversed. And we need to first go, 'I need - God has my highest loyalty, my first priority in the day. I need to give him my whole heart. And then after that is the only time that I'll be able to truly love my friends and not just use them to meet my needs.

Because I'm getting satisfied in my walk with Christ, I now have something to offer my friends. I can love them not demand that they love me.' And so, keeping our order right actually helps us be true friends to each other instead of using our friendships to meet needs that they really can't meet. It might seem loving on the outside, but underneath when we're just using our friends that's not real love. That's not the sacrificial love that Christ has called us to."

**Amy:**

That is so helpful because it exposes our selfishness that we all tend towards anyway.

**Kelly:**

Yes. And I think that's something I always hope, I hope in the book I made clear that this is me, too. This is all of us. I think we all struggle with this, and so if anyone is listening and is like, 'Gosh I am—this is rough. This is me, too.' It's like, yeah this is all of us.

This is not because you're bad at friendship. We're all bad at it, you know [chuckles].

**Cheri:**

All right. Well, on page twelve—I want to get real practical here—you say, "Loneliness is not primarily a people problem, but an unbelief problem." Ouch! "It's an unwillingness to turn to God to meet our soul's deepest needs."

And then you also say, "When Jesus is our stability, our consistent friend and refuge we are freed to truly love others and love them sacrificially."

So what does it look like to turn to God to meet our soul's deepest needs and for Jesus to be our consistent friend and a refuge? Put that into everyday terms for us.

**Kelly:**

I think the reason that that all of those truths are hard for us, is, to build a relationship with God is to build a relationship with someone we cannot see with our eyes and we cannot touch with our hands. And that's why it's hard for us.

That's why friends are so tempting to look to for that relational longing that we have. Is we don't really don't believe that Jesus will satisfy. For me that daily looks like - bible reading, time in prayer, and making sure I'm gathering with other Christians at my local church.

Now, I think why we do those things matters. For me, I'm not reading my bible to, you know, 'how to be a better Christian'. This is where I'm learning facts about God and details about him. Which is how I grew to love my husband. Right? I learned facts about him. I learned that he was a class president when he was a senior in high school. I'm like, that's you know, telling me something about him. And that he learned guitar on his own through just teaching himself. You know, those things they're all of the little facts about him are-they are what put together a personality that I begin to love.

And so, for me, my Bible is full of details that sometimes I don't fully understand about God, but it's becoming a joy for me to go to uncover his character. And then in prayer to talk to him about what I'm learning about him. And then I start to recognize his activity in my daily life, because I paid attention to who he is. And he's told me, "If you wait on me you'll never be ashamed." And so as I wait on him to respond to me, man, I see him moving and being active in my life, and those other believers in my life become his hands and feet, at times, to minister to me.

And so, those are the three main avenues by which God becomes a tangible and real presence in my life. And I think only then when God is that real and that enjoyable to me does it free me to see my friends and go, 'I want things for you, not something from you anymore. I want to give my friendship to you. I want to fight alongside you with whatever you need.'

So that's what that looks like in my life, and it is hard. There's some costs to knowing God that aren't there when we get to know friends because before God we get exposed, right? Our sin is exposed in His eyes. And our friends we can kind of hide it. We can get away with that.

So there's some challenges and some costs we have to count in getting to know God. But it's always worth it, if we will in faith move toward friendship with Him. I think it'll just pour life and vitality into our friendships.

**Amy:**

Well, thank you for being so honest with us because the truth is there's no short cut!

**Kelly:**

That's right!

**Amy:**

Those spiritual disciplines are what it takes to forge a relationship with God. So I appreciate your honesty so much, Kelly. You are delving into an area that Cheri and I have talked about quite a bit. In this next section, which is, um, meddling.

**Kelly and Cheri:**

[Chuckles]

**Amy:**

And page ninety-nine you said, “When we encounter the neediness of others in friendship we must urge to run away or to rescue. Our job in these moments is to point to Christ to take our friend by the hand to the only place her needs can be met.”

So good! So what do you mean by ‘run away’ and how can we recognize when we’re ‘rescuing’?

**Kelly:**

Yeah. For me, running away from neediness in other people has usually looked like avoiding them, which depending on who it is in your life is sometimes easier than others.

And it’s that feeling of ‘this person needs something from me that I know I can’t give them or it’s putting all this pressure on me, and I don’t know how to handle that.’ So I’m just going to conveniently be busy or I’m going to come in the side door for church instead of the normal door I come in. And I’m just going to be on the phone-pretend I’m on the phone. I think we’ve all done that okay?

And that’s not really loving to that friend, right? Because they might not know they’re coming off as the way that they are and to just avoid them makes them go, ‘What did I do wrong?’

They can’t read our minds; they don’t know what’s going on. And to have that conversation to say, ‘Hey, you’re expecting something from me I really can’t give in this season or maybe I should never give because it’s just not appropriate to ask of anyone. But any good you see in me that you want is what I’m getting from the Lord, and I’m going to point you there. And I’m going to be honest with you I’m not going to avoid you. But I’m also going to be real about what I can and can’t do.’

But sometimes we do rescue. And I think the reason we do that is because it can give us meaning to feel that needed. It can make us feel really important to be that needed by somebody.

And so, it can be tempting to do that and that’s sometimes harder to see, and harder to recognize because it feels very noble and Godly to be doing that. But I think one way you can know if you’re having a tendency to rescue somebody in their neediness is that you’re no longer pointing to Christ as their fulfillment and satisfaction.

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You're just coming to them with 'I'm here. I'm here to help. I can do this for you.'

Instead of 'Let's pray together and ask God for this,' or 'let's see what He has to say.' It's 'here I have the answers.'

And then we begin to feel threatened when that person goes to someone else for help and not to us. And that can kind of be that warning sign that, 'Oh, maybe I've stepped into this role not to point them to Christ because it's making me feel good about myself.'

**Amy:**

Wow.

**Kelly:**

That can be really hard to see, but it's good to have eyes for in our hearts because we don't want to take Jesus's place in anyone's life, you know?

**Amy:**

Ghosting and meddling. [Laughs]

**Kelly:**

[Chuckles]

**Cheri:**

[Snorts]

**Amy:**

These are patterns that Cheri and I have really—we're learning, but we've been fighting. [Chuckles]

**Kelly:**

Yes!

**Cheri:**

And to all of our listeners: you're welcome! [Laughs]

**Amy and Kelly:**

[Laughs]

**Cheri:**

We're squirming as much as you are right now. All right. Well, you say, "Jesus shrewdly flips the script on us and exposes the poison of our picky love. The issue is not 'who is my neighbor?' but 'what kind of neighbor am I?' Not 'who is my friend?' but 'what kind of friend am I?'"

So can you unpack what you mean by 'picky love' and offer us some practical applications especially as we're moving into the holiday season?

**Kelly:**

I think that the idea of picky love—of kind of picking and choosing who our friends are—is the normal default way that we are raised to think about friendship by our culture or maybe just, you know, by our parents or just what we see around us. Is we're always concerned about 'who are my friends?' and 'who do I want to be my friends?'

And the Proverbs does give us some wisdom, "Be aware what company you keep," right? Make sure that you have - the people who are closest to you who are not encouraging you to walk in sin, but to walk closer to Christ. But it's interesting Jesus command is to "love your neighbor" and neighbor is a nearby person.

Like when I tell a lot of women that I talk to that are hungry for friendship 'Who should I go befriend?' And I usually say, 'Well who's in front of you? Who's in your small group? Who do you sit next to at church?' Like those are people right next to you that are your neighbors in a really true sense. Go and love them.

But we don't want to do that, right? Because we want to pick the people who we get along with the most, who are like us, and I think that's really a form of 'I want friendship that's easy, I want friendship that serves my needs,' and it's not a friendship that's going 'I have something to offer for those around me.'

And that's the type of love that Jesus is calling us to. Much, much harder, and forces us out of our self-centered motives we're used to in friendship into a place of 'How can I give friendship to these people around me?'

Even if they're not the cool people. Even if they're not the people in the inner circle I want to be in. Even if they're not the people in leadership in this organization or they're the people over here.

If the person right next to you is that other mom down the street that you just don't really click with, but she's sitting next to you at the PTO meeting. It's, like, befriend her and offer her your friendship by just being interested in her, caring about her life. It's probably going to be harder for you to do that if you don't get along, but that's a sacrifice we're called to make to love sacrificially even against our own comforts.

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And I think when we do that we end up creating communities that are not clicky, but are actually really welcoming to other people. Because we're no longer going, 'Who do I get along with? I'll be their friend.' We're going, 'I can be a friend to who God places around me because that's what God did for me.'

And it all has to flow out of that satisfaction we have in Christ as really the power source the thing that enables us to be doing that.

**Amy:**

So good.

**Cheri:**

I want to throw in one more quote from your book and have you expand on it. You say, "We must give preference to proximity even when the digital world tells us location is an unnecessary limit." So could you unpack that a little bit for those of us who do spend at least some time on social media.

**Kelly:**

Yeah! Well, me too, and a lot of my good friends don't live around me anymore. So I don't think there's anything wrong with keeping up with friends far away.

The challenge is if they are my only friends, there's a problem there. There's a problem there because what happens when I may be walking in sin—even willfully—they don't see that. I'm not going to call them up when I'm doing that, right? If I'm in rebellion against the Lord, or if I'm having a really hard day and feeling really just discouraged or isolated. And just thinking, 'Man, none of my friends love me because look they're not calling me!'

Well, guess what. Those friends don't even know what's going on in my life because they don't live near me. But somebody who goes to church with me, somebody that is - that I'm crossing paths with in my neighborhood, if they see me downcast, they can go, 'Hey what's going on? What's up with you?'

We need flesh and blood friendships, because we need some interactions built into our daily and weekly lives to catch us on those hard days. That's the community that we're meant for is that.

It doesn't mean don't have friendships elsewhere, but I think our technology has allowed us the ability to kind of curate our community and say, 'Well, I don't really like where I'm at right now, so I'm just going to pick this handful of friends that none of them live in the same place, and that'll be my community.'

But it just allows for the enemy to creep into our lives and get us into a bad place and no one will really know. So I think that flesh and blood community around us that proximity is something that is a safeguard for us and a protection for us.

And like I said earlier, it's the expression for how he's called us to love: love your neighbor as yourself. Not 'love your faraway person that's two flights away'. Love your neighbor. Love the people right around you. It's the call of the Christian life.

**Amy:**

So good. Powerful stuff. So, Kelly, what words of encouragement would you like to leave with our listeners today?

**Kelly:**

Hmm. Well, I first would like to leave the encouragement that you're not alone. I know these conversations, especially for women, they expose a lot of things in our hearts. And like you said it feels kind of "ouchy," like getting your toes stepped on.

Writing this book it felt like the Lord doing that to me, you know, dealing with all those things in me, and I really realized in interviewing people, this is, we're not alone. We all struggle with this, so I hope that no one listening would feel discouraged or condemned in maybe some of these things being exposed, but know that they're not alone.

There is actually a better alternative to friendship, and one that's actually more satisfying more freeing and far more joyful, that when we build friendships not based on our own needs and what I need to get out of it but out of something bigger. Out of the kingdom of God, and what he's doing in this world, and that we get to be a part of it together and link arms together—our joy and our friendships will actually deepen. It will actually become more enjoyable and satisfying.

Just like you see in men that go to war. The way they describe their friendships are with such profound depth and joy, and I think that the reason for that is they've united together for a really big cause that's bigger than themselves.

And so, when we get our friendships off of ourselves, and our own thoughts and on to something bigger, it's just going to bring so much more joy. So this isn't a call to a boring, bland friendship that's like-I don't, you know-'I'm not being real with you, I don't need anything from you.' We need things from each other; it's just not maybe what we thought. And when we link arms together for something bigger, it's just going to be better so much better than we thought.

**Cheri:**

We hope you've enjoyed episode 178 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules.

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**Amy:**

Make sure to hop on over to the website, [GritnGraceGirls.com/episode 178](http://GritnGraceGirls.com/episode%20178). There you'll find this week's transcript, the digging deeper devotional, and links to Kelly's website and resources.

**Cheri:**

We'll be continuing this conversation about friendship over in our Facebook group. If you're not yet a member, search Facebook for **Grit n Grace Girls**, and you'll find us.

**Amy:**

Next week, we'll be processing together what we learned about friendship from Kelly

**Cheri:**

For today, grow your grit, embrace God's grace, and when you find a bad rule, you know what to do. Go right on ahead and...

**Amy 'n' Cheri:**

BREAK IT!

**Outtakes**

**Amy:**

But I will say that...

**Cheri:**

I have an alarm going off. I'm so sorry. I'll be right back.

**Amy:**

No worries.

**Cheri:**

That was my alarm to remind me to setup and be ready to record.

**Amy:**

I'm sorry about that.

**Cheri:**

No, no. My bad for not catching it.

[music]

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**Cheri:**

And I'll be editing your alarm out.

<Laughter>

**Amy:**

Why did I not think of that when yours went off.

<Laughter>

**Cheri:**

That's okay. Our outtakes will involve both of us turning off our alarms.

<Laughter>

**Amy:**

Yes. Ridiculous.

**Cheri:**

It's a good thing we're brand new podcasters, and, you know, this isn't like episode 178 or anything.

<Laughter>

**Amy:**

Mercy!