

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode 55: Don't Be Weird — Loving Our Neighbors as People not Projects

Amy:

So Cheri, what kind of feelings boil up when you think about reaching out and inviting your neighbors over?

Cheri:

Whatever the opposite of being “the hostess with the mostest” is? That would be me. Every time I think, “Oh, I should invite so-and-so over for dinner!” it **sounds** like fun ... and then I think about how much work it would take to **actually do it**.

Amy:

Sounds like you identify with the listener who wrote us to say,

“I struggle with keeping house. I often feel overwhelmed by the mess and I feel like a failure because I can't keep it up to my perfectionist standards. I am constantly cleaning, picking up, and I feel like I can't take time to relax and enjoy my family let alone friends or neighbors.”

Cheri:

I totally, **totally** resonate with that. But here's the thing: when I do have people over, they never ever seem to care about my house. Nobody has ever criticized my housekeeping. So why am I still so reluctant?

Amy:

That is so true! I had a friend who used to say, “If you want to come see my house, call ahead. If you want to come see me, come any time!” That's a good rule I need to adopt!

Cheri:

Well, this is Cheri Gregory...

Amy:

...and I'm Amy Carroll...

Cheri:

...and you're listening to "Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules."

Amy:

Today, we're talking with Amy Lively, author of *How to Love Your Neighbor Without Being Weird* and creator of The Neighborhood Café, an international ministry helping women share coffee, conversation and Christ with their neighbors in their homes. She is a popular speaker who loves sharing tips and tools about Christ's command to love our neighbor. Amy lives in Buena Vista, Colorado with her husband, a holy dog and unsaintly cat while their daughter attends college.

Cheri:

So if you've ever hidden behind excuses to avoid your neighbors? Amy is here to help.

Amy:

Amy, I love the title of your book so much: ***How To Love Your Neighbors Without Being Weird.*** How did you come up with that?

Amy L.:

You know, being weird has been a fear of mine ever since I was a little kid. Just you know, wanting to fit in, wanting to be popular, wanting to be accepted. So when I was trying to figure out how to do this in my own life, that was one of my fears—not to be weird, not to be singled out, rejected. I mean, that's one of the biggest fears I had to overcome. Plus it was a little catchy title.

Amy:

It is. It makes me smile every time I say it.

Cheri:

What do you mean by "being weird?" How do you define "weird" in the context of your book title?

Amy L.:

Yeah I think what is weird—what our neighbors perceive as weird—is when we go after them for a purpose. I think of the phrase "fishers of men" like we go after them for a catch. We go

with our nets, with our rods, with our bait, instead of just going after them to love them, and to know them, and to be with them. And that's what they, I think, perceive as weird.

Cheri:

Paint a picture for us that shows the difference between true neighborhood evangelism and making your neighbors your next spiritual project?

Amy L.:

You know, I can answer this really well because I went after my neighbors kind of as a project initially. So that was one of my biggest mistakes that Christ just very gently pointed out to me: the difference between a project and just really loving people.

So I think a project has an *objective*. It has a slogan. It has an agenda. And it also has a start date and an end date. And a check box that you can just "Check! Loved 'em. That's it! I did my good deed: reached out, took cookies, flowers, did an errand..." and anything like that. That's a spiritual project. You know, putting another notch in our Bible, you know.

<LAUGHTER>

Cheri:

Oh no...this is painful, Amy!

Amy L.:

Only because I've been there.

But evangelism is ... instead of meeting *my* objective of "I've got a command to love my neighbor, and I'm gonna go do that today..." evangelism is about meeting *other* people's needs and about helping them meet *their* goals and *their* desires to be known, and to feel safe, and to be recognized, and to be cared for.

Evangelism listens instead of talks. Yeah. Evangelism is a commitment. Really a commitment is a long-term. It's ongoing, it's a lifestyle, not a checklist. It has its ups and downs, it has more give than take. It is for the *other* person's benefit rather than mine.

That is how God kind of flipped that in my own life and in my own neighborhood.

Amy:

Well I know you experienced this as part of your story in your spiritual journey, is you actually came back to the Lord because some people *didn't* treat you like a project. Tell us about that.

Amy L.:

I had been really in rebellion, walking away from God, for about twenty years, when we enrolled our daughter in a Christian school, just because it was a good school. They had the best education.

And we were just going to keep an eye on the Jesus thing and make sure it didn't get out of hand. I was very involved. I was part of the parent-teacher night, and I did all the recognition banquets, and I helped in the classroom, and I hung out on the playground after school, and I helped with the carnivals and all the events. And so the women that I was spending the vast majority of my time around were godly people.

They were Christian women; they were women of great faith. And it just kind of rubbed off on me and became very attractive to me. They, just through their lives, showed me what a real relationship with the Lord was really about and see I had been raised in church, so I knew all the language; I was totally faking it, they had no idea where I was in my *heart* condition.

But they did *not* reject me because of that. They did still embrace me, they did still invite me to coffee, they did still invite my daughter for play dates.

And it was just through their friendships that I softened spiritually and came back to the Lord.

Cheri:

What you're describing sounds really appealing but also really scary. Like how would I know if I was doing the right thing at the right time — you know the perfectionism flashes here!

And this could involve a lot of people. Like do I have time in my life to listen to so many people and to just lifestyle love on so many people...I mean there's a lot of people in this world!

Amy L.:

There are! And that's really the beauty of defining *neighbor* as people who you're in regular contact with every day. Because that's a much much smaller number.

And you're also touching onto some personality issues. I am an extrovert, so twenty people, dinner, no problem. That energizes me.

Cheri:

Twitch twitch twitch.

Amy L.:

But I'm married to an introvert who has taught me so much. My introverted husband can be a much better neighbor than I am. Because where I go wide and shallow, he goes narrow and deep where he could be really close and really get to know a couple of people, where I will become acquaintances with twenty.

And so if all of us as believers were following this command on our streets, the introverts appealing to their kind and the extroverts appealing to their kind, I just can't even imagine the difference that it would make in our community. So you do really have to find that balance and that approach that is right for you, your family, your personality, your stage of life, your availability.

But I'll tell you what: you're never going to have time. You're never going to have all the answers. You're never going to have a completely clear calendar where you sit down one day and twiddle your thumbs and say, "Hmm! I think I'll just go love my neighbors." That's never going to happen. You're going to have to push something aside to go and do it. That's how it worked for me.

Amy:

Give us some practical tips. What has this looked like in your life and what has it looked like in the lives of the women who have read your book and responded to it?

Amy L.:

Creating opportunities to interact with people.

It's the Christmas story brought to life every day in your life in your neighborhood: God stepping out of that comfortable, beautiful, safe place of Heaven, to be with us, to be God with us. So creating opportunities...whether...and again that looks like different things for different people. For me it meant starting a neighborhood Bible study. For others, it means lingering on the sidewalk and asking someone's name, and starting those slow conversations. So it does look different for every body but it is an awareness and intentionality. Its' an action.

Sooner or later we're going to have to stop praying about this and actually go out and do something.

Amy:

Ow!

Cheri:

Amy...AMY! You are stepping on my toes!

<LAUGHTER>

Amy:

I felt a little stab in my heart when you said that! It hurts so good.

Amy L.:

You know I see so many messages to women that are about our beauty, and our worth, and our value in Christ's Kingdom, and that is so so true.

Once we grasp that, we have a calling and a command to share that with other people. And that's where the second half of the command comes in. If you want to bring more glory to God, then go share His love with some other people.

The command is so simple. But that does not mean easy.

Amy:

Right.

Amy L.:

It is very very simple: just be with people, do what Jesus did, touch them, be with them, eat with them, go to parties with them, celebrate life with them, be with them in their sorrow. You can think of scripture to go with each one of those. It is that simple, but it is not easy.

You asked how do I know if I'm doing the right thing? If your phone rings in the middle of the night, you are doing the right thing. You are with the right people. You have become the lifeline of hope for somebody in your neighborhood. Is it inconvenient? Yes. Time consuming? Yes. Difficult? Yes. But so worthy.

Cheri:

My first reaction is, "But I seem to be in crisis a lot." Like I had pneumonia last fall...and there's just...I wasn't even sure if we could do the podcast today because of the storm that went through. We didn't have pow- ... blah blah blah ... there's always something going on, and I'm always telling myself, *Well I can't possibly be of support to someone else because I'm feeling too shaky, unstable, maybe even fragile myself.*

Amy L.:

Did you ever wonder how they might be a support to you?

Cheri:

Mmmmmmm....

Amy:

<LAUGHTER>

Cheri:

Mmmmmmm... What are you talking about?

Amy L.:

Well you know, we had a situation in my neighborhood where I always wanted to be the one who was delivering the proverbial plate of cookies to the new people, and being the one of strength and support to my neighbors.

But we had a situation where we just had one of those household accident emergencies that ends up with people screaming and 911 being called and everything. And gosh my neighbors stepped in for me. And they brought *me* the cookies and they helped *us*.

And so that's the genius and the beauty of this command, is that when we think its all about us and us doing for other people, we miss the flip-side of that in that God has put people around us to support *us* and to bless *us*. And to help *us*. And not just in those real practical ways of bringing your mail when you had pneumonia, or taking your dog to the vet when you're sick, or helping you clear trees when there's a power outage. But they bring the missing pieces. They bring the skill sets. They bring the passions that compliment ours.

It's just this incredible vision of what God has designed for us as community, and we're not realizing it because we're locked up in our churches, we're locked up in our Bible studies, we're hiding away in our sanctuaries, and then we stay in the comfort zone of our own homes and miss the richness of everything that's around there.

Amy:

So good.

Amy L.:

And I think I can only preach that so heavily because that's exactly where I was.

Amy:

That's really really good. Okay so I have a question because when you said you go to the parties...I seriously-

Amy L.:

I'm thinking of the wedding at Cana!

Amy:

Yeah, No! I love it!

So help us with that because we're doing a series about friendship. And what you're really calling us to is true friendship, because like what you just said...if we were *always* the giver...that's weird. That's weird. That's not a real friendship. Real friendship is giving and receiving, so you're calling us...I mean, it's evangelism, but you're saying you've got to *really* be friends, and so that it goes both ways.

So really being friends means going to the party where everybody's drinking ... and you're not. Talk to a reforming good girl about how to handle that.

Amy L.:

There have been times in my Christian walk where I was too fragile to be in that environment, where I had to protect myself from that. So if you're strong enough to walk into that situation—whether or not you think it's okay for you to have a glass of wine or beer that's you know, that's your personal choice —but you can always walk in with a glass of water and just *be* with people.

You know at the very least it's going to give you insight on how to pray for your neighbors. At the very least you're going to be learning what their lives are like, what their relationships, their marriages, their parenting, their problems; you're going to see how you can be praying for them.

Think about the kinds of things that Jesus would have seen when he was hanging out at tables of the tax collectors, and the prostitutes, and the sinners. I don't think they were dressed modestly. I don't think they had perfect language. I mean I think they probably dropped a few F-Bombs... You know, he just- he went there. He was really a lot more comfortable there than he was in the synagogues. He taught from both places. The scripture says it was intimate settings of homes that he explained everything to people.

When you go to that party with the attitude of, "Lord I am walking in to these people's lives. Please open my eyes and show me how to love them" and we don't walk in condemning and we don't walk in judging. That's not our job. Our job is just, "Hey this is a graduation. Hey this is a Super Bowl. This is a celebration of something that we have in common."

Amy:

Awesome.

Cheri:

All right. A related question in terms of discomfort and relational angst: The election stirred up a lot of angst in our country. So what's your advice for us as we deal with neighbors who see the world differently from us? Do we hide to avoid offending anybody? (Which is my preferred tactic...)

Amy L.:

...Me too.

Cheri:

...Do we connect and risk messing it up? What is your experience and insight?

Amy L.:

I read this just this week, Proverbs 18:2 it says "Fools have no interest in understanding, they only want to air their own opinion."

Amy:

Ooooooh.

Amy L.:

And I think when we go into a conversation wanting to air an opinion, instead of taking the opposite approach of being a wise person who wants to gain understanding, we're going to come off as weird. In today's culture, being passionate about an issue has come to mean vulgarity, rudeness, and anger, divisiveness. That doesn't have to be. We've lost the art of dialogue and lost the art of disagreeing with people but still being friends with them. We have really cloistered.

So I think when we, again, do what Jesus did and ask people questions...ask people questions and look for their story as to why they feel this way, not just like the rhetoric. And they might not even know beyond the rhetoric. But if we look for their story and ask questions like "Why do you feel this way? What in your experience has made you come to this conclusion? How do you think this problem would be resolved? Have you ever thought of what would happen if another approach was tried?" if we look for that story, we'll see them really as people, instead of as propaganda. If there's a dialogue and we're going into this kindly, then we will maybe

have the opportunity to share our story. Why we have chosen the worldview that we have. And in a Christian's life that always comes down to what Christ has done for us and what he has done on the cross and what our salvation means to us.

Cheri:

It sounds like everything that you've shared with us is the opposite of fear. It sounds like it's really being driven by love.

So just as we wrap up here, what advice would you have for our listeners as to how they can stay connected to God in such a way that when they get into these situations, whether they're bringing in their trash or they are at the PTA meeting and they have that opportunity to respond in fear or respond in love, what is it that you've done yourself or you've seen with others that makes it so that love wins out.

Amy L.:

The fear doesn't go away.

Cheri:

What?!?

Amy L.:

Sorry. It doesn't go away. The fear drives me to Christ. The fear makes me rely upon His strength instead of my own. So in the face of the fear we have to acknowledge it, pray about it, confess it, overcome it, and act in spite of it.

And see the peace that comes with this obedience to Christ's command to love our neighbor. It does not happen because we have it all figured out, because we know how its going to turn out, because we have the answers, we have the plan, we have the promise that its going to go well- that's not where the peace comes from.

But the peace comes from knowing you're being obedient to Christ's command. That's where the peace comes from. And in fact when I ran from this command, when I just disobeyed what Christ had asked *me* to do personally to love my neighbor, He really took me to the woodshed. And there is no peace in that when you're under godly discipline. There's no peace in that. So that's where the peace comes from- in knowing you're being obedient, not because you have all the answers and you know it's going to go well.

Amy:

I think what you shared today, we have more to learn about being valued loved and beautiful, by going out and loving our neighbors, being dependent on Christ, and watching Him work through us than we ever do sitting in a Bible study some place.

Amy L.:

Absolutely. We do have to see ourselves rightly, but then we have to go do something. That's the two-part command:

Love God, and loving God means loving you who God created and knowing how He made you and Him loving you and you loving Him back.

But then loving your neighbors is the outflow of that. It really is.

Cheri:

Head over to GritNGraceGirls.com/episode55

Amy:

You'll find links to this week's Digging Deeper Download, Bible verse art, and transcript.

Cheri:

If you've enjoyed Episode #55 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules, would you leave us a review on iTunes? You'll find a link on the webpage for this episode.

Amy:

Be sure to join us next week, when we'll be processing together what we learned from our time with Amy Lively.

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!