

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #93: Giving Up Control When You Want to Manage It All

Amy

Cheri you do come up with the hardest things to talk about sometimes. Today you want us to actually talk about surrendering control. But at least you gave me a choice of what to talk about that I either surrender by choice or by force. And I would say that I mostly have surrendered by force and particularly when I became a mother. You know, it was always my heart's desire, really, the dream of my life to be a mom, and when I had Anson, my first, I just was so excited. But you know I've wrestled with motherhood, giving up my own rights and my time and *control*, and there's nothing in life that forces you to give up control like a baby, and it wasn't until he was 3 years old. So for 3 years, I wrestled. And when he was 3 years old a friend of mine just told me the name of a book, *Surrendering to Motherhood*.

Cheri

Wow.

Amy

I didn't even read the book, but I realized that I hadn't surrendered, and I gave up that control. Can you imagine how that exponentially increased my happiness quotient?

Cheri

Oh my word. I come up with these questions, and I think I'm gonna put you in the hot-seat and it turns out they're just as hard for me. Not surprisingly, the example I can think of is when I was forced to surrender. Because I don't think I've ever surrendered control by choice. Oh my goodness. I couldn't come up with...

Amy

Who does that?

Cheri

Yeah, I couldn't come up with any examples. And you know, what happened for me was about 15, 16 years ago I had a back injury and I ended up in excruciating pain, and spending a lot of time on the couch, and finally went to physical therapy. And I'll never forget thinking it was going to be the magic bullet. I don't know what I thought they were going to do, whether they had a magic wand or whatever, but in my head I was convinced that they were going to fix me in one session. And when the gal told me with a very serious look on her face that I needed to come back for 6 months twice a week and by the end of 6 months I might be slightly better, I was so angry with her. I just couldn't see straight. And so I drove home, and I did the most intelligent thing I could think of, which was to avoid her and the physical therapy place for, I

don't know, weeks on end, and so, of course, things got worse. And when I finally surrendered to the fact that this is going to be a long process, and I went back it seemed like the things I was doing were so dumb: core strengthening? I mean that wasn't where my problem was. My problem was in my upper back. Why not fix that? And you know over the weeks and months with that physical therapist, by the way, I now consider physical therapists angels of mercy. Torture, yes, but mercy as well. But she knew what to have me do first and second and third, and I was able to build this routine that ultimately restored me to health and mobility, and really reduced my pain, but it was a fight.

Amy

Well, giving up control is never easy. One of our listeners said, "I expect everyone to live up to my standards, and I drive my loved ones crazy!" Ugh, when I read that I thought I have been there. So I can't wait to hear from Shannon so that I can grow in this area.

Cheri

Well, I'm 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 to Shannon Popkin, author of *Control Girl: Lessons on Surrendering Your Burden of Control From 7 Women in The Bible*. Shannon is a writer, speaker, and bible teacher who loves pointing others to the truth of God's Word. Shannon has been married to her husband Ken for more than 20 years. Together they live the fast-paced life of parenting 3 teens in Michigan.

Cheri

Well, I want to start out with a confession and an apology. Last week when Amy told our listeners that "next week we'll be talking with Shannon Popkin, author of *Control Girl*," I paused for a really long time and said, "Do we have to?"

Amy

Such a bad girl!

Cheri

Hey, you were glad I said it. Don't throw me under the bus! You started laughing! But you just need to know it's totally not personal; it was me whining because I don't want to talk about a topic that's so hard. I prefer light and fluffy topics, but God keeps leading us to do this hard

work of dealing with control, so Shannon, welcome to Grit-n-Grace, we really are glad that you're here with us.

Amy

Well, and not only is this topic hard, but it might be hard for Cheri and me because we're pretty sure you're going to step on our toes, but we invite you to!

Shannon

Well, my toes have definitely been stepped on.

Amy

Ah, well, so tell us how did you end up writing a book on control?

Shannon

Yeah, so I don't think it's marketing genius to write your first book on a problem that nobody wants to claim as their problem, right? Nobody has issues with control, so I don't know what I was thinking, but I definitely struggle with control. I didn't realize it at first. I always thought my problem was with anger. I had anger issues and really struggled with the way that I wanted it to be, and I had very precise ideas for how everything was supposed to go, not because I was trying to be difficult. I was trying to make it all turn out right, you know? And then when it didn't go the way that I was intending, I would get angry. I would blow up. And so that's what I thought my problem was. And then I was listening to the radio one day, and Dee Brestin was talking about the sin beneath the sin, and she mentioned this deeper core sin that we often have with control. And I linked those two together. I realized like, "Oh my goodness, that anger is what is rising to the surface, but at the core of the anger, what's feeding it, is my desire for control." And so that's really what started this process for me, is linking those two together. And so I think it can be the same for people who struggle with anxiety or perfectionism. It can be rooted in this core issue that we often have with control. But you know we don't readily see the control. We have to connect those and look for it. But yeah, that's exactly what led me to studying these other control girls in the bible. I was looking for answers for myself.

Cheri

What connections do you see between control and perfectionism? They seem really related.

Shannon

I think perfectionism crops up from this desire that we have to control everything. You know we have this idea of the perfect happy ending, all worked out in our head. And we feel responsible to manage it all. To manage all the contingencies that are leading to our perfect happy ending and then we have to be perfect to keep it all in line. But I think if we really want to be free of perfectionism, if we don't want to have that burden in our life, we have to look below that surface and deal with those deeper issues of like who really is in control. And if God is really in control, can I trust Him? Can I defer to Him? Can I make him my God and can I trust Him with things that don't see perfect to me? When things aren't going the way that I would have

chosen, or what I would like to happen, is that gonna be okay with me? So I think that until we deal with those core issues, we're not gonna get traction with our perfectionism.

Cheri

That makes total sense. Of the women, the 7 Biblical women that you studied, the *control girls* that you studied, who of them would you say this the classic perfectionist and why would you pick her?

Shannon

You know, I think all of these 7 women that I studied, all of them probably had some perfectionism issues. Because they were all inserting themselves, they were all trying to take matters into their own hands, they were all trying to make it all turn out right, and then it was blowing up in their faces. They were doing what we do and they were making everybody miserable in the process. But you know if I had to pick one, I would say Eve. She's the only one woman who ever has lived who got to experience what God intended for us to be like, and yet even in her perfect environment, perfect relationships, Eve was not content. She especially wasn't content with this particular limitation, right? There was one thing that was off limits to her, the self-improvement fruit, right? She heard about this fruit. This fruit will open your eyes to something. It will make you like God. It will do something for you. Isn't that kind of what perfectionism is? It's like being discontent with my own limitations, my own deficiencies, right? And I think it's so interesting, don't you think when we look at Eve, to note, that even from the beginning, God wanted Eve to have limitations. He wanted her to be dependent on Him. He wanted her to surrender to Him. Instead of being like Him, He wanted her to live in surrender. Perfectionists, we like to be strong and capable right? We don't like to be needy. We don't like to be dependent, right? We want to have a can-do attitude. But from the beginning, God designed us to need Him, to be dependent on Him. And so, yeah, I think that Eve has a lot of lessons for us about, like, we need to just be comfortable with our limitations and live with the fact that God designed us to be needy. And God designed us to be ultimately dependent on Him.

Amy

Well, I'm wondering, Shannon, is it even possible for a people pleaser to also be a controller? Because it seems like people pleasers are too nice to be controlling.

Shannon

Again, I think were trying to make it all turn out right and when our idea of it turning out right is that everybody likes us, and everybody approves of us, and everybody appreciates us. Well, then that definitely turns into somebody whose wanting control by getting people to be pleased, right? So yeah, I definitely think that they work together.

Amy

So which one of the seven women that you studied, do you think, is a people pleaser? And why do you think she is?

Shannon

I would have to say Leah. Leah was in this out of control situation. Her controlling issues are more subtle, but Leah had this husband who has been tricked into marrying her, and he despised her. She could not win his approval. She wanted it desperately, and the one thing that Leah could do was have babies. And so baby after baby after baby we have this picture of her like bringing her little baby before her husband and she says, "Now will you love me, now will you accept me, now will you be attached to me?" And so she's longing to see this glimmer of affection in her husband's eye. She wants endearment, and so she sort of makes herself a slave to him. You know, I mean isn't that kind of what, do people pleasers, they make themselves a slave to other people, right, and their opinions. What she's doing is she's giving Jacob the role of deciding her worth. She's giving Jacob, her husband, control. As people pleasers so often what we do is we're staking our value on what other people think of us, and we're letting them. The more we care about what they think, the more we're letting them control us. We don't mean to do that. Its sort of unwittingly that we give them control, but the more we care about their opinions, the more we let their opinions matter so much, the more control we give to those people. But for every single one of us, rather than letting people decide our worth, we need to let God decide our worth. We give control to the person who matters most to us, and for all of us that has to be God. It cannot be what do people think of me? How are they evaluating me? It always has to be what does God think of me? And how does He evaluate me? And so in Leah's situation there's this one little phrase that it says that, "God looked on Leah and saw that she was unloved." You almost picture God, you know, just kind of leaning into this situation. She felt like God was a million miles away, but He was there. He could see her. He saw her misery. And doesn't that just give us so much hope when we feel rejected just like Leah did, or when we feel just so desperate to win the approval of other people.

Amy

I have never thought about that story and about Leah that way and that by acquiescing, she was trying to control Jacob and his emotions. That is fascinating. Okay, so what can we learn from her?

Shannon

Wouldn't it have been great if Leah could have recognized that God was there? That He did see her. That she didn't have to win the approval of her husband. That God loved her. And that she was in the story of God. She had a very significant role. She was one of the mothers of the tribes of Israel, right? And so she didn't have to prove her worth to anybody. She already had that. Wouldn't it have been great if she could have had that perspective, and wouldn't it be great if we could have had that perspective? We have something Leah didn't have. We have God's Word that we can hold in our hands. You know, she had promises passed on, but we have like black and white on paper promises of what God thinks of us and how He values us, and so, rather than giving control to other people by valuing their opinions too much, we can flip that around and give God control by letting it matter most what He thinks of us.

Cheri

Mm. Mm. So, so good. So on a real practical, everyday level, how does being a *control girl* impact our day-to-day relationships?

Shannon

When we're trying to control people, they don't like it. They don't like it. That was one of the first signs to me that I did have control issues is that there was tension in my marriage. Eventually, there was tension with my children. They don't want to be controlled. You know they have a God. They don't need me stepping in for Him, right? And so, I think especially in our marriages, I don't know if YOU all struggle with any of this, but as a young wife I was very much trying to control every little detail. For instance, we had this lamp on a table, and my husband, that's where he would sit to read, and he was always pulling the lamp over closer to the chair, because he wanted to have the light from the lamp. Well, I was not interested in the light. I was interested in the decor and how it looked on the table and it did not look right where he was putting it. And so, it was a tug of war every day. And you know, it was just getting to be this point of contention, and I'd walk in the room and go, "Ohh!" and go over and change the lamp. And he would pull it back over by his chair, and oh, it was just — those are the sorts of things that when we nag, and when we insert ourselves, and when I was grabbing the knife out of his hand when he was cutting the hotdogs for the kids. "You have to do it smaller," "Let me show you how to do it," or "Do you hear that sound in the basement? I don't think you've taken care of it. I think there's something wrong. The house is gonna blow up."

All of these little messages of things that I was trying to control him, you know just little things, these were giving him messages of, I didn't see it, but messages of disrespect. What he was hearing is, "You're inept. I'm not confident in you. You displease me. You disgust me. I'm frustrated with you" and the Bible says we're supposed to respect our husbands. That's not just an option. It's God's will for us to be respectful wives. And I don't think we see control as disrespect, especially when it's just little things like parenting or how we keep the house or those little naggy things, right? We don't necessarily see ourselves as being disrespectful. I certainly didn't as a young wife. I just thought I'm trying to make this house look good. I'm trying to keep the kids safe. I didn't think of myself as being disrespectful when I was trying to control him. Sin always feels like sin when somebody's doing it to us. Like when our husband is lazy or he's irresponsible or selfish, like that feels like sin to us, right? But sin never feels like sin when we're doing it to somebody else, right?

<Laughter>

Amy

So true! I've never heard that!

Shannon

My pastor says that often. And it's so true. You know when we're trying to nag, and even when we're being dishonoring and emasculating our husbands, it does not feel like were sinning against them. We're helping!

<Laughter>

Cheri

We're being a helper!

Shannon

Yeah, so yeah, our control, it does not feel like sin to us. It feels like a burden. Like, we have got to get this shaped up! We have this happy ending, and it's all up to us to make it all turn out right. So it feels like, "Oh, I'm carrying around this burden." But what God wants us to do is just lay down that burden, right? And give Him control, you know, of our husbands and how our marriage is gonna turn out, how our parenting — like, we don't have to carry the burden of trying to control it all. We can set that burden down, and then, oh my goodness, don't you think that would be so much more of a blessing to our husbands and our children if we didn't feel burdened to control it all? You know, we say God is in control but after we say it we live like we're the ones in control, right? And so, I think we live the way we live because we think the way we think. And if there's ever gonna be any change, it has to be through meditating on truth. If we can really grasp truth and take it in, let it nourish our souls, let it answer our deepest questions about ourselves and about God, that is the only way we're ever going to give up control. If we aren't convinced that God sees us, if we're not convinced that He is in control. If we're not convinced that He's good, and He has the best intentions for us, well then, we're not going to give Him control are we? We're going to keep taking it for ourselves. There's no way I'm giving control to someone who doesn't see me, who doesn't care for me, who isn't being responsible. So we have to take these truths in and really let them sink deep into our hearts and that is what I think is transformative.

Cheri

So I'm imaging that there's a bunch of our listeners feeling like we are right now, they've been convicted repeatedly by things you've said. What is some practical, immediate advice that you can give to someone whose right now on the other end of listening to this going, "Oh my goodness, I'm a *control girl*, what do I do now? Help, I want to stop!"

Shannon

Some years ago I was leading a bible study, I asked the women in my group to share a prayer request that day that related to a relationship struggle that they were having. We went around the circle and every single woman in my group asked us to pray about a very controlling mom, or a very controlling mother-in-law, and at the end of their requests I said, "Ladies, do you hear that consistency in our prayer requests here? Like, this is so ironic." And I said, "You know, I have really been struggling with control myself. I said I see the seeds of this. I see who I am becoming." And God was just starting to open my eyes to this and I said, "How do we not become them? How do we ensure that 15 or 20 years from now it's not our daughters and our daughter-in-laws that are asking prayer about us? Because I could definitely see that happening." Little by little by little we're turning into someone, right? And I think that if we're giving full vent for our desire for control, it's changing us into someone. Well, if we want to go the opposite direction in our lives, then it's in those little moments of not giving vent to this

desire for control. It's doing the opposite. You know, I think there are these big moments of surrender in our lives, like those *come to Jesus moments*, or maybe there's something big that happens in your life. You lose someone dear or something doesn't turn out the way you were hoping, maybe you have a cancelled engagement or something like that, where you have to lay this big, huge thing on the altar. And you're saying, you know, "Jesus you take control, not my will, but Yours be done." But do you know anybody who has had those big moment of God, Jesus, you take the wheel. You're in control. I surrender all." But they live the rest of their life like a *control girl*?

<Laughter>

Well, I have found one of those in the mirror. I definitely see that in myself. I have given God control of my life, but then I keep snatching it back moment by moment. So if we want to go in this different direction, I say start with the little moments of your day. Start with the little decisions of, "Am I gonna take control of this? Or am I gonna lay this down? Or am I gonna surrender this to God?" And so I would say pick the ONE thing that you would most like to control.

Maybe it's a person, maybe it's a situation, maybe it's a financial struggle, or you just found out about somebody's pornography addiction. Whatever it is, the biggest thing, you can just picture yourself holding that in your hands and just gripping on so tightly, right? That one thing, and if you can't think of anything, then think of the thing that's making you the most angry, or the most anxious, or the most stressed out, the thing that drives you to perfectionism, the thing that you would like to control if you could. So take that one thing and decide, I'm gonna surrender this to God. And then in those moments when you feel the anger rise over that thing, or you feel the insecurity, or the fretting starts, or the fear, or the anxiety pushes to the surface. In those moments, and there might be 57 moments in a particular evening, where this comes to the surface of your mind or you're just in this battle over it. In those moments, surrender that to God. And you know, I just want to say something about the word surrender. When we picture surrender don't we sometimes just picture our hands lifted and our faces are so serene. You know serene and surrender they kinda go together. I don't think that's what surrender is like, you know? I think a better picture of surrender is Jesus on his knees bent over in this gritty battle facing the cross and saying not my will but yours be done as the sweat is dripping off, in like, drops of blood, and he's saying, "I give control to you." And that's what it looks like for us, with this thing we're holding in our hands, it's not this easygoing, like, lift your hands. It's a gritty struggle for us, too, but I think that that process of little by little by little by little in the moments of the day, in the course of a year, in the course of a decade, that is what changes us, those little moments of surrendering control to God.

Amy

Very insightful! So Shannon, what closing words of encouragement would you like to leave with our listeners?

Shannon

I just would invite you to consider that control is a burden, right? Trying to manage it all, trying to be perfect, trying to make everything turn out right, to manage all of the contingencies and create the straight path to your happy ending; it is a burden. And the more controlling we get, the more miserable everybody becomes, us included, right? And so I would just invite you, lay down that burden of control. God did not intend for you to be shouldering that burden. Lay it down. He invites you, “Lay it down. Let me be God. Surrender to me. Live in sweet surrender to me and know the peace and the joy and the security and the hope that doesn’t come from taking control.” Those are gifts from laying down control.

Cheri

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode93.

Amy

There you’ll find our transcript, this week’s digging deeper download, bible verse art, and you’ll be able to enter this week’s giveaway of *Control Girl*.

Cheri

Did you know that we have an Etsy shop that helps support the Grit-n-Grace podcast? You can check it out at etsy.com/shop/gritngracegirls.

You’ll find several sets of laminated Bible verse cards and scripture-themed jewelry.

Amy

And don’t forget to join us next week when we’ll be processing together what we learned from Shannon.

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 & Cheri

BREAK IT!

Outtake

Cheri

I also told her to stop us if we called her Sharron. She said it’s actually happened in 3 different interviews, and she didn’t have the nerve to correct them. And I’m like, “Oh no, no,” as someone that has 14 different possible spellings of her name, I really do feel like it’s important to call people by their actual name.

Amy

Well, and when I put Shannon’s guest post on my blog, I introduced her in writing as Sharron. I felt so bad, and she corrected me, and I’m glad she did, but I was like “Oh!”

Cheri

If your book is called *Control Girl*, should you correct people if they call you by the wrong name or not? That's kind of a quandary.

Amy

The wrong name is the wrong name!