

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST Episode #274

The Power of a Simple 'What If?'

with Kathi Lipp

Cheri Gregory

Hey friend, it's Cheri Gregory.

And you're listening to Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST that equips you to **lose** who you're NOT, **love** who you ARE, and **live** your ONE life well.

Can I just say that God is teaching me so many lessons thru the revival of this podcast?

As you probably know by now, my original plan was to re-launch Grit 'n' Grace back in the summer of 2023.

But then — after Amy Carroll, Michele Cushatt, and Kathi Lipp all coordinated their schedules to make the recordings happen — I just couldn't seem to make everything else happen on my end.

And with each month that passed by, I felt worse ... and worse ... and worse. For wasting their time ... for disappointing them ... and for letting YOU down!

It was 14 months of this increasingly heavy sense of "It's just too late."

Someday soon, I **will** tell you the story of how I went from feeling like "It's just too late" to a sort of stealth relaunch of Grit 'n' Grace that surprised even me!

But what I want to share with you right now is this: If you sometimes feel the same way ... like **too much time has passed** and **it's just too late** ... I want you to hear what a couple of our listening friends have said about our "newest" episodes.

This is so good! I needed to hear every word.

Thank you for this wonderful episode. I am going through my own difficult journey right now ... and I'm so thankful that this episode came out when I really needed to hear it.

So one lesson God is teaching me — that I want to pass along to you — is this:

In SO MANY areas of our lives, it's **not** too late.

It's really not!

It's really **NOT** too late.

Well, in this week's episode of Grit 'n' Grace, we're talking with Kathi Lipp about her book *The Accidental Homesteader: What I've Learned about Chickens, Compost, and Creating Home*.

Kathi Lipp is the Publishers Weekly best-selling author of over 20 books, including *Clutter Free*, *The Accidental Homesteader*, and her brand-new book *Sabbath Soup*. She and her husband Roger ran away to the mountains of Northern California where they grow their own food and turn it into delicious meals for those they host at the Red House Writers retreats.

Amy Carroll

Okay, Kathi, I have to start today with a little gushing. Can I gush?

Kathi Lipp

Please! Well first of all, I'm gonna pre-gush, because the gang is back together. Cheri and Amy — this is so exciting. And I'm so excited to be here with the guys for Grit 'n' Grace, like all the things. I'm so excited to be here. Okay, Amy. Go ahead.

Amy Carroll

Well, yes to that, like all the pom-poms and jazz hands to that, for sure.

So I have a confession that I did not pick up my advanced copy until last night. But when I did Kathi I could not put it down! It is every delightful thing that I love about Kathi Lipp. And I had not opened it, and so I didn't realize that the photographs are like, all the beautiful chicken pictures!

Kathi Lipp

I finally understand what it is. It's like all my favorite Pinterest boards come to life and personalized. Which maybe isn't the best selling point for a book. But it's like: "This is really the life I'm living!" It literally started on a Pinterest board, and now like this is my life and I get to tell my story.

It's my favorite book I've ever written – and some of my favorite books I've ever written are with somebody who is on this podcast – but it's just... I went into this project, saying “I want readers to be delighted.”

Amy Carroll

I felt delighted 1,000%. You know, our friend Jill talks about “Soul Snacks” and I just left a message for some of my friends that said, “I have to tell you what your soul snack for the day is, it's to pick up a copy of *The Accidental Homesteader!*” Like, have to do it. So like, all of the gushing, but we need to let you talk. So tell us about this journey. How did you become the accidental homesteader?

Kathi Lipp

Yeah, accidentally. I know that that's the stupidest response ever. But let me just tell you. So, Roger and I – it was a whole series of inconsequential things that turned out to be life-changing.

So you guys know our friend Susy Flory, who has a cabin here in the mountains, and when they first bought it, they would just come up on weekends. And she told me, “If you ever want to use it, just let me know.” And I was bold with my visiting schedule. And we tried to be generous, as they were generous. So every time we went, I'd buy a doormat or I always brought Kirkland toilet paper, because like, you know, you always need toilet paper. But I was always picking up little fun things for the house that Susy loved.

And then she rudely moved into it full time. Like, come on. Is that what Jesus would do? Really? And so I – you know, Roger and I, we would go and rent an Airbnb, and that's what we did July 5th of 2018. We were in Lake Tahoe in a one room cabin and we said “You know, could we get our own one room cabin, and Airbnb it?” And we thought, “You know what, maybe we can!” And so we started exploring that. And then I was going to teach at a writing retreat. And I'm like, “Wouldn't it be great if I could teach a writing retreat at my house?” And then I'm like, “Wouldn't it be great if I—” so it's all this spiraling to, okay, now we have 33 acres in the middle of the wilderness. We teach retreats here, like it's, it's just insane. And we've given up our house in San Jose and live here full time. So like, it's just a series of “Well what if..?”

We “what if”ed we what ourselves into being accidental homesteaders.

Amy Carroll

Well, I'm on a little real estate adventure myself. And you made me feel so brave Kathi! This is one thing that I think will be a side effect, a good side effect of your book, for people, is it's going to help us all like launch into the dream, make us feel more brave.

Kathi Lipp

If it makes one person do that, I will be thrilled. If there are two, you know, that's completely God's hand. But you know for a long time, I didn't allow myself to say "What if?" because my life was so chaotic, that I couldn't add another "What if" into it. And now it's like, okay, you know what, your life is going to be kind of chaotic no matter what you do. Why are you not asking God "What's the next thing?" And so is this an adventurous real estate adventure, Amy? Like, what are we talking here?

Amy Carroll

It's top secret right now. When I succeed, I'll reveal it.

Kathi Lipp

Okay. I'm praying for adventure. You know what, you get to see God in those spaces between safety and adventure. You really do. Now I'm not saying being reckless. That's not what I'm saying. But, you know, I mean, when God is obviously leading you somewhere, you know, you don't have to have it all figured out. It's not good to be unwise. But for somebody who feels like, "Okay, you need to have everything planned out for the next five years," that doesn't work because it doesn't matter if you have a five year plan. The world doesn't care. God, you know, thinks that's adorable. People change. We have some friends going through some big stuff. We've all gone through some big stuff. **And so you might as well live out that adventure and see where God is steering you.**

Cheri Gregory

Kathi, what I love is that you use that phrase "What if?" which is known to be the fiction writer's technique, right? "What if" this-and-this happened, and then they write an entire novel or an entire movie is based on it. And you "fiction"ed your way into this whole new nonfiction life!

Kathi Lipp

I never thought of it that way. And what it is just a crazy, wonderful way to look at it. Because yeah, if you had told me five years ago – okay, maybe five years ago. If you told me six years

ago, like, no! None of that, you know, 33 acres? Roger didn't mow our lawn. What? What? What? It doesn't make sense.

Cheri Gregory

Yeah. So for our friends who are listening, you just have to know that when you drive to The Red House, you drive through serious forest. Like, the first time I went to visit I was like, oh my goodness, they own these trees and mountains. Like, how do you own trees? Like it's truly mind boggling.

Now before we get down to any actual serious questions, however, I do have a bone to pick with you – and this is something that's not in the book – but Amy is going to be my witness.

Kathi Lipp

Okay. Okay.

CheriGregory

So I just want to just lay out a chronology here and have you explain it to me. So, sometime in the last month, you posted a video of a visitor to The Red House.

Kathi Lipp

Yes.

Cheri Gregory

And that video was the biggest bear I've ever seen. And then like, but nobody got hurt. Next day is a picture of the chicken coop with the door ripped off. And the next thing is an email: 'Hey, Cheri. Would you like to house-sit for us for a few weeks while we're gone?' Like are you trying to get rid of me or something? Like, explain this to me. Help me understand this chronology.

Kathi Lipp

Well, I needed the house sitter longer than we knew about the bear. So what you're saying is I should send you the video of the next bear that came – that I have not posted yet – chewing on the camera. Like, we could send that to the bear's dentist and get him fitted for braces because like, you get the full mouth.

Yeah, you know, here's what I know. Bears walk through. They stay a little while and they move on. So I was asking you for like September and October — well past Smokey [the Bear] season. Yes. I will say, we would never leave somebody here. And we feel very safe here. You know, you see all those videos of bears in Tahoe, like, climbing into the car and opening the door to get to the refrigerator inside. Tahoe bears are much more civilized than our bears. Our bears can't do that. But yeah, we we now have — okay. Please don't think we're monsters. We have bear boards down now. And what those are, they're called 'unwelcome mats.' And at first I refused to do this because I was afraid I was going to hurt the bears but I was assured that's not what would happen. It's boards with nails sticking up. And I don't want to hurt the bears. You know, I don't want to — but our resident nature expert, Teddy Flory, Susy's daughter, said it would be like you stepping on a thorn. Like really unpleasant, but it's not going to hurt you. Because bear skin is tough. Very, very tough. So Cheri, we would have never left you here if we didn't think it was safe. I promise. I promise. I promise. I love you. I love you.

Cheri Gregory

I'm giving you a hard time. And I'm very sad that the bear showed up after the book came out because I'm sure there would have been a whole fun chapter about bears, so I just had to include it.

I also have to include how you open on the back of your book it says homesteading (noun): 1. an act or instance of establishing a homestead 2. the act of loving where you live so much that you actively ignore the fact that your house is trying to kill you on a regular basis. So I just figured the bear was just another in the list of ways your house is trying to kill you.

Kathi Lipp

It's just another. You know, between trees falling on our house, a 100-year snowstorms, the Caldor Fire, like you know, yeah! It's not for people who don't have a sense of adventure. Because yeah, if you had told me our house was almost burned down, I don't know that I would have moved here. But you know, our house almost burned down in San Jose too. So like, you pick your poison.

Amy Carroll

This adventurousness is admirable, but I would say that the trait that Cheri and I particularly love was that it takes *grit* to live where you live, Kathi, right? And so what kinds of lessons have you learned about grit as you've homesteaded that can be applied to other parts of our lives?

Kathi Lipp

Oh, yeah. So, you know, – I think my favorite book, my favorite fiction book, and my favorite fiction movie is *Pride and Prejudice*. And – yes – and when Catherine de Burgh calls Elizabeth an obstinate headstrong girl. I remember as a little girl being called stubborn. Or you know, pig-headed. I mean, like, I was called all the things. And I have to say, that did some psychic damage to me, where, you know, like, we were kind of raised it at least in the church, that if you were any of those things, no boy would like you. And I'm like, now I'm understanding, 'I don't care if boys like me.' This is not a bad thing. This is so good. And so it's that grit.

I can bend, but I'm not breaking. There's only one time [since] we've moved up here, with all the death-defying things that have happened, where Roger and I've looked at each other like, "Did we make a huge mistake?" It's okay to ask the question. It really is. Because we kind of thought we might die.

But here is what I know: that stubbornness has made me so that I will learn how to do something that I never thought I could learn to do before. And whether that is making sourdough bread or raising chickens or growing our food or, you know, whatever it is, that obstinance – and, you know, it's just another word for **determination**. That we can grow that aspect of us. You know, like everything we were told as a child, you know, everything that somebody said was a bad trait in us has the good side.

And so to really lean into those things that maybe you were told as a child you'll never be, you could never ... all those things. Yes, you could. Yes, you could. Now I'm not going to become a professional ballerina, but that's actually never been a desire of mine. But to raise chickens, to raise a garden, to live in this place that gives my husband so much peace. I would do anything to stay here. And so that's where my headstrong — that used to be a deterrent to me — is now one of my greatest qualities.

And so to reframe some of those things that you were told us a child that were bad and say "Maybe this is actually one of the strengths that God has given me," is kind of a beautiful redemptive thing.

Amy Carroll

I love that. The reframing of it, the focusing of that, the channeling of it, into what the life that God has given you, this gift that He's given you amazing.

Cheri Gregory

Well, and as soon as we're done, I'm going on Amazon and finding a t-shirt that says 'obstinate headstrong girl' because oh my goodness, I need to wear that at least once a week.

So Kathi, you are famous for your STEM acronym: **S**pace **T**ime **E**nergy and **M**oney; so talk to us especially from your experiences from homesteading, how do you manage your resources in ways that encourage growth and resilience?

Kathi Lipp

Yeah, so you know, it's so interesting. So many of us are – the bottom line of every decision is how do I save money? How do I save money? And for a lot of people, that has to be their bottom line, 100%. But I think it's also good, you know, with the STEM – space, time, energy and money – those are our resources. And if we are not in a crisis all the time, we still have those resources. So I thought once we moved up here, time would become more abundant. The exact opposite has happened. You know, people think that we're just kind of sitting on the deck sipping iced tea. It's like having a second job up here, but it's a second job that's nothing like your first job.

And so it's really interesting how we have to look at our redistribution of resources all the time. So if you are always thinking "I need to buy the cheapest, I need to ..." – maybe you do, but also maybe, if that's just something I know many of us have grandparents who were part of the Great Depression and so we equate saving money with godliness in lots of ways. And so I've had to get myself out of that mindset that – you know what? Space is no longer really ... we lived in 1400 square feet before we moved here, and we had four kids. So space was our most precious resource. Now, we've got a little more space that we can, we can play with.

Time. You know, we have to really put rhythm into our lives. There's not people around us creating rhythm. So we have to create our own rhythm. And Roger and I were just talking, you know, we get together in the morning and we watch the news. And then at night – I know these are both TV-related, I don't care anymore. You know, I'm not going to be ashamed for watching West Wing at night.

But you know, we have these little rhythms and he says – "You know, I love so much about our lives here but I love the rhythm of our lives. Like I know what's coming next." And sometimes there's a crisis, but most of the time, we know what's coming next. And we know like when we're cooking food or when we're going to be in the garden, and we love these rhythms that we have established.

So really taking a look at your resources and saying, “Am I still managing my resources as if I’m a 25-year-old?” Because 25-year-olds, one of their best resources is energy. And you know, like I’ve been on a health journey and my energy has gone way up, which is such a gift. But I also know I’m getting older and that’s not always going to be the case. And so to really taking a look at those resources and saying “**What can I do today? What can I do that brings me joy with the resources I have, and how can I manage those to take care of myself and to take care of the people that God has surrounded me with?**”

And so up here, it just is – it’s so interesting how those resources kind of get flipped, and how you think about them in a new way.

Cheri Gregory

I love that. And then of course, your book is focused on kind of seasonality, which is going to be a part of your natural rhythm as well. I love it.

Kathi Lipp

Which I love. We try to enjoy the season we’re in because each season has its own gift. Like up here, there’s something weird that happens. We have a million mosquitoes, and – which is the worst right? But there’s a day, right in the middle of August where about 10,000 dragonflies descend on our property? And it’s just crazy. It happens the same, like one or two days, every single year. And my favorite part about it first of all, it’s beautiful. And the second favorite part is they chomp the mosquitoes in half. And so the mosquito bodies fall to the ground, the chickens run and eat them all up. And I hate that I love to see death and destruction, but with mosquitoes I haven’t found out what they’re good for yet.

Amy Carroll

Fair game.

Kathi Lipp

Yeah, yeah, they are fair game.

Amy Carroll

That’s fantastic. So you’ve unpacked **grit** for us in this situation so well. But how has **grace** played into all these challenges that you face the resilience that you’re building?

Kathi Lipp

So I would say in a couple of ways: self grace, mutual grace, and community grace. So here's what I mean by that.

Self grace. I'm not good at stuff. Dang it. That's really frustrating. You think just by moving up here I would be able to start canning. Like, why is that not an automatic skill that I'm given? But I always have to say, "You know what, I am a beginner, and I'm gonna get better." And that's something I repeat to myself all the time.

"I'm a beginner, and I'm gonna get better."

Another area of grace is mutual grace.

Sometimes Roger and I are both exhausted at the same time. And he knows sometimes we're going to have, I've got a couple frozen dinners in the freezer, which is not a bad – but I'm just exhausted and Roger's just like "I do not care." And nothing is ever going to be done as much as we want it to be done. The garden's not done as much as we want it to be done. Our household projects are not done as much as we – and I see, oftentimes, couples turn on each other in those circumstances.

And it's very easy to get angry at the person who's you know, arm's length away. And to just say, "You know what, we're both doing the best we can." And sometimes I may appear lazy. I think that's just exhaustion or overwhelm. I don't, you know, most of the people I know and love are not lazy. They're distracted. They're overwhelmed. They're overworked. They're over-something.

And then I will also say community grace.

People here have very strong feelings about a lot of things. And they are passionate. And I often have to say, "You know what, it's not my job to change anybody's mind. It's not my job to do any of that." Jesus was pretty clear about it: **my job is to love my neighbor**. And the only way anybody is ever going to see God in me is by loving them well. Nobody has been shouted or convinced or anything else.

And so just say you know what, our community has embraced us and I know that they're giving us grace because we don't always know what we're doing. And I need to give grace back. And you know what, it makes for a much better set of living circumstances. And you have to be a community when you're living in a place like this. You have to. You have to rely on each other. You have to bring each other meals, you have to help each other with logging projects. There

are no people on islands out here. You have to be able to be a part of a community. And your life is better because you're a part of that community, not just with the people you agree with.

Amy Carroll

I love that. I remember reading on social media, Kathi, that one of your neighbors dug you out of the snow. Imagine if you had made an enemy of that person.

Kathi Lipp

Right?

Amy Carroll

What if we all had a life-and-death whether we were actually nice to people or not?

Kathi Lipp

Right. And I will admit he's very easy to be nice to. But he has saved us more times than I want to count. He's one of the firefighters who saved our house. I bring him a meal once or twice a week. I'm not dumb. Okay, first of all, he is so appreciative of that because he has told me if I didn't bring him a meal, if Roger and I didn't bring him a meal, he'd be eating Lunchables. So I'm like, okay, I may not be a perfect cook, but I can beat out a Lunchables most days. And you know, we do. We take care of each other and I'm so grateful. We had to become part of this community. We're part of the Fire Safety Council. We do all that kind of stuff because our survival depends on it. But our lives are better because of it too.

Cheri Gregory

So Kathi, for the woman who's feeling stuck or facing a significant life transition, or maybe she's looking for some adventure, but if she's afraid to play the 'what if' game, what encouragement and practical advice can you offer her to help her move forward with some hope and joy?

Kathi Lipp

Yeah, so you're scared about the big what-ifs, what about the little what-ifs? What if I took a class? What if, you know, one of the things I've been doing here is there's extension programs, and so that for, in California that runs through the University of California system.

So I took a winter gardening class, because I'm like, "What if we could do a winter garden?" You know, and the classes are free. And, you know, so you can start with the small what-ifs. If

you haven't gone back to school in a long time, is there something that would pique your interest, whether it's a mosaic class or a literature class? There's so much available now, like on Netflix and YouTube to learn to do something.

So **start off with small what-ifs.**

And some of those are going to be failures. I have been trying to learn to crochet for like two years now. And I really want to, but I don't know how, and it's very frustrating to me. But there's been a lot of successes. Like we have raised chickens. That's huge. We have a huge garden. Cheri and her husband came up here for a week, and Daniel helped Roger build our greenhouse. I never knew we could do that! Like, the list of things I didn't know I could do was huge.

So start with the small what-ifs.

“What if I interacted differently with this person?” I've been trying to change some of my relationships. And you know, people will make jokes as a way to kind of cut you down. And I said, “Oh, you need to explain that joke to me. I don't get it.” And when you do that, they realize they're not funny; they're just mean. And so they start to treat you differently. So like, what if I just said, “Oh, I need you to explain that to me.” Or you said *You know what, I'm not going to be guilted into doing something I don't want to do. So I'm just gonna say “No thank-you.”*

And I am starting to learn the small what-ifs can be as life-changing as the big ones. So take the class, go on YouTube, figure out how to bake the bread, you know, dig a trench. We are learning the skills up here just by watching YouTube.

You know, for a lot of women, for a long time, they couldn't have an education. And now, education is free and available to all of us. Like, what a gift.

So one of the most defiant radical acts you can do is to get educated on a subject. So. Go find something that just stirs that ... that spirit within you. And go learn something about it. I feel like that's the first step to almost everything.

Cheri Gregory

I so appreciate Kathi's mindset of **“I'm a beginner, and I'm gonna get better”** ... her advice to **start off with small what-ifs** ... and her encouragement to **find something that just stirs that ... that spirit within you. And go learn something about it.**

You see — it's **not** too late ... it's **NEVER** too late to learn.

I sure hope you've enjoyed Episode #274 of Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST!

Check out the webpage for this week's episode
<https://GritNGraceThePodcast.com/episode274>

There you'll find links to Kathi's books — *An Accidental Homesteader* AND her brand new book *Sabbath Soup* — and to her website, which is full of fabulous resources.

And then be sure to tune in next week when Amy and I will be processing what we learned from Kathi!

For today, grow your grit ...

... embrace God's grace ...

...and pray-cess the question:

“What can I do today — that brings me joy — with the resources I have?”