

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #145: Discovering the Hope and Happiness in Hospitality

Amy: Well Christen, we're so glad you're with us today. What led you to write Invited?

Christen: Right. I'm so happy to be here. I started to write Invited because I've been an event planner for several years both professionally and personally. And I've planned birthday parties and wedding showers and baby showers, but I've also planned events for fundraising and for women's ministry at my church and school. And so, event planning has always been part of my life. And so, I've enjoyed celebrating people and I'm a detailed person and so I enjoy the planning of an event and then seeing it all come together. And then, it's just such a wonderful moment. But I think for me personally, so much happens behind the scenes when I'm planning an event. Even if it's an event like a birthday party.

And sometimes things can happen that I don't plan for, that are unexpected. Something always goes, not necessarily wrong, but something goes different and I haven't anticipated it. And for me personally, I've struggled with that over the years and what happens when things don't go according to plan and how to deal with the unexpected. And for me, it's gone both ways. And so, it was really [inaudible 00:01:30] in that I knew that I was but my friends were having it as well, just a struggle with perfection and wanting everything to be just right. And so, God just began to lead me to writing Invited. I did learn that it's not about perfection. It's really about connection.

Cheri: I love that. I love that so much. Now what I need help on here is learning how to translate into my life because my mother was the ultimate perfect hostess and I'm the exact opposite. So you saying hospitality isn't about perfection, it's about connection speaks to my heart. But can you unpack that for those of us who are terrified, like literally terrified, to have anybody in our homes?

Christen: Right, right. For me, I often felt that way. I grew up, I was really the shy kid. So I grew up not really knowing like okay, well, if I have a party is anybody even going to come? And I had all these fears and these anxieties and stuff. And I think sometimes too we do have this idea about what a party is supposed to look like. And we see that from our mothers or from women that have gone before us and have planned events even for us to celebrate our special occasions. And I think immediately our minds go to this crystal clean house where everything is in perfect order and everything is color coordinated and it's matching and it's that Pinterest perfect idea. And the food is wonderful and everything is to a T.

And I think sometimes what we've got to look back and just focus on is just yes, that can happen. And yes, that's a certain type of party where we do have to go the extra mile to make sure everything is in order. And that can be really, really intimidating. But really, what I'm inviting people to, this idea of hospitality, is more of a back to basics style of hospitality. And it's trying to see through the lens of Christ.

And so, one of the terms I use in the book is for us to be hallelujah hostesses. And to be a hallelujah hostess, that's having a love for the stranger or helping with the needs of the ministries that you see maybe in your church or your community. And I think we are all called to be hallelujah hostesses. I see teachers being hallelujah hostesses or if you're a greeter on Sunday morning. And so, there's different ways that we can practice hospitality.

But I think if we're to invite people into our lives, we can do that through inviting people to our homes and if we do, maybe pick a room in your house like your kitchen or your back porch. A place that you feel comfortable in. And it's not like you have to get your whole house prepared and ready. And maybe be intentional and just invite a small group of people, one or two people, or maybe a couple of people. And don't think it has to be grand and majestic and perfect. But just invite people over and let them know, I'm a mom with young kids so it's easy for me to say hey, the toys are out and they're in the front room. They're not completely put away. And that's okay.

Or if it's intimidating to have people in your home, I encourage people to invite others to maybe a fun restaurant in town that has a great menu or atmosphere. Just a place that you can go and connect and form a relationship with people. And that's really the most important part of entertaining and practicing hospitality to me.

Cheri: Okay, well. I was about to think I need to borrow some children to make excuses for the state of my house. First of all, I love the phrase hallelujah hostess. That just warms ... I started to tear up just thinking wow, I'd never thought of that before. But I love the idea of inviting people out to a restaurant. That would be such a nonthreatening way to start.

Christen: Right.

Cheri: Oh boy. I'm going to have to work on that one. Okay. In your book, you just stepped all over my toes in the best possible way so I'm going to say ouch, thank you. You said it seems to me that women are desperately chasing perfection and when we don't capture it, we lose control over our emotions. So Christen, what on earth are you talking about there?

Christen: Hasn't that ever happened to you?

Cheri: Maybe.

Christen: And again, I say this from the place of I've been there and I am still struggling with it. I don't think it ever really goes away. But I think for women who have perfectionist tendencies, and I think we all have that in some way. Maybe we only become a perfectionist when it comes to our grades if you're a college student or our work or you know, raising a family, whatever it is. There's certain things that you want, you just strive. And to be a perfectionist is not a bad thing because it helps you set goals for yourself and it helps you to get further in what you want to do with your life. But sometimes we can become so passionate about the matters of our heart that we can let that passion drive us and before we know it, I know for me personally, before I get ready for a party, it's really easy to let a quick comment come out to my husband or to my mom, somebody that is around me. And it might not be the nicest comment. And afterwards, I just think oh, boy. Why in the world did I say that or feel that way? And it's because in the moment I let that passion get to me and I wanted everything to be just right and perfect and so I wasn't the nicest that I could be.

Again, I saw that in my own life and I just thought I've got to stop blaming others or myself and belittling and having these breakdown moments because it's just not worth it and it's not making me a pleasant person to be around. And therefore, it's hurting the relationships that I'm working so hard to have. And so, you know, it's one of those things where I had a reality check. For me, it came after my son's first birthday. We had his party at our house and just moments before the party began, I dropped the cupcakes on the floor.

Cheri: No.

Christen: And these were homemade cupcakes that I'd made from scratch, had done the icing from scratch. And I just was devastated.

Cheri: Of course.

Christen: Because I had worked so hard on this and they fell out of the container and they dropped. And I just had this moment where I had to go and for me, breaking down, looks like going to the bathroom and just having a moment just to cry. And I had that moment and my mom came in and was like you've got to get back out there. Everybody's coming over to your house and you've got to get over this. And I can remember that while I was celebrating my son and I put on my happy face and everything was fine, I can look back at those pictures and I see that ... I just see it just took away some of the joy from that day. And I just remember saying to myself after that, okay, things have got to change.

Cheri: Christen, I'm breaking out in hives just thinking about this and it didn't even happen to me. Oh my word, girlfriend. Whew. You have a very specific interpretation of this idea of perfection and I just found it so very valuable. Share with our listeners, what kind of perfection is actually healthy for us to have in our lives?

Christen: Yeah. I think for us, when we begin to turn the lens, not from our own tendencies to be perfect but when we begin to see how God is perfect and how he has given us Christ, that helps us to just release our perfectionist tendencies and to give our imperfections to him. And there's two words in scripture [tamam and kalau 00:10:04], they're in Hebrew. And they mean perfection. And they mean balance and wholeness and radiance. And so, for us to be women who have these tendencies for perfection, if we can begin to see, okay, I can find balance and wholeness and radiance in my relationship with Christ and who I am in him, then it's like we can give ourselves more grace and we can let go of the things that we are struggling with because when you are a perfectionist, you're really hard on yourself. And it's easy to be self-critical and just to look at the lens of it wasn't good enough. You know? But in scripture, we are told that Christ is enough and I am enough in him.

And so, we're able to see our imperfections as actually just this beautiful way to connect with Christ and to form that relationship. And connection is all about a relationship and being tied to someone else. And so, you know, we can be connected to the Holy Trinity through relationship. And that's our basis for how we were created. It goes all the way back to Genesis. And so, again, when we say that we were made for connection and to be in a relationship not only with God but with one another, we can just let go of so many of the things that we get worked up on and really that's when we find the true joy in celebrating and being in communion with one another.

Amy: That is beautiful. What's the difference between a woman who really loves being a hostess and somebody who feels like Cheri who really struggles with inviting people into her home and hostessing?

Christen: Right. Well again, I have been on both sides of this so I'm speaking from my own personal experience. But I think sometimes for me, the moments when I haven't always enjoyed or I've been intimidated to host, it often has had to do with my own fears and my own insecurities. I've struggled with okay, is my house pretty enough? Or is the food, is it tasty enough? Are people going to want to come? And how does this reflect me? And it really becomes this whole, I'm kind of absorbed with myself, and the things that I've got going on and what I'm doing to bring people in.

But I think, for me, what I have seen from hostesses who really have a joy and a knack for it is that they are able to let go of their own worries and insecurities and they're really able to be happy and to enjoy the experience. And one of the benefits, actually, of hosting is happiness. And it says that the women that are most happy ... I did some research on this ... are the ones who are treating their guests like the most important people in the room. And they're the ones that aren't looking at themselves and inviting people in to say oh, look at everything that I've done and everything that I have and look at my own vanity, if you will. But it's turning it and being how can I serve you? How can I serve you in love? And that's a simple looking people directly in the eye or taking their plate from them, or stopping and having a conversation. And a real conversation, not just hey, how are you?

But it's actually making people feel important while they're in your presence. And I think the moments when I'm able to do that, I walk away from the evening, even if the food's not just right or maybe a friend couldn't come or I did have the dishes in the sink. If I think I had a meaningful connection with the people who were here tonight, that's what leaves my heart happy and that's what leaves my heart full. So it takes some of that fear and intimidation out of the way.

Amy: Wonderful. That's such a great perspective shift. And speaking of perspectives, you have a unique perspective on a Biblical woman that we love. So would you share how you see Elizabeth?

Christen: Sure. Yes. Well, in chapter three of my book, I talk a lot about community and how there's this call for community. And I share about how after Mary found out that she was pregnant and she immediately went to the home of her family member, Elizabeth. And Elizabeth too was pregnant but her husband had ... He was silent because he doubted the angel when he told him and everything. And so, in the book I talk about how Elizabeth was probably really excited to see Mary because she hadn't been talking to anybody for a while and women, we like to talk, you know?

Amy: Yes.

Christen: And so, to me, I think Elizabeth was really excited to have Mary come into her home and to spend time with her. And it doesn't say this in scripture but I can just imagine these two women who are pregnant and they're just so overwhelmed by God's goodness in their lives. And I can just see her really accepting Mary, not just as a guest, but really as someone who is part of her family. And Mary stayed with her for three months. And when I read that, I was like oh my goodness. She had a guest for three months. I mean, I couldn't last for three days. And to me, that was just a true sign of come, you are welcome here.

And I can just see the women helping each other maybe with morning sickness or maybe going on walks and breathing in the fresh air. Or maybe Mary helped Elizabeth prepare. I know they probably didn't have nurseries but you know, just that whole, I think as women we still have that tendency to nest and to get excited about a baby coming. And so, they just got to bond. And I think that was Elizabeth just saying Mary, come in. You are part of our family. You are part of our home. And it wasn't this extravagant I've got to have everything just right for you and you have to have grand meals the whole three months that you're here. But she just said come, I want to be in community with you and let's fellowship together.

Amy: What if we do our best but disaster happens and we really do drop the cupcakes or burn the meal or forget to clean the guest bathroom? What's your advice for us then?

Christen: Oh boy. We've just got to let it go. Old Elsa in Frozen's coming out. But I think we have to have this sense, again, that we've got to expect the unexpected and just begin to take on that mindset of having just this planned spontaneity to ourselves. That's hard for me, honestly, because I do have ... I'm a person of order and details and it's like oh wait, I've got to something that I haven't planned for. Oh my. But it's just like okay, we're going to order some pizza or there were a couple cupcakes that didn't totally hit the floor so those were the ones that we set out. He was one, he was only turning one so we did that.

And I think too if the house isn't just right, just say excuse the mess. And I think too it's perfectly okay to have someone help you prepare if you're going to have people in your home whether that be to hire someone to come in and help you clean or to grab a friend or a mom or your husband and just say hey, we've got to work together on this. And it's okay to accept help and it's okay to not apologize.

I've seen sometimes when friends, if they have people in, they'll apologize for everything the minute they open the door. I am so sorry that my house ... They'll say things like I'm so sorry that I don't have pillows on my couch yet. I'm still working on that. And we haven't painted this wall. It still has this wallpaper. You know? They're apologizing for everything. And it's like it's okay. Let's just make a joke about it. Like yeah, we still have this old wallpaper, oh well. You know? And it's like we just have to accept things for what they are and just not be ashamed and not let our own fears get in the way of being in community with one another.

Cheri: All right, well. So for me, I identify with you saying in your book that it's sometimes for a perfectionist, it's so easy not to even try. So my rationale has been, I'm really bad at hospitality so why not just accept it? It seems so much

easier for all of us. I'm guessing you would disagree. So what would be my next step here if I'm like okay, I'm really bad. Why isn't it good for me to just accept and not try? Why should I and our listeners who are more like me, why should we push ourselves?

Christen: Right. Loneliness is a disease and the best cure for it is community. And so, at the end of the day, as we said before, you don't have to have people in your home. You can go to a restaurant or you can be someone who helps host a party. It doesn't have to be in your house but you can bring a dessert and by golly, that dessert can come from Publix, you know? And so, it's just like if you desire connection with other people and that's what hospitality, that's a way to connect with people, then why not go for it? Because being lonely can put us in these dark places and it can make us feel like not only are we not connected to other individuals but we begin to doubt God's presence in our lives.

And so, I think, for us to ultimately say yeah, hospitality is hard for me but my desire for community and connection is worth it. And so, it's seeing what works on your level. For some women, that might even be online. And I think there's so many different ways for us to connect. The older I've gotten too, I would rather have a few good friends than have a party full of people. And so, if I just have an evening with a couple of my girlfriends or my husband and I invite a few people over or I see that woman at church that maybe wants to go deeper but I haven't maybe put the time in yet. And I say hey, let's go to coffee. Let's spend an hour together. You know? And to me, that's again, one of those things that fills me up and it makes it worth it and it takes away those fears after I've done it. I'm like okay, I can do this and it wasn't as hard as I originally had in my head.

Cheri: Yeah. Us recovering perfectionists and those of us who are highly sensitive people, we can tend towards all or nothing. So maybe I don't have to try to be my mother. Maybe I could start with that little cup of coffee for an hour. That feels like a commitment to community that I could try.

I was fascinated that you said that rest is a vital component of hospitality. I have never heard that before. So could you explain that to us?

Christen: Sure. Through my event planning experience, I've seen that there's this party planning cycle, I guess you could say, that happens. And the cycle begins with this idea and it says we've got this idea for an event or a shower that we want to host and then, when that idea moves into the planning phase and then the planning phase slowly moves into the week of and it's like the last minute details. And then finally, the event is here and we're so excited and we just can't wait for it to happen and we're in that adrenaline rush getting everything ready and getting together to the best of our abilities. Again, it doesn't have to be perfect. But we've experienced the unexpected so we're dealing with that and

it's finally the day of and it's like okay, this is going to happen. Ready or not, here we go.

And then, the event happens and it really is ... It makes all the planning and preparation worth it. And then, I've noticed that after an event, it's that wrap up period. So you've got to clean up. You've got to put things away. You've got to send your thank you notes. Do all those after the event things. But then, that's where rest begins to ... It needs to be situated. Because if we don't plan for rest and we don't give ourselves enough time to recover from an event and we immediately transition into the next thing that we have on our to do list because we're women, our calendars are always full, right?

And so, I feel like if we don't plan for rest and be intentional about just taking ... listening to our body, number one. How much rest do we need? Does our rest require us to maybe get away and go to the beach or the lake or the mountains for a few days to rest or is it simply like do you need to rest at home and maybe, this may sound strange, but for me sometimes that rest involves cooking a meal because it's just a simple thing that's totally different than anything that I've been doing the past few weeks. And it's coming off of that adrenaline rush and it's coming off of all of your brain spinning and planning and doing. And it's simply that time to number one, recover, but also to remember okay, this just happened and how did I see God through this? What kind of relationships did I form? Maybe who do I need to continue to be in contact with now that the event is over? What are the next steps?

And just taking that time to listen to God and to be still and just to be poured back into you. Because I have found in my own life if I keep pouring out and going and doing for other people, that if I keep that going, I'm going to get burned out. And then when I get burned out, I get depressed and I get sad and I get that state of loneliness. And I get discouraged. So I can't see God and I don't have that clarity and that focus anymore. And so, for me to prevent burnout or maybe to make burnout not happen for quite as long of a period, I need to rest so I can fix my eyes on Christ and have hope that he's already preparing something for me to do later. But I've got to recover from what I've just been through, the process that I've just experienced.

So that to me is why rest is so vital and so important because it's that transitional piece between the cycles. Because life is like a party. Not only are we planning events but events are happening in our own lives. So rest can look like a maternity leave or it could look like a sabbatical from social media or it could be a summer vacation. Or it just can come in different seasons of life. And so, it's really important to help you to keep going and to have that hope and to see God through your daily.

Cheri: I love the intentionality of including rest as part of the whole experience of hospitality. Thanks so much.

Amy: And that element to remember too. I love that. That's what makes it worth it to do it the next time. Great stuff. What closing words of encouragement would you like to leave with our listeners, Christen?

Christen: Oh goodness. I just really want us all to remember to give ourselves grace. We're flawed but we are forgiven and God has just planned this ultimate party for us. He is the perfect party planner. And he's invited us into a relationship with him and as I said before, the two words for perfection, one is about who God is but it's also about the place that he's prepared for us. He wants to accept us into that. And we just have to say yes. You know?

I really think too that any type of celebration whether it be a cookout on a Saturday night, a special event, or a really big thing, that it's a way for us to connect with one another and for us to celebrate the people that we've been given. Because when you think about how God has created us and he's created us for connection with him but also connection with people, he has given us people to love. And so, celebrations help us with that. And they can be really positive things in our lives and they can be moments that we cherish if we just let go of some of those perfectionist tendencies and really focus on connecting with other people. And that's when our hearts will be full and that's when we'll see God.