

## Grit 'n' Grace — The Podcast

*Episode #192: You're Not Alone in Anxiety and Depression*

Cheri: So the first thing we're going to talk about, Amy, is lose who you're not. And what I want us to focus on briefly here is – and listeners, please join us in this – you're not an outsider. Let that sink in: you're not an outsider. And when Tim said that he had felt like an outsider, that he felt left out, like he wasn't part of the in crowd, oh, man, this totally made me tear up. And it was just so astonishing to me. I mean, here he – he actually was the chosen one. You know, he talked about being chosen for this particular program. He was the cream of the crop, the creme de la creme, and yet he still struggles with feeling like an outsider. And so for me, the bottom line on that is – and it is such a hard lesson, I feel like I have to relearn this almost daily – but no amount of human affirmation is ever going to be enough.

Amy: And you know, and I was processing that too. It's shocking to hear someone who is so successful say that they feel like an outsider because you're like, "What?" And then you go, "Oh, yeah, other people might consider me," or our listeners, "they might consider you successful." But don't we all have that place where we just don't feel like enough, and we feel like the outsider. And so you were processing his relationships and made that place of belonging and I was processing (because I'm such a producer girl) all the accolades and positions and titles, and even though he had all those that that didn't ease that imposter syndrome either. And for me, you know, I have found that for me to find a place of belonging, I have to so push through that feeling of being an outsider. I have that, and it might surprise people to know every time I walk into a room of new people, and I have to really push past that. And remember that I already belong. In the family of God, I already have places of belonging with my family, with my friends. And I have to remember that I am not an outsider.

Do you want me to continue there or is that enough?

Cheri: Oh, no, that's – that sounds fine. Did you actually – did you actually make the point about not doing enough? I can't remember.

Amy: Yeah, I talked about –

Cheri: Okay, cool.

Cheri: Yeah. All right. I was getting my tea. I'll edit that out. I've got too many computers and mice.

That is so, so good. So the, the – I think the two things we're looking at here under the loose who you're not, you're not, quote unquote, an outsider. There's not going to be enough human affirmation. There's never going to be enough that other people say about you to make you feel like you belong, and then you can never do enough to feel like you belong. So we can just give up on all of that, we are not an outsider, we can lose who we're not. So let's move on to love who you are. So we're going to split this each each time. And you're going to have a statement of who you are, and I'm going to have a statement of who I are. Who I am.

(Amy laughs)

Yeah. Okay, go for it.

Amy: So I love this one, you are flawed and loved.

Cheri: Yay!

Amy: You know, I mean, so many times we can feel like this are mutually exclusive, and yet they are not. And I had such a clear experience of this. Early in my 20s, that Barry and I had just gotten married – in fact, a friend of mine met with me and she said, “Amy, I've been looking at a list of the ten most stressful things that you can do. And you've done seven of them within a year. How are you doing?” And the truth was I was not doing well at all. Now, my first year of teaching, I had received this kind of Rookie of the Year award, I don't remember exactly what it was called, but it was Teacher of the Year for a brand new teacher. And teaching was my passion, I was so proud of that. And just like a year and a half later, I moved, I got married, I moved, I went to a new school system where my mother-in-law, it was the, the top of the heap, man. I mean, she was known as the best teacher in the school system. And so I felt like I had to live up to that. And nothing she put on me, totally my own stuff. And I fell apart Cheri, I mean, I just fell apart. I was a really, just a wreck and literally, well, I wasn't sleeping. And so – and you know, I've talked we've talked about that on this show, but that's kind of my default to stress is I really wasn't sleeping much at all. I, Barry and I taught on the same side of town but we drove our own cars. Every morning I would pull out behind Barry and his car in front of me was the literal lifeline to get me to work. I had to have my eyes on my car, on his car, it was an act of my will to drive myself to work. And when I look back on that time, I should have gotten counseling. I was in a really bad, dark pit. But – I'll talk some more about that later. But I did it. But when I fell apart and all my flaws were so obvious to everybody, I found out that I was deeply loved in that, Barry, my new husband, who could have been so impatient that I wasn't the girl that he had married, loved me so well through that. My parents saw that I was in this pit – my mom has had struggles with depression in her past, so she recognized it – and they offered to pay for counseling for me. And then another teacher in my grade level – someone actually I didn't particularly like – but she was kind of a saving grace in this

situation. She said, "Amy, if you, if you keeled over today and died and could not come back tomorrow, guess what the school system would do?" And I was like "What?" She said "They'd hire somebody else. Now. You go home. Get in your bed and do not come back here for three days." She said "You have got to sleep, you've got to get yourself better. You are not irreplaceable. A sub will take your place tomorrow. Go get well." Which – what great advice, right? So I learned that I was flawed and in a way that everybody could see. And I was well loved.

Cheri: I love that. So being loved wasn't dependent or conditional on you being able to produce all the time, so.

Amy: It wasn't.

Cheri: So important for action—Amy.

All right, well, so in terms of love who you are, my are, my am, and so I'm going to say this to anybody who's listening that finds that this fits, you are someone with a mental illness and with much to offer. And that, that's a mouthful, but it's also a hard one, because for the longest time, I thought it was either or. I won't say I do this consciously, but I enter every single room certain that I'm the only person there who's ever been in a mental institution. Those of you who've been listening for quite some time know that when I was 17, or 18 – it was right after I graduated from high school, so I guess 18 – I was actually in a neuro-psychiatric hospital for six weeks with an eating disorder. And it's something that happened with great secrecy, because back then We're talking over three decades ago mental illness was seen as shameful for a very long time, or at least it was in the community, in the family that I was raised in. And when I say – and culture that I was I was raised in, so. And then 20 years ago, I went with my dad and my brother and sister-in-law and our spouses and children – we went to New Jersey to visit basically, the family compound that he was raised on, the family farm with it had lots of houses that belonged to his aunts and uncles; and I will never forget the shock of having somebody who lived there, and he had been a little boy when my dad had been an adult there and, and he – and once once they communicated, my dad explained who he was, he was like, "Oh, you're the family whose uncle committed suicide here." And I remember thinking "Excuse me? No, no, no, we are not that family. Our uncle fell off at roof on Black Friday. Thank you very much. I know how this story goes. He fell off a roof."

(Both laugh)

Amy: Are we allowed to laugh at that? It's such black humor. Well, sorry, let me reset. It's such macabre humor.

Cheri: But I tell the story yes, because we laugh at it now, because it illustrates, it never occurred to me. Never. And at that point I was in my 30s. I had never revisited that family story. I had never questioned that family story. He just happened to slip and fall and it just happened to be Black Friday. And that was the day that he happened to be out on a roof. A man who had never done anything like that in his life. And it was such a shock to go, "Wow, everybody here is able to talk about the suicide in my family, but we can't talk about it." And it hit me so hard, there's something wrong with that. There's something really, really wrong. So what I've discovered in the year since then is that anxiety and depression and even suicidal ideation are everywhere on both sides of my family, and they are on Daniel's as well. And there's been, I think there's been a lot of unnecessary suffering because it was on the list of things that should not or ought not be spoken, which meant it went undiagnosed, which meant it went untreated. And you know, I think for a long time, there was this sense of "I refuse to have my child labeled," or "I refuse to be labeled. I'm so much more than a label." And I agree, we are not labels. I know for me, and I'm just going to speak personally and people can feel free to write me hate letters if they want on this one. I'm just going to be gut level on this here. For me, there's always been this silent fear that a diagnosis would become an excuse. Like if you get diagnosed with something, then you become a self-fulfilling prophecy, as if being diagnosed with depression would make it worse or that others in the family would watch and go, "Hey, I want to, I want to, I want a diagnosis too, so that I can get out of work. So I can have an excuse to get special privileges or special treatment." Now, that probably is a figment of my imagination, but I'm just going to put it out there. The other thing that concerned me is that a diagnosis becomes the primary identity like, "Hi, I'm Cheri, I have an eating disorder." And I never want that to be the way that I see myself or present myself. And what I've come to understand is that a diagnosis is not a label, it's a tool. It's a tool that can open doors to services and to treatments.

Amy: Well, and that is what was so powerful about Tim's interview with us, is he blew up all the stereotypes that are around mental illness and the reason that people often, we often keep our own mental illness secret, is – and he just came right out there with it. And he's a man. And so and I feel like it's even more of a stigma for a man, and a professional man, to confess these things. And so what a powerful thing for him to bring this out of the darkness into the light for us. I just, it was it felt like a gift that was given to us, to me.

Cheri: Absolutely.

I'll let you lead into the next.

Amy: Okay.

So, finally we want to talk about how to live our one life well, and Cheri, you put together four great questions to ask ourselves about mental illness that will help us step into living our one life well.

Cheri: Yeah, and these are hard questions. I'll admit that up front. But they're really important to me because I didn't ask them for so long. So the first question is, what do I really believe about mental illness? And for me, the bottom line was I didn't know what I really believed. I desperately wanted to protect my children from having history repeat itself, and so I acted as if I believed secrecy was the best policy. But here's something interesting. I recently read a blog post that stopped me. Like it – I don't know, it was like a big slap upside the head it talked about the difference between secrecy and privacy. And I thought to myself, "Oh man, I wish I'd known about the fact that these are very different things." I didn't mean to be secretive about my eating disorder. But I had no idea how to set good boundaries that would protect my privacy, and that would protect my kids' privacy. Like I've known too many preachers' kids and speakers' kids who knew way too much about their their parents lives than they wanted to because there weren't boundaries around privacy and I didn't want to go all TMI, I didn't want to be too much information. Unfortunately, it meant I went in the opposite direction. It was kind of like zero information. So figuring out – question number one is figuring out What do I actually believe about mental illness? I'm sorry, What do I really believe about mental illness?

Amy: And this is so important, because these questions require us to pause – I think without a pause, what we do is we default to the stereotypes. It's only when we pause that we begin to think about, we begin to think about what are our biases. We can be honest, especially if it's done kind of personally, we can be honest about these biases without shame. But until we're honest about our biases, we can't confront those biases and dismantle them.

Cheri: Absolutely. So the second question is, why do I hold these beliefs? And here's the thing, I don't really believe that mental illness is a sign –

Here's the thing. I don't think I ever really believed that mental illness was a sign of moral failing or weakness, but I didn't have any alternatives to the unspoken beliefs that were running around in my head. I didn't see any alternatives in my family, in my culture, in my church. So instead of beliefs, all I had was reactions. And so these were kind of unchosen, unconsidered, unintentional, knee-jerk, control-freak kind of reaction. So when Annemarie went into depression during her freshman year of college, I tried every way possible to fix it fast. Because that was my go to reaction to anything that scared me: fix it fast.

Amy: And when we confront "Why do I hold on to these beliefs?" The bottom line for most of our for most of us is that it's a lack of education. And so how do we dismantle the biases of the wrong beliefs? We dive into some education. We learn about depression, anxiety – which as Tim says, one out of six

people I think, in America, wasn't that the statistic I think Cheri? – are suffering from either depression or anxiety. That's huge. So if we think we don't know someone, we do, and we will – we can be a better friend, a better family member by educating ourselves and really confronting Why do we hold on to these beliefs?

Cheri: Absolutely. And so the third question is How is God leading me to change my beliefs? And so you know, my shortlist on this is counseling, like you just said reading, and research.

Amy: Amen to all of that.

Cheri: Yes. And then courageous people like Tim, who are willing to post things. I mean, this is one of the ways I got connected with Tim is seeing him post on Facebook, “Depression and anxiety are all in your head, just like a heart attack is in your chest, go see a doctor either way.” I mean, that was the first time I had really seen that kind of a perspective. I was like, “Really? Really? It's that, quote unquote, easy?” like, oh, it was such a completely different mindset. Like it really was a growth mindset shift for me. A shift from kind of this fixed mindset of this, this set of beliefs about mental illness to oh, here's a whole new way to think about it. And then it's also been important, this continued journey— journey of intentionally learning to differentiating between meddling and rescuing, which is people-pleasing and intentionally accommodating. And this whole idea of learning to accommodate when somebody has legitimate needs, has very real needs, that have to do with a mental illness. I have a ton to learn, but I am in the process of learning. And let me tell you, it's not nearly as scary. Scary was ignorance. It's a, it's a – hard. And I don't do a very good job. But I feel empowered as I learn more.

Amy: Absolutely. So I guess the last question is, What does God want me to do differently as a result of these changed beliefs?

Cheri: Yeah, and this is the hard one, you know, because what it comes down to – for me at least – is a lot less doing and a lot more being, which I'm learning is a way of, of taking action, but it doesn't feel like action. So for me, it's meant hunkering down for the long haul in the middle of a messy situation. It's definitely meant staying put where I'd rather run, lots of leaning into hard conversations and listening, sometimes listening to things I don't want to hear, and doing my best to be there and then to invite feedback, and then to try again. And this is one of the reasons that I knew I was ready to stop talking quite so much about perfectionism. And it's not because I'm doing any of this particularly well, but it's because I'm doing it at all. And I keep doing it, even though it's hard and it hurts like crazy.

Amy: You've waded into the messy.

Cheri: Yes!

Amy: And perfectionism that has to go when you wade into the messy with people.

Cheri: Absolutely.

So how are you learning to live your one life well in this area?

Amy: Well, it makes my action-Amy heart so happy to give everybody the action today! So first, so we want to give two practical challenges, two practical steps for each of us, Cheri and I included, to take.

The first one is build a relationship with someone who has mentioned illness. This is hits particularly close to home for me. I have a close relative, someone I love very much, who has schizoaffective disorder, which means that she struggles with both schizophrenia and bipolar and – which is severe, hers is severe. So we, when we talk about mental illness or specs– it's such a spectrum. There's Tim, who is – who struggles with depression and anxiety occasionally, it sounds like, but functions very well; and this person I love does not function well at all. And so what has been a blessing to me to watch is that she has a job, and her employers have been so dedicated to her. So last summer, medications weren't quite right and she ended up hospitalized again. And they held her job for her, Cheri, while she was in the hospital. And this is a big chain it's not even a – it's not even a like a mom and pop song but her manager at that chain is dedicated to her. And it's brought me to tears several times to know that they're there like “When this is over, you will be welcomed back with open arms.” But on the other hand, she doesn't have a lot of friends, and her mom really worries about her being so lonely and so isolated.

So I'm putting this challenge out here, knowing that it's difficult, because very often, especially with someone who's struggling to function at all, it is difficult to have a relationship whether it's a family member or a friend with someone who's struggling with mental illness. But just yesterday, I read on Diane Kim's Instagram feed something that I thought, “Oh, I'm going to share this because it's so helpful!” and she was talking about autism, but I'm going to replace the word autism with mental illness. So her quote was this: “Don't feel pressured to learn everything about mental illness. Just get to know the one person God brings into your life. Find out what works for them, just like you would any other relationship. Become a master in loving one person or one family well.” That was like, oh, that just lifted the pressure and the weight off of this challenge. First of all, we're trusting God to bring someone into our life. We don't have to go on this big hunt. And they're probably already there. We just don't even know it. And secondly, it's all about love. It's not about working or manufacturing

something or, you know what – this is what I always make it and maybe that's why I'd say that – it's just about loving that person and entering in to the, wading into the messy with them.

And then the second action item I want to put out there is to invest in yourself. You know, when I think back to – my parents said that they would pay for counseling for me, and I did not take them up on it. And it's one of the great regrets of my life, because I don't really feel like there's this for me that there's a stigma around counseling, my mom had gone through it. So for our family, it had been kind of normalized. But for some reason I didn't think I should spend the money on myself, even though it wasn't my own money. Like I've spent money on counseling for my kids a bunch of times, but I have not been willing to invest in myself. And so I just wanted to put that challenge out there that if you're someone who is struggling with depression and anxiety – and listen, I would say the one in six in the midst of this COVID crisis has gone way up. I know I had a day Sunday, where I climbed into bed and I stayed in bed from three o'clock until bedtime. I did not come out of my room until the next morning. I had run out of any internal resources to deal with the stress in this situation. – and, and so if you're feeling that way. If you're suffering, I just want to encourage you don't wait and try to get better. And I put that in quotation marks. Number one, tell someone who loves you, who will support you. You are flawed and loved, just like all the rest of us. And secondly, find a counselor, someone who can help you – and a lot of counselors are doing telecom right now. And so, one great source if you don't have any clue of where to look for a counselor, is Focus on the Family has a fantastic counselor referral service.

Focus on the Family has a fantastic counselor referral service, and you can find that on their website. If you just Google Focus on the Family counselor referral service, you'll find it. We've used it before, my family, and it's excellent. Not only will they send you some resources, but they'll also refer you to someone in your area. So don't be afraid to invest in yourself.

Cheri: So, so good. So the scripture that Tim shared with us as kind of the foundation of these two episodes, is found in II Corinthians 1, 3, and 4. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

So, Amy, what's the grit for you in all of this?

Amy: Well, definitely what I just talked about, that for me when I'm in a bad place again, I want to, to make sure and decide ahead, pre-decide that I will invest in myself. I think the other part is, you know, confessing to other people when we're struggling, just like I try to just do – you know, I would prefer not to tell you that I couldn't get out of bed Sunday. But that was the truth of my situation. But I bet I'm not the only one. And when we finally bring these things – like Tim has modeled for us – out of the darkness into the light, we find out that we belong in places that we never even knew we belonged.

And we have comfort, as that scripture just said, from other people who have suffered in the same way.

Cheri: For me, the grace is something that you just said a few minutes ago, that we can make such a production, we can try to figure out all the ways that things should be done and you said basically, it's just about loving people. And I put just in quote unquote, quotes. So because it's like, but that's what everything really comes down to, you know, when we lose who we're not and we love who we are and learn to live our lives one life, well, we'll realize, oh, it really is about loving people. We were making it way too hard. So we don't have to make a big production out of it. We can as II Corinthians 1, 3-4 said, we can receive God's comfort and we can give that comfort to others. We can receive God's grace, we can receive God's love and we can give them away abundantly.