

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST

Episode #231: Tapping Into Your Promised Deep & Wide Life

Amy Carroll

Cheri, have you ever been the recipient of a gift that you never opened?

Cheri Gregory

I do not have that kind of patience, no.

(Both laugh)

I cannot imagine getting a gift and not tearing into it immediately unless it was Christmas. I was being told to wait. But I have given cards to people that I know they've never opened.

Amy Carroll

Hmm. Well, and I was the recipient of a re-gifted gift that I had given to the person that they obviously had never opened.

Cheri Gregory

Oh my word.

Amy Carroll

Yeah, that's a close family member that shall remain nameless.

(Both laugh)

So anyway. But can you imagine – I can't, I'm like you, I'm too impatient. And yet I think that we do this with Jesus all the time.

Cheri Gregory

You know, one of the things that our guest for today Shellie Rushing Tomlinson says she does is she helps people who believe in Jesus enjoy Jesus. And believing without enjoying is like receiving the gift without actually opening it.

Amy Carroll

Exactly. Let's tear that thing open today.

Cheri Gregory

Well, this is Cheri Gregory –

Amy Carroll

– and I'm Amy Carroll –

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.

Amy Carroll

Today we're talking with Shellie Rushing Tomlinson, author of *Finding Deep and Wide: Stop Settling For the Life You Have and Live the One Jesus Died to Give You*. Shellie Rushing Tomlinson and her husband Bill live and farm in Lake Providence, Louisiana. An incurable storyteller and bonafide people lover, she uses her gift of humor to connect instantly and easily with a wide variety of audiences.

Shellie is the author of award winning humor titles with Penguin Group USA. Jeff Foxworthy calls her work laugh out loud funny. A Jesus lover in full pursuit of a well blended life in Christ, Shellie is a sought after speaker whose inspired and entertaining messages are encouraging believers to help keep seeking and never settle. More information can be found at belleofallthingsouthern.com.

Cheri Gregory

Now, some people see stories as fluff. They'll say things like “Just cut to the chase.” But what do you say, oh, speaker-coach Amy?

Amy Carroll

Stories are powerful. They are a direct connection to peoples hearts. And there is no better storyteller in the whole wide world ever than Jesus. I joke around and say Jesus would – He'd sit on the front porch with the southern girls with a glass of iced tea. Sweet tea, of course. And you know, I just know it because He was such a fantastic storyteller.

Cheri Gregory

You know, I'm thinking of a time when I watched our students in chapel and the speaker was not particularly inspiring. And so I could just see them all sliding further down, down, down in their seats, and they were bored and they were tired. And then this speaker literally uttered the

phrase “I once had a truck,” and I watched all of my students sit up and lean forward just because he was about to tell a story about a truck.

Amy Carroll

Well, okay, that speaks directly to the anticipation of a story. So friends, buckle up, because Shellie – this interview is full of great stories.

Shellie, we're so glad to have you with us this morning.

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

Thank you. I am just delighted already and looking forward to this conversation – oh, my voice is leaving.

(All laugh)

Amy Carroll

Well, I tell you, the title of your book had me from the get-go. It just really called to the deepest parts of my soul, Shellie. So tell us about the why of your new book and who you wrote it for, *Finding Deep and Wide: Stop Settling For the Life You Have and Live the One Jesus Died to Give You*.

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

Oh my gosh, I really just felt like I opened my veins up in blood on the page, because I was just so passionate about helping people who believe in Jesus enjoy Jesus, like really get the fullness of this one that lives with us, in us, and that we're living through. And I come always from experience, like this is my journey. And I often say like, if you can stand on my shoulders and not do all the crazy silly things that I did, and you can get a closer relationship with Christ find that intimacy because of my silliness, and my own thinking. So I just open it all up and say, this is what I was like, and this is the thing that Jesus is teaching me.

I want to be sure to pause and speak in present tense because I have not arrived. So the thing that Jesus is teaching me, I want to encourage everyone to join me. So that title, if I may, I will explain that. So I grew up in a little country church and from my earliest memory, I sang a song called deep and wide, that there's a fountain flowing deep and wide. And my brain is trying to sing it, even as I say that, and Cheri is doing the motions, because we're on video as well. But for me, what so very often happens is that all of that promise of coming to Jesus, I thought of him as a little girl, invisible Jesus, everything I heard about invisible Jesus, I loved, I was like oh, I want that, you know, but we come to Christ, and we accept Christ.

And then by and large, we don't understand how to continue to draw from Christ and reach that life that is deep and wide, that is promised to us. We often stop short of that feeling like everyone else has got that, they're that intimate with Christ, they have that type of relationship, but we don't. And many in the body of Christ, just kind of settle below it over time. And they say, okay, and so they just fall into this life, ladies, of just believing. And of course, that's where our life in Christ starts. But He is intentionally wanting to be in our business 24/7, walking this life with us. And so I just want to help people find that deep and wide life that Jesus died to give us.

Amy Carroll

Okay, I have a follow up question that's not on the page. So let's just talk about the elephant in the room for a minute. There aren't many girls with accents like me that come on Grit'N'Grace, I'm just sayin'. Where are you, Shellie?

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

So you heard just a tad bit of accent, did you?

Amy Carroll

I love it, you know I love it.

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

So I'm from Northeast Louisiana. I'm sitting here in my backyard. There's a beautiful lake. And I'm hoping that y'all can't hear my crazy loud, because there's a guy fishing down there, and my dog is determined to save me from him. So I hope that that audio is not coming through and bothering you. But yes, it's up in the northeast corner of the state.

Amy Carroll

Well, I want to talk to the southern girls for a minute, but I bet our friends from other parts of the country will identify. Do you think there are any particular obstacles to deep and wide for Southern girls?

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

Having not been raised in the north, but having plenty of friends across the body of Christ and across the world, I feel like that I can say that one of those initial thing that comes to my mind, Amy, is the sit up and look pretty, just act right, just like the appearance on that our mamas – way to go moms, but they ingrained in us just the check it out, get it done, do what you're asked to do, comply, and look pretty while you're doing it. And so maybe that has had an effect on us and our walk with Christ by not kind of saying, hey, look, I don't have that deep and wide life. Help me. You know, I don't have that. I don't understand how to get there from here. Maybe.

Amy Carroll

I have experienced that myself. So yes, I would say I can identify with that answer.

Cheri Gregory

That is a great answer.

Well, I love that you brought up your dog – who by the way, we cannot hear – but you tell a wonderful story in your book about a dog named Mercy. And then somehow that ties into you saying the journey I'm inviting you to share is an ongoing story about what begins to happen once we quit treating God like a halfway house. So I was hoping that you'd be willing to share with our friends who are listening, maybe just the short version of the story of a dog named Mercy and then explain what you mean by treating God like a halfway house. I think you're going to step on my toes in the nicest possible way here.

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

Thank you for that invitation to tell this story, Cheri. I am like prayer peddling – that's my word for praying on the inside while I'm talking on the outside – so I'm like prayer peddling asking Holy Spirit to help me concise that story because it is a wonderful story. But being a storyteller, I can tend to use more words than are necessary. So with the Holy Spirit's help, let me try to set this up for you.

One morning, I was on my dock about to go have our kayak ride. And it was later in the day then generally it was because I had been there for a while after my prayer time. And so I had one dog that was on the dock, Dixie's gone to have a nap because all dogs do. Dixie didn't like me on the water, so she barked when I left and she barked when I came back, and you know, all of that, but I took the kayak ride down the lake and because it was later, I was closer to the edge of the light where the tree line is. And that's important because had I not been close to the tree line, I would not have found this or heard – oh, I've got to stop and tell ya, the reason why I wasn't generally close to the tree line is because I've grown up hearing stories of snakes falling into boats and I didn't want that to happen to me.

Amy Carroll

I was shaking in my shoes already just listening to you talk about it.

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

It was hotter and it was mid-August in Louisiana. So I'm closer to the tree line. Anyway, I heard it first and then I saw this little white malnourished ribs-showing soaking wet puppy stranded on the side of a lake. It fallen down this dilapidated wall in this area of the lake that was overgrown. It wasn't a manicured lawn, that would have been nice, sweet Jesus, but instead, it

was this overgrown brush, and I knew I was gonna have to go in and save that dog. And it meant going up underneath all these low hanging branches. But this puppy couldn't get back up the same wall, and I don't know how long they had been there because a puppy can lose a lot of weight really quickly. But I mean, it was in a bad way.

So cut to the chase, I did manage to get up on the night there. Rescue this puppy, this very ungrateful puppy that tried to bite my hands. I put the puppy in the kayak, and I came home with it. Dixie freaked out when I neared the bank, you know, because now I'm on the water with what looks like a possum, a wet possum. But throughout the story in the book, I weave in scriptures of how Jesus was talking to me through that experience, because I was trying to save this puppy and this puppy wanted rescue, but it was wary of me and what else I wanted of him, you know, again, trying to make the story shorter, over the next couple of days this puppy came and went, like trying to get from me food and you know, what we think of his rescue, a refuge, and a place to have this puppy's needs met, but then it would disappear. And I didn't know if it was, you know, in a road somewhere. And one day as I was looking at that puppy, and I was thinking to myself, if you would just stay I would love you more than you can imagine. I would tend to you but it was distrustful of what else I wanted of this puppy besides the initial rescue.

So I liken that to where we are often as believers that we won't Jesus, like, hey, I grew up in a Southern Baptist Church, I knew what was on the other side of this thing, eternity, and I just wanted buyer insurance for a long part of my life. I mean, I just wanted my buyer insurance card. And then I didn't want to do anything bad. But I wanted my life. And it was very much a pursuit of my life with my buyer insurance in hand, just like the dog that I named Mercy. And when Jesus got ahold of my heart, He said, I will love you more than you can ever imagine if you will stay and quit trying to come and go at my throne and get your needs met while you live your life.

Cheri Gregory

So let me ask a follow up question to that. And first of all, thank you so much. I mean, like I said, you're a wonderful storyteller. And our friends who are listening, just need to read, buy the book and read it because it's so fun. All the details that you weave in. And I loved the way that the Scripture is woven in. What might it look like in our everyday lives? Like if we're sitting here thinking, do I treat God like a halfway house? If I really, you know, genuinely – one of the things that Amy and I talk about with this podcast is living an examined life. So let's assume our listeners are like, oh, Shellie, I would never treat God like a halfway house. Or if I would, I wouldn't know how to identify it. So what might we be looking for in our everyday lives as evidence that we're doing that?

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

Okay, for me, that would be – and it's kind of tied into something else I talked about later in the book, and it's the secular/sacred divide that – to explain that in a few words as possible, it's this attitude of where we expect to encounter Christ. If we're in charge, if we're in our Bible study in the morning, if we're doing our devotional in the morning, we expect to encounter God. We're like looking for him. But we can have a tendency then to close that book, and to go into our day. And I've learned to ask the Lord, I don't want to walk out of prayer, I want to walk in prayer, you know, help me learn this life of not finishing my prayer and walking out of prayer.

And until we begin to decide that we want Him like, all the time, all the time, and not just in our devotion, not when we're sitting in church, that is when we begin to doubt ourself, and we begin to learn the living dying life that leads to finding deep and wide. Short of that, Cheri, to answer your question, to help us understand it for doing that, it means maybe if I pray, because I have a need, if I'm coming to God because someone is sick, and we do, we want to do that all the time. But if those are the times that I'm coming to God, when I need provision, when I need a healing, when I need something, then I'm only coming for request. But I'm encouraging us to realize that He is asking us to come farther than that, to quit coming and going with our request and to live in his presence, to live listening for Him, live looking for Him. Does that answer it?

Cheri Gregory

Beautifully, beautifully.

Amy Carroll

We say in the book, Shellie, I had bought the big lie, and you may have too. So what is the big lie? Or can you give us some clues? And what did that look like in your life?

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

Yes, the big lie for me goes back to what I was saying earlier about wanting my life and Jesus on the other side of eternity. I believed who He was, I was like, check, yes, you're the Son of God, thank you for saving my soul, I will see you on the other side, kind of thinking, because the big lie that I had bought into was that I needed to pursue this big wonderful life, the best life that I could have was the one that I could grow and curate, if you want to use that word that you know, that I could build. And the best life that we can have is the one where we're beholding Christ Jesus, I mean, that is the light that fills our souls that no other way can. But as long as we're living with this big lie, that Jesus, You are wonderful, but I need this, that, and the other, and I if no one else is going to be looking out for me to have the best life if I don't, you know, I've got to curate this best life. And the best life is just found just all in, just all in and and not being divided the way I was like seeking fulfillment and encouragement and comfort, satisfaction, seeking all those other things and thinking it was up to me to find Him when they're all found in Him.

Amy Carroll

So rich.

Cheri Gregory

So in your book, I kept finding myself highlighting, as I do. So you said Adam's life before the fall was marked by easy companionship with God, that phrase "easy companionship with God" really jumped out at me. And then I love your authenticity here. You said that there's zero similarity to my past religious experience, zero as in none, "charting my spiritual progress by my spiritual performance didn't produce anything close to such a heavenly relationship. But I'll tell you what has..." so I'm hoping that you will tell us what has produced that kind of heavenly relationship.

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

It is just like pure Jesus. Realizing that he accepts me and you, Cheri, and you, Amy, and everyone listening that He loves me as He is, and that He is not waiting to stamp me with approval. Once I get through my extreme makeover, as I refer to it in the book, that I think you know, we're doing on me, but that He loves me right now, in the middle of it.

I tell a story in the book about my husband and I remodeling our bathroom, and how it just turned into this horrible thing. Because you know, every home improvement project with us, it starts with "Let's do it!" In the middle of it, it's "Why are we doing it?" and the end of it is "We did it." You know, but it's just this deal – and we hit a water pipe, and it combined with the mortar dust of the makeover and that's like concrete mud. And it was just a ridiculous thing. Once we were through with that makeover, we were thrilled with it, we were able to say wow, look at this. This is how we think God is going to do once we're in heaven. And we get to hear well done, my good and faithful servant. That is when we're approved of. And not until then. Until then we're just like scrambling and trying to hustle and make this happen and be the best Christian girl we can be.

But realizing, for me what has turned my life around, is that instead, Jesus and God are looking at all of us that are after him in the very middle of our makeover with that satisfaction that we had for the bathroom when it was all done. Like we're messy. We're a big mess, but our hearts are after Him. And Jesus says in John, I won't have to ask the Father because the Father Himself loves you because you believe that I came from Him. And to get that deep in ourselves, that God loves us because we believe that Jesus is who He is, and he's going I want to partner with you in this extreme makeover. I'm not asking you to do it and then I'll see you later and grade you. I want to tutor you daily. So that has changed my life completely.

Cheri Gregory

That easy companionship is not something that has any conditions attached to it.

None. And can I say that for me when I used those words in the book, not grading my acceptance with God based on my performance, that's how I often came to God in prayer in the morning, you know, if I got my Bible on my word, and I got down on the dock with my coffee, and I was looking forward to being in time with the Lord, I brought into that what I had done and had it done, instead of what Jesus has done, and that learning to approach my Father – I call it with the big ticket, Jesus is just like the big ticket every day, just walking into God's presence with the big ticket in my hand, waving it, you know, like, I've got the big ticket! That's who Jesus is and not gauging his welcome of me based on my performance, but that I stepped through that door with the big ticket.

Amy Carroll

I had a visceral reaction to that they've made me tear up, because that's beautiful. So you say you and I forfeit intimacy with God every time we swallow the lie that we can find more of what we need outside of him than we can with and through him, which is really this performancism that you were just talking about. So how do we make sure that we're finding what we need with Him and through Him?

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

I love that you asked that question. And when I was growing up, you know, in church, I remember people always did. They were pastors that would say, whatever the question is, Jesus is the answer. And that can remember thinking, well, that is very simplistic. Like as a teenager, you know, you're critiquing everything, but then I find the Shellie that's answering that question is everything you asked Jesus is the answer. But it is asking him, I ask Him all the time, like I wake up saying, show me when I'm looking to things around me for what You want to give me. Show me when I'm looking for affirmation and affection and approval, and all the things that we look for in this world. And I asked him for a neon light, I'm just like, I want a neon light, like, pat me on the forehead if You need to, just show me when I'm looking outside of You.

And I take Eve as my best example, because I will never forget as well worn, as well told as the story of Eve is in the garden, ladies I will never forget, when I realized that this woman who looked around her and said yeah, I think I need that, because that's gonna make me wise, that's pretty to behold, and that is going to be good to eat. And she looked around her. When I realized that this was a woman who walked and talked with God. And she was acceptable? To looking beyond for something else in this world? I mean, like it nailed me. And I began to say, if she can do that, I can do that. I mean, you have since become my life, my love, my heartthrob, but she walked with You intimately in the garden, and she was acceptable to

looking around her. And so I come to Him with that confession. And I just say in the morning, like, tell me, tell me when I'm looking outside of me, for what You want to be to me.

Cheri Gregory

Our listeners always provides some amazing questions. So we have a few that they submitted that they were hoping that you would share some responses to. The first one is what are some of the best questions to ask others or best scriptures to read when you feel stuck and unfulfilled?

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

For me, I'm just going with the Scripture, I'm going there every time. And I'm going to John, like if you were to put me on a deserted island, and you said you can have one book of the Bible, I would like have my claws around the gospel of John, because I love John. I have been obsessed with this book for a long time. I really want to write a book on John, but I can't get there because I'm feasting on John. And so I'm just you know, it's up to the good Lord. But John lives his whole gospel saying, ta-da! Here's Jesus! I mean, he's just like wanting us to see Jesus at every turn. And I'm just taken with keeping my eyes fixed on Christ Jesus, so dryness disappears for me in John, guidance comes to me in John, I mean, I love Psalms, I love all the words, I read through the Bible every year, but your question was, where are you going to go when you're dry? And for me it's John.

Amy Carroll

Beautifully said.

So how do we know – I thought this was great – how do we know when it's okay to walk away when we've been pouring energy into a person or project and there's no forward movement?

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

You know, Amy, when I read that question, and I thank y'all for giving them to me to consider, when I read that question, I thought to myself, what happens with me is happening with the person that asked that question. She kind of already knows it's embedded in that question, because she says when they're not listening. And that really is her answer for when to walk away when you are pouring into someone, and they are not receiving and they're not changing. You know, the Lord doesn't say that you can wash your hands and walk away. We're not talking about that. But we are allowed to pull back and love them from a distance, we are allowed to say, you know that maybe I'm taking up some space here that someone else would feel that this person could listen to, because they're not gaining from me. And maybe I'm not the one to really have this impact.

And so if there is a prolonged time, and I'm thinking of a person in my own life that I have loved and tried to mentor and have made no progress with. And now I love her from a distance in my prayers, I have not washed my hands of her. But with physical contact and physical words, I realized I was running into a brick wall.

Amy Carroll

A light went on when you were talking about that, Shellie, because I've had a situation where God has told me to stop talking, stop inserting, because I was trying to be everything for this person, instead of allowing God to be everything for this person. So we can get into that trap. And we ourselves are the obstacle for them coming to know Jesus in the way that you're talking about.

Cheri Gregory

So the the last question here, I think is such a good one. And if I'm understanding correctly, your book actually released right as COVID was hitting. And so, you know, author to author, that must have been so exciting for you.

(All laugh)

But her question is, how can we rebuild relationships that lead to spiritual growth after so many months of limited connectedness, and sometimes no connectedness at all?

What a question, isn't that where we all are? I mean, having come out of this, and I told someone recently, maybe y'all can agree, maybe y'all did it just so well, that you won't, but sometimes, throughout this whole thing, I've been like, can I do a pandemic makeover? Like, you know, a do over? I think I could have done some different things, or can I do a do over? But God gives us the grace to go, you know, you've never walked through a pandemic before. I'm gonna give you a little bit of grace for maybe how well or how you did this.

But when we're coming out of it and we're seeing this light, you know, and we're going, how do we, how do we connect now, I would tell this sweet soul that asked, you connect with the nearest people to you, because Shellie is prone to say, okay, I'm coming out of this. And now just like, I've got to go out there and get to talk to everybody about everything, and just like, go full force. And I feel like Holy Spirit is saying, you know, you connect again, with those nearest people, that person that you can easily connect with. Almost kind of like baby steps. Baby steps back towards that fellowship. I would suggest that would be those ladies around you who love Jesus. And you know, get them together for Bible study, be the one that says, let's read this together.

If you aren't a facilitator, if you do not feel like that gifting is in you – and p.s., it is because we're out to the ministry of reconciliation – and the more we feed on Jesus, we find out that he's just like, we can't contain him, and he overflows out of us and splashes on people. So we're all cowed into that ministry. But I would say if you don't feel like you can facilitate a large group, you know, get someone else that you know, has is feeling that way. And just say, Can we just read this book together? Can we just read this Bible study together? I don't know how to lead us in conversation and lead us in questions. But let's just read together and go through this and just take that baby step.

Amy Carroll

So Shellie, wrap this up for us. What final words do you have for all of us that are listening, that we want to put a stop to the hustle but really experience the deep and wide that Jesus has to offer?

Shellie Rushing Tomlinson

For me that begins when my eyes open in the morning, I am aware that I am going to want to be the boss of me. As long as I walk on this earth with ya, I'm going to want to be the boss of me. That is how we wake up. It does not matter if I was at a place last night as I was going to sleep and I was reading and praying and hearing from God and you know, everything was wonderful. That next morning, I have to do the living dying all over again. I have to realize when I wake up that I want to live dying so that Jesus can come through me and to this dark world so I slide out of bed. This is not my prayer time. And I don't – I'm not recommending the physical part of this, because some people listening may not can do this physically. So please hear it as a heart issue if you can't, but I slide for years now out of bed to my knees before my feet. I'm not there two seconds, I promise you, it's not a thing. It's just an outward for me, I may say something every day that's not the same thing every day, but it's just an admission. Okay, rule me, boss me, reign. Because I want you to reign and not me. And it's not my prayer time. It's two seconds, I'm up, I'm gone. But it frames my day that I have a master and it is not me. I have a Lord and it is not me and I want to live listening and obeying.

Cheri Gregory

"I'm going to want to be the boss of me." Oh my goodness, does Shellie ever understand?

Amy Carroll

She really does. And I just love how she unpacked for us what it looks like to let go of that so we can really enjoy the gift that Jesus has given us and to to walk in that fullness of life with him.

Cheri Gregory

Well friends, we sure hope you've enjoyed listening to Episode 231 of Grit'N'Grace: The Podcast as much as we've enjoyed making it for you.

Amy Carroll

And we want to say a big thank you to Shellie Rushing Tomlinson, author of *Finding Deep and Wide: Stop Settling For the Life You Have and Live the One Jesus Died to Give You*, and her publisher Salem books for making this episode possible. Check out our web page at gritnegracethepodcast.com/episode231. There you'll find this week's transcript, a link to order *Finding Deep and Wide: Stop Settling For the Life You Have and Live the One Jesus Died to Give You*, and a link to Shellie's website which has some great resources related to her book.

Cheri Gregory

If you've enjoyed this episode of Grit'N'Grace: The Podcast we would love for you to leave us a review. You can go to gritnegracethepodcast.com/review and you'll find a little video that shows you how.

Amy Carroll

Next week, we'll be discussing what we learned from Shellie Rushing Tomlinson, author of *Finding Deep and Wide*, and how it's impacting our lives.

Cheri Gregory

For today, grow your grit,

Amy Carroll

embrace God's grace,

Cheri Gregory

and as God reveals the next step to live your one life well,

Amy Carroll

we'll be cheering you on! So –

Both

take it!