

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST

Episode #235: How to Live in Peace Even When You Want to Go to War

Cheri Gregory

In our contentious culture, there are dozens of triggers every single day. One of our buzzwords is uttered or typed, and we go from sipping coffee to armoring up for war. So how do we find peace when we feel so embattled?

Amy Carroll

In today's interview with Amberly Neese, author of *Common Ground: Loving Others Despite Our Differences*, we learn lessons for loving others well, even when we disagree with them.

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 Amberly Neese, author of *Common Ground: Loving Others Despite Our Differences* and *The Friendship Initiative: 31 Days of Loving and*

Connecting Like Jesus. Amberly is a popular speaker and teacher, comedian, author, and all-around encourager dedicated to helping you become the joyful person you were created to be. She is a featured speaker for Aspire Women's Events and the main host and female comedian for Marriage Date Night, two popular Christian events that air nationally. Amberly and her husband have two teenagers and live in Prescott, Arizona, where they enjoy the great outdoors, the Food Network, and all things Star Wars.

Cheri Gregory

Whether it's in politics, the professional world, a party, or a pew, we face conflict every day.

Amy Carroll

Yes, we do.

Cheri Gregory

Boo. (Both laugh) As discussions get more heated and social media is deluged with opinion-spewing, hurt feelings, and broken relationships, we need hope and practical tools to navigate the tumultuous waters and live at peace with everyone.

Amy Carroll

Fortunately, the scriptures hold the key to living at peace despite our differences. In *Common Ground*, a four week Bible study, Amberly Neese combines stories of sibling rivalries from the Bible with personal experience, humor, hope, and her love for the Word of God.

Cheri Gregory

Why did she choose *sibling* relationships, Amy, I have no idea! (Laughs)

Amy Carroll

Hmmm, me neither!

Cheri Gregory

Stories examined from the Old and New Testaments include Joseph and his brothers; Moses, Miriam and Aaron; Mary, Martha and Lazarus; Rachel and Leah.

Amy Carroll

Now if you have siblings, I'm sure you get it: squabbling is constant, right. And even if you're an only child, I bet you have a friend who's like a sister. These stories point us to peace and reconciliation in all our relationships, reassuring us that it's possible to find common ground with everyone, despite our differences.

Amberly, welcome back to Grit'N'Grace!

Amberly Neese

Oh, I'm so excited to be here this morning, you guys! I know that the listeners can't see you, but you're looking good, and I'm excited to dive in today.

Amy Carroll

Okay, so, true story. I'm super excited because of course, I have a cheat sheet of our questions. And I'm thinking that maybe this isn't for anybody else today, but I know it is for me.

(All laugh)

Amberly Neese

That's how the Holy Spirit works when you think wow, ouch that that just cleans my clock. That was for me indeed. I love it.

Amy Carroll

I'm gonna be hanging on every word. So tell us – start us off. What inspired you to write *Common Ground: Loving Others Despite Our Differences*? Uh, hello last year, but anyway, go ahead.

Amberly Neese

Exactly. Thank you. So I felt behooved. It was the fall of 2020, when we were in this crazy political tumult, when I was watching people I love who loved Jesus do some really unsavory things on social media. Unfriending, canceling, being just mean and unkind. And I just thought, oh, Lord Jesus, there's got to be some practical ways to help these people and help myself navigate these crazy waters. And so I literally it was one of those like Bible bingos, where you open up and say, Lord, I need you to – I'm just going to open it up, I need something from this and something that just kept coming up were the sibling relationships in the Bible and I thought wow, if they can navigate the crazy that they did, and somehow we can glean lessons from there, then sign me up. I want to be a part of that. And that's how *Common Ground* was born.

Amy Carroll

Well, I'm excited to share your words with all those other unsavory –

(All laugh)

Amberly Neese

I did sound a little Judgy McJudgerton, I totally –

Amy Carroll

No, no, I'm just thinking sure glad I'm not one of those unsavory people!

Amberly Neese

We all saw people who forgot who they are Jesus there for a hot minute.

Amy Carroll

Yes, yes. I might have a few times myself.

Cheri Gregory

Yeah, yes, sister Amy. Sister in Christ. I have to admit it's just landing on me now, I, you know, I must just be still really slow from last year; I'm like "Sibling relationships and dealing with our differences. Wow, this is kind of a stretch. How is Amberly gonna connect these?" And like, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Hello. Okay. So just for any of our friends for whom, you know, they needed that spelled out for them. I just diagrammed it and now we're all on the same page, okay.

Amberly Neese

Nobody is exempt. Just because you don't have siblings in your family does not mean you don't have siblings in the Lord. And so buckle up, buttercup, it gets real.

Cheri Gregory

All right. So these days, it does seem like people argue just for the sake of arguing rather than trying to find common ground. So do you have any theories as to why every topic seems to be so incredibly polarizing?

Amberly Neese

I do indeed have a theory. And I think part of it is I've read – I did a lot of research when *Titanic* came out. And when the movie *Titanic* came out, and they had all these articles about how people handled things. I read this research about the fact that survivors would hold on to anything because of the uncertainty, whatever was floating by, a toilet, it didn't matter, they just wanted to hold on to something. And as some of them admitted to, if somebody else tried to hold on to the same thing, they weren't having it, they would literally, even though they were all close to drowning, they would push away.

I think in the uncertainty of life, of history, of relationships, of – when we're toilet paper hoarding, and we're doing this political bashing, when everything was so tumultuous, I think we were all just holding on to something with everything we had. And when we do that, we disallow connection. When we're holding on to certainty with everything, and we discount the needs and relationships of others, we find ourselves leaving people out and not living out the Gospel like we should. And so that's my thing.

I think in uncertainty, we hold on to the certainties. And sometimes we hold on to the toilets, we hold on to the side of the boat that was never designed for that. And I think in the meantime, we've hurt a lot of feelings. And I know I have, and we just need to we just need to get real, and we need to make amends.

Cheri Gregory

That is such – that really resonates, Amberly. You know, I'm all about, we're all about connection. And yet, if we're holding on to the toilet, we can't connect with the people.

Amberly Neese

Yeah, I was gonna say, for me, saying it, I'm still like, wow, diggity dang. That's hard to hear.

Amy Carroll

That's like 1000 light bulbs just went on for me and really such a great insight. And you gave us a teaser a minute ago about this next question, but your *Common Ground* Bible study focuses on four pairs of biblical siblings as examples for living at peace with others, even when you disagree. Who are the siblings? And what lessons can we learn from them?

Amberly Neese

Well, first of all, I'm such a visual learner. I'm so envious of people who can hear instructions and just do them, like IKEA furniture, if somebody just reads them, okay, I can't do that. Give me the picture, show me what it looks like. And so I loved looking at these siblings, because good and bad, they were examples of how to

navigate relationships, or what not to try at home. And so I started off with one of probably the most – I mean, all of these are pretty, pretty familiar Bible stories. But I am so excited to say that when you look at it through the lens of their relationships, their sibling relationships, it's unlike any sermon I'd heard.

So Joseph and his brothers, we can learn in week one, we talk about combating jealousy, which that can be on social media, we're scrolling through and we're saying, oh, look, her house is perfect. Her kids are perfect. They're straight As, they have great cars, they do all the things. They're invited to all the parties. And although that was not what the brothers were faced with, what we can look at is if there is jealousy in our heart, there is no way that both jealousy and connection can coexist.

And so if we're going to live in peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we got to check ourselves and make sure that any jealousy that we have is cast aside. And that could be jealousy of somebody else's gifts. I mean, when I look at other authors, when I look at other speakers who are doing great things in Jesus' name, in my heart of hearts, there are times that I think, wow, Jesus, how come? Why not? And you know what, that disallows me to celebrate the gift that they are.

And so just unpacking jealousy, what that looks like, just as brothers talked to him, and about him, but never with him, until the very end, when the reconciliation happened, they finally were talking. And so as brothers and sisters in Christ, we can learn from that.

And then we dive into Moses, Miriam, and Aaron. We all have heard stories about the baby in the boat and all these things, but when we look at their story, we can talk

about working together despite our differences, three very distinct personalities, three very distinct giftings, and yet they learned, sometimes through the school of hard knocks, they learn how to get along. And one of the most beautiful pictures to me after Aaron has been a gossip with his sister, and they've undermined their brother's success. There's this beautiful picture where Moses has got his arms raised in battle, and who comes alongside him but his brother Aaron, and his brother-in-law, and how do we work together? Even though we vote differently, and we live in different, you know, socioeconomic sections, and geographically, how do we bridge and how do we learn from their example?

And then Mary, Martha and Lazarus, oh, good 'ol Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. We dive into the New Testament, and we look at this sibling relationship. Lazarus is kind of – I mean, it's pretty cool. His story in the Bible goes something like he died. And then he's not dead anymore. I mean, like, he gets raised from the dead, but we don't, we don't learn a whole lot more about him. But he has a story. And then you have Martha that we're all like, oh, she's just a busy body. No, she's not just a busy body. The beautiful way that God wrote her story is that she had a message, which was she was the very first person to read that the Holy Spirit gave total clarity into who Jesus is. I mean, how fantastic is that? So Lazarus had a message. Martha had a message. And then you have Mary. Mary pours the perfume on his feet. And he says she's doing the greater thing. She had a message of worship.

And so how do we navigate that knowing that everybody has been given a message and a story that God can use for His glory? So how do we appreciate the contributions of others, and really give God thanks for what the message of other people looks like. And that happens all the time in our churches, we make it a

competition. It's not a competition. It's the body of Christ. And the liver never says, I out filtered everybody, suckers!

(Amy laughs)

Never. How does the finger celebrate what the liver does?

And then finally, Rachel and Leah, before we dive into how to have compassion for the plights of others, and I will tell you, I saved week four to the end, because it's the story that always breaks my heart. Because we can all relate to Rachel and Leah. We've all wanted more. We've all felt not enough. We've all longed for something that we can't have. And for Rachel, she was gorgeous. She was so beautiful. But she couldn't have children. And that's all she wanted. And then you have Leah, who either was ugly, or – it's so interesting. In my studies, it may have been that she just had weak eyes, or she had blue eyes, which I think is so – but in the desert, that was considered a disadvantage. Now it's like interesting, you know, an ultimate of beauty, but she was not considered pretty. And all she wanted was her husband's affections.

So here are these two women on the struggle bus at the same time, they live in the same place, they're married to the same guy, which I know is a whole other Kardashian episode, but they're married to the same guy. They're living in the same place. Their father's the same, their culture is the same, and never once do they turn toward each other and say "I'm sorry that you're struggling. I'm sorry this is hard. I'm sorry. I'm sorry that your heart is broken." And we need to do more of that in the church. We need to do more of that with other people that we say gosh, instead of

just feeling sorry for me, I need to open my eyes and see where God has sent me to bring a message of gosh, I'm sorry. Is there anything I can do to help? Can I sit in this discomfort with you and love you right where you are?

Cheri Gregory

I see you've rendered Amy speechless.

Amy Carroll

That's a rare moment.

Amberly Neese

Let's take a moment, y'all. Let's take a moment.

Cheri Gregory

Okay, so let's talk about social media. The alternative to hashing out differences on someone's social media post, and I've heard all sorts of advice I followed. Some of these advice is to unfollow, unfriend, or snooze someone for 30 days. Is that really a better solution to conflict when someone is truly a friend and not just an acquaintance?

Amberly Neese

First of all, I know that I am a boisterous – I'll be it, strong, whatever, obnoxious, whatever adjective you want to use, so I don't handle conflict in a mild manner. I know that there's some people that are mild by personality, and so just like snoozing them or unfriending them, that works for them. It does not work for me. And the reason is, I've loved people hard, but I also hope that they give me feedback.

That's hard. And so there have been times that instead of just snoozing – I'll snooze them because that's healthy, I don't need to hear their feelings – I'll snooze them, but then I send them a private message and say you are breaking my heart or you are hurting my feelings. Or would you please just review this with me? I really want your perspective on this because all I'm hearing is anger. All I'm hearing is what you're against. What are you for and who are you for? And that often brings about a conversation.

And it may not change one iota, but how I see it and how I'm able to just scroll past it, it does change for me. And so again, I know that doesn't work for everyone. But it has worked for me to practice that Matthew 18, where I go to the person and say, give me some context on this where, I mean, obviously, you're really passionate about it, tell me more. And oftentimes we're able to find a common ground, we're able to find, you know, we're able to navigate that better. And again, even if they don't change, you know, I've done the next right thing. I've made the connection and tried to live at peace with everyone.

Cheri Gregory

I love the intentionality that you're expressing behind engaging with them, rather than just sitting back and being passive.

Amberly Neese

Just for the record, although I'm pushy, and whatever, it's not easy. There are some people that I think conflict is super easy for. For the record, adult child of an alcoholic, conflict is not easy for me. It is intentional, I have to be intentional. And the more I do it, the easier it gets. But it's still – I would still not consider it easy.

Amy Carroll

That's a good caveat. Because I think some of us from the outside watch people who engage well, simply because they engage well, we think it's easy for them. And I just don't think that's really ever true. Probably that that's the hard work is finding common ground.

So one of the the emotions that you touched on for just a minute that I want to circle back around to is jealousy. And I think as women we're in denial a lot about jealousy. So it's easy to pick up on it with our kids. But how do we identify it in adults? And then how do we get over? And how do we mend fences and be mature? Do be mature and overcome those feelings?

Amberly Neese

Well, I think first of all, we need to look at the root word of jealousy, which is lousy, right? Jealousy does not help really, right? It's lousy. So if we look at that idea, and we go into it, saying this is not a good thing, this does not make us better. It doesn't make the other person better. You're right – with kids, they're so candid. And they just say I want that. I want that toy. I want that thing. I want the, you know, whatever. I think as adults, we learn to mask our jealousy, you know, and justify our jealousy.

But I think the big issue is that it communicates a lack of trust in God. He either supplies all of our needs, according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus, or he is not who He says He is. If we are jealous, we are literally saying God, I'm not certain you are who you say you are, you say you're Jehovah. But I want that big house, I want

that platform, I want that other thing. And I don't want to say that. I want to be a person whose life is marked by trusting God, and that I know more about his character and appreciate more about his character every single day. So some of it is just getting into his word and reminding ourselves who he is and who we are in him.

But some of the more I'm gonna say like nuts and bolts, I think we need to pray for that person. And not just like, in *Fiddler on the Roof*, you know, there's a scene where they say, is there a proper blessing for the Tsar? You know, the Tsar was part of the regime that was oppressing them. And the rabbi says, may the Lord bless and keep the Tsar far away from us. So when we're praying for somebody, we're literally praying for God to do amazing things in them. To use them in mighty ways, not just Lord, keep her – like, please don't let her be at this grocery store where I'm going, please don't let, you know. That is not a prayer.

But I'm saying true transformation happens when we say I want the best for her. I want God's best for her. I want God to show her just how much He loves her. I want that. And when we're praying for somebody, it's really hard to harbor that jealousy. It's really hard to do those things.

And also gratitude. I know that that is like such the Sunday school answer. But if we just sit down and we just think through all of the things that God has done for us last time I checked when the alarm clock went off, my body was able to get out of bed and turn it off. Like that's, I should be grateful for that. And so I think that those two are really practical ways to do that. And God has always honored that, because I'm not kidding, I've definitely struggled with jealousy when it comes in the professional

realm. In other areas, not so much, thankfully. But that to me is kind of my cross to bear.

Amy Carroll

That is great practical help.

Cheri Gregory

So Amberly, what are some of the most important things we can learn from Jesus about relationships?

Amberly Neese

So at the same time I was writing *Common Ground* I was also writing a devotional called *The Friendship Initiative: 31 Days of Loving and Connecting Like Jesus*. And again, in the same tunnels, I was diving into what that looked like. Jesus was so revolutionary in all the things that He did. And again, I'm so thankful for the fact that He came to die for my sins. But He also lived on earth for 33 years to show us an example of what connecting with others looks like. Serving others looked like. And He did things, like with the adulterous woman, He got down on her level. I always wanted to know what he was writing in the sand. I mean, I just want to get to heaven. I know when I get to heaven, I want to say Why did you give me curly hair? Why mosquitoes? And what did you write in the sand? I got to know.

But as I was writing the devotional, I thought maybe it wasn't about what he wrote, but that He postured himself in a place of humility. He got down and looked her in the eye. Maybe that was the secret sauce. He did things like this, you know, in order to heal the ten lepers. We all love that story about the one who came back and was

thankful. He had to leave the comfort of His city, the city that He was in, and go to a leper colony where it was gnarly, and not so fantastic, no glamour whatsoever. He had to get out of his comfort zone to meet the needs of others. And so he shows these beautiful pictures, these wonderful connections, where He served and He loved, and He taught, and He modeled this wonderful willingness to go the extra mile. And I'm just so thankful for that.

And the devotional for me, even when I did my edits, there are times that I was like, wow, okay, I think I need to work on that one. Thank You, Jesus. That's really good. So you know, He's the master, but He also did things masterfully. And one of those was how He connected with others so beautifully.

Amy Carroll

Amazing.

Okay, so Amberly, we have a private Facebook group, and they're – some of our listeners, they contribute some of the best questions we ask people. So we've got a few for you today. The first one is 'What types of strategies or scripts can I remind myself of when it feels like their opinion means something personal about my identity?' Okay, this is the one for me.

Amberly Neese

Yes. Okay. So I think this is so good, because this is – so where I live, it is so easy to take things personally. So the first thing I'm going to say is hashtag understandable.

I mean, absolutely, it does feel personal. But remind yourself, when you get short with your kids or with your spouse or with a friend, it is rarely about what they're doing. 94.7% of it is about the day you had, or the traffic on the way to the meeting, or the whatever, it's this little grain. That's actually the thing, everything is the stuff before. And so oftentimes when we hurt other people, first of all, we're hurt ourselves.

But secondly, it's not about that particular person or that particular thing. So it's like, give them grace space and just say, you know, maybe they had a rough day, maybe they, maybe their bagel wasn't ready at Starbucks when they ordered it. And I don't know. But you know, maybe it's not that. But the other thing is, it is a choice to not take it personally. It's a choice to not take it personally. And if we say again, God will be in all of our needs. Some of that includes our PR and our pride, because oftentimes if somebody says something, it's my pride that gets hurt. And so I need to say, you know what, God is in charge of my PR, God is in charge of protecting me. And so I need to look at His word.

And you know, there may be a grain of truth to that. But let's get into His word and see what He says about who I am. If you really know that you are created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for you to do, which is Ephesians 2:10. If you really know that, then that's easier to take that hard feedback.

One of the most amazing for me is Psalms when David wrote that I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. I love that we all talk about that. But he says I know it full well. Well, that didn't happen on day one of his knowing God, that was hard earned. I know that full well I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. And so get into His word and

practice. Say in your mind, listen to things that that encourage who you are, so that it's not like you're totally impervious to those things, but you're less likely to take them personally. Again, extend grace space to them, but also extend grace space to yourself, and ask yourself What does God say? And is there anything in here I can learn? Very helpful.

Cheri Gregory

All right, so the next question is how do you handle a volatile parent/adult child political divide between a “traditional” and a “progressive.”

Amberly Neese

So if I had an answer to this that was absolutely applicable across the board, I could write a book and make gazillions of dollars, let's be honest, because there are lots of people in this boat. So the first thing that I would say is, I'm sorry that you are struggling with this because this is a hard road for sure.

So the first thing I would say is that just like any conflict, find the common ground. My son is huge into politics. He loves it, I would rather I would rather have a bikini wax than wisen to a political analyst blather on –

(Amy and Cheri laugh)

– I can't do it. But he loves it. He loves it. And he has one of his favorite political guys that really welcomes conflict. And what he says is, can we agree on this? It's like the most masterful thing. I've listened to him 100 times and somebody says, oh, I don't agree with and he would say, okay, but can we agree on this? Can we agree on this

thing? Do we agree that all people have value? Do we agree that all people are loved? He finds the common ground, and then they're able to have the conversation from there. They don't start with what they disagree, because there's a plethora of things they disagree on. He says where's the common ground we can find on this? He doesn't use that terminology, I do, because I want to sell books, but he uses it because it's golden. I think that that's so brilliant. And so we focus on that.

And the other thing is, I think there is a great question that a mentor of mine asked, he would say things like, what would need to be different in order for this to be successful? So we have our current situation, what would what would need to change what would need to be different in order for this to be successful? And I think that we can do that in the political realm. I'm blessed. My dad got his master's degree from Berkeley in the late 60s in political science. So he and I have lots of disagreements about politics. But first of all, we love each other. And we made that clear, and we did not raise our voices, we stayed calm, we didn't make it personal. And looking back, we would ask each other what would need to be different in order for us to find this common ground, and that is really golden.

The other thing is no political party fully embraces and lives out the gospel, none of them, they're made by people. And so don't die on that hill with your kid. Your kid is so much more important. And you are so much more important than a political party. So find out what would need to be different in order for us to find common ground.

Amy Carroll

And those are two fantastic things. Can we agree on this and what would need to be different for us to be successful? I'm glad – I'm so glad I had it right there.

Amberly, what closing words do you have to motivate our friends who want to learn to better love people despite our differences?

Amberly Neese

I'm gonna throw a scripture bomb right in their laps.

Amy Carroll

Please do.

Amberly Neese

Romans 12:18 says "As much as it depends on you. live at peace with everyone." It does not say like everyone, run off into the sunset with everyone, Buddy Robinson and rainbows for everyone, but brothers and sisters, in as much as it depends on you, do everything you can to live at peace with everyone. And no silly story of mine, and no sermon illustration, says it more clearly and more beautifully than the Apostle Paul. So I'm just going to lay that right there.

Cheri Gregory

In Amberly Neese's Bible study *Common Grounds: Loving Others Despite Our Differences*, you'll find Biblical and practical help for facing conflict, navigating broken relationships, handling heated discussions in-person and on social media, and living at peace despite differences.

Amy Carroll

Components for this four week Bible study, each available separately, include a study guide with leader helps and video sessions with four 20-25 minute segments with closed captioning. Plus, y'all she is so stinking funny. She's even been endorsed by Anita Renfroe.

Cheri Gregory

Well friends, we sure hope you've enjoyed listening to episode number 235 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 Amberly Neese, author of *Common Grounds: Loving Others Despite Our Differences* and *The Friendship Initiative: 31 Days of Loving and Connecting Like Jesus*, and her publisher, Abingdon Press.

Cheri Gregory

Check out our web page at gritnegracethepodcast.com/episode235.

Amy Carroll

There you'll find this week's transcript, a link to order *Common Grounds: Loving Others Despite Our Differences* and *The Friendship Initiative: 31 Days of Loving and Connecting Like Jesus*. We'll have a link to Amberly's website as well, which has some great resources related to her books.

Cheri Gregory

If you've enjoyed this episode of Grit'N'Grace, would you consider leaving us a review? You'll find a super simple video showing you how at gritnegracethepodcast.com/review.

Amy Carroll

Next week, we'll be talking with Kay Weimer, author of *The Peace Project: A 30 Day Experiment Practicing Thankfulness, Kindness and Mercy*.

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!