

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST

Episode #253: What Do You Do When Suddenly ... He's Home? (Part 1)

Amy Carroll

He's home!

Cheri Gregory

In today's timely message, Cynthia Ruchti And Becky Melby, co-authors of *Spouse in the House*, share the help so many of us in need.

Amy Carroll

COVID brought many families back together, literally, working and schooling from home.

Cheri Gregory

But all that togetherness can be a mixed blessing.

Amy Carroll

Cynthia and Becky are here to help us smooth the rough spots and enjoy the extra company.

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 love who you are not love who you are, and live your one life well.

Amy Carroll

Today we're talking with Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby, co-authors of *Spouse in the House: Rearranging Our Attitudes to Make Room for Each Other*.

Cheri Gregory

Cynthia Ruchti tells stories hemmed in hope through her novels, novellas, devotions, and nonfiction; and through speaking for women's events, retreats, writers conferences, and workshops. She's also a literary agent with Books & Such literary management. Cynthia and her husband Bill live in the heart of Wisconsin, not far from their three children and six grandchildren.

Amy Carroll

Becky Melby has authored more than 20 novels and novellas. *Spouse in the House* is her first nonfiction book release. The Melbys have four sons and 15 grandchildren, and make their home in southeastern Wisconsin. When not writing or spoiling grandchildren, she may be found touring the country with Bill in their camper or on their Honda Goldwing motorcycle.

Cheri Gregory

Two's company, especially for those who love each other.

Amy Carroll

So what happens when due to retirement, working from home, or even running a business together spouses find that being in the same space all at the same time is awkward, complex, annoying, and just plain challenging.

Cheri Gregory

How can partners coexist without co-exhausting each other?

Amy Carroll

Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby know all too well how adjusting to a new all-the-time closeness can cause the bliss of marriage to form blisters.

(Both laugh)

Amy Carroll

I love that.

Cheri Gregory

That's hysterical.

Drawing from their experiences, and from men and women across the country in the same situation, the authors take a deep breath and dive into the root causes of the discomfort.

Amy Carroll

They dig into the ways God's word addresses the topic, and they offer practical tips for learning the spiritual, emotional, relational, and even physical steps that can help readers replace irritation with peace.

Cheri Gregory

For the Christian woman who wants her home to be a refuge of peace and serenity for all,

Amy Carroll

and who wants to know that she isn't alone in the mental and physical claustrophobia of too much togetherness,

Cheri Gregory

Spouse in the House is a vulnerable, charming, and pragmatic breath of hope.

Amy Carroll

Cynthia and Becky, something tells me that this book has a little bit of a backstory. So what made you decide to write *Spouse in the House*?

Becky Melby

Frustration.

Amy Carroll

I feel that, Becky.

Cynthia Ruchti

Real life.

Becky Melby

We were you know finding ourselves moving into this same season of life together, and, you know, doing a lot of commiserating and encouraging each other, and then we started realizing we're not alone. We're not the only women going through this. And maybe we should take what we were learning and put it into book form.

Amy Carroll

So I'm going to do a little follow up. So what did spouse in the house look like for you? And what have you seen in other women in your world?

Cynthia Ruchti

For me, my husband actually was forced into early retirement at 50, which if you ask me is way too early, because in my mind, retirement isn't an actual word. It's not a real word, we use it, but I couldn't imagine retiring from anything that I was doing. But that 50 age range where all of a sudden, he was home all the time so early in life, let's say, thrust us into that for a while. And then after just a few months worth of golfing and fishing and hunting and puttering around the house and not being able to pay our medical insurance, we realized that perhaps he could find another job and postpone real live retirement a little bit longer. And then he had a physical problem that meant that he was again kind of semi-retired and then now he's back to working two days a week. So that will soon end, but we have been in and out of that stage a lot. So that's what thrust us into this. It's a different story for Becky, but I came to that place of trying to navigate my work from home all the time, and his in-and-out for extended periods of time. And then Becky has a different story to tell.

Becky Melby

My husband was – he owned his own business. He's a chiropractor, and so for 35 years, he left the house at 8:30 in the morning and came back at 6:30. I worked for him for a while, and then retired, if that, you know, can use that word from that job to come home and write full time. So I had the whole house to myself, I could, you know, set my own schedule, if I wanted to go out for lunch with somebody, I moved my laptop around the house. So I'd stand at the counter, I'd sit on the couch, go to the kitchen table, I could spread papers, I could spread laundry all over. So when he first started, it was semi-retirement. So I thought that had given us enough time to adjust to him being

home all the time, and found out when it actually happened that I really wasn't all that prepared.

You had asked about other women. The first time I mentioned to an old friend that my husband was considering retirement, she slid her hand over mine and she just kind of nodded like I feel your pain. Went on to tell me how she she doesn't you know, if she says, you know, I think I'll go pick up a loaf of bread, her husband immediately grabs the keys. And she's like, you know, can't even go to the grocery store alone.

Cynthia Ruchti

And the interesting background to all this is we love our husbands.

Amy Carroll

Exactly.

Cynthia Ruchti

Everyone would say we love being with them. We love who they are, we chose good men, which is a really good first step, we chose good men. But that doesn't mean that there aren't going to be those pinch points if you all of a sudden find yourself 24/7 with someone, even someone that you cherish and love.

Amy Carroll

Oh, such a great point.

Cheri Gregory

Absolutely. Well, and I love the variety that you've shared, because you're making me realize – my husband's a teacher. And so we would go through 10 months of not seeing each other hardly at all. And we understood, because we were both teachers. And then suddenly two months where he was home and making up for lost time. And

you know, every summer I looked forward to it. And then I looked forward to the start of the new school year, because there is such a thing as too much of a good thing.

Alright, your book *Spouse in the House*, was in the works prior to March 2020. How did it take on a whole other life after the initial COVID-19 shutdowns? And how can couples who aren't home together for most of the day benefit from reading this book?

Becky Melby

I think the most drastic thing is that we were meeting people who were thrust into this, you know, where we had had a little bit of warning. And I could identify because years ago when I was pregnant with my third child, my husband came home with a pink slip, and he had lost his job. So you know, I kind of understood from experience that feeling of you know, wow, we were going along at a pace that we could both handle, we had a routine, we knew who did what, who took care of the kids, who, you know, who paid the bills, and then all of a sudden that changed drastically. And that's what you know, thousands of couples found themselves in that situation in the past year and a half.

Cynthia Ruchti

I think in a way, a lot of people initially might have thought, oh, this will be cool, even though it was not of their choosing, the stay at home orders. But it might have seemed like a snow day at first. But then it was a snow day and then another snow day and another snow day with no end in sight. And that also, added to that, was this upheaval of there are financial constraints we didn't know we were going to have. Our house felt big enough before. Now it doesn't feel large enough. Maybe we need to remodel. We saw a statistic that said that Googling 'remodeling your home' escalated by 650% during the last couple of years, because there were so many people thinking 'What do we do so we can survive in the same space together?'

And then there were another number of couples who found out that the work from home was going to be permanent now, it wasn't going to be just for a season. So that added not only to the the confines of being 24/7, which is a lot of time breathing the same air, but also those additional stressors that came in, the financial stressors, the health concerns, what happens with our children or our grandchildren. There were some people like us who we were doing virtual school, we were the virtual school location for a couple of grandchildren. So more people crammed into this 24/7 kind of idea with uncertainty and uncertainty in just about anything can create chaos in our homes. We were hoping for the peace that we had established in our home to maintain itself throughout any kind of crisis, whatever it would face, and didn't happen perfectly and it didn't happen every single minute. But during that process, then we began to see, boy, it's not just us, it's not just the age group of the 10,000 boomers per day who are retiring in the US alone. But it was a whole culture full of people who were having to rearrange their attitudes to make room for one another.

Amy Carroll

It just is such a timely book. It's amazing, because I had such a before and after. My husband had been traveling half the time the year before, so I was home half the time by myself. And then suddenly, not only was he home full time working with me, but our oldest son bounced home because he had been on a national Broadway tour. So the house got very full, very, very fast.

So talk to us a little bit about those before and afters for you guys and others that you've talked to. How did life change? What were the challenges? And what were your husbands saying about all this, too?

Becky Melby

I think one of the biggest things, you know, it's just you have to have the discussion of who does what when? Because, you know, we had pretty much had traditional gender

role, you know, models the way our parents did back in the 50s and 60s; well then, you know, when one spouse is suddenly there, 24/7 it's easy, if you're the one who's been home, especially, to kind of feel like why am I still doing everything I did while you were at work, and now you're not working? So as many conversations as you can have, before the fact to prepare yourself, you know, just talk about chores.

And you know, when it comes to things like that people have natural, you know, abilities; play to your strengths, and include the kids in that too. So, you know, one of my kids would seriously get sick to his stomach if he had to handle dirty dishes. So he was the one who unloaded the dishwasher. But it's just, you know, understanding people's strengths. And I think the other thing is, is talking about your hopes and dreams and your bucket list and having the mindset, you know, how can I make this the best situation for my spouse, rather than constantly thinking how can he help me? So you know, one of the Bible verses that we've used is, you know, outdo one another in showing love from Romans 12. And I just, I think, if that's your mindset every morning, it's not going to be perfect, but it's going to bring things into a better order.

Cynthia Ruchti

I think when it comes to challenges, too, of that suddenly we're both home all the time, one of the challenges from my end, and probably from Becky's too was that the house had felt like our business that we were running, it felt like a business. And now all of a sudden, there's a, we're bringing a partner into the business part of just running the home. And we may or may not agree with a partner's decisions. I had to be okay with the fact that my husband doesn't do colors or decorating. That's fine. He had always left it to me. But now he saw what I did all the time. As if he was looking over my shoulder.

But from the guy's perspective, I think my husband's adjustment have been more related to my needing to be careful that he doesn't feel like a stranger in his own home, or a visitor to his own home. Becky often uses this example. It's not me, my son, my

dishwasher, it's not my kitchen, it's not my dining room, it's not my house, and his garage. This is ours. And what she had expressed several times that I picked up on that both as a friend and then as a co-writer with her, that concept that the 'our' of all of this really makes a difference. So if we see that the chores that need to be done are our chores, the challenges that are faced are ours, and then recognizing too that the guy coming, let's say – it isn't always like this. Sometimes it's the woman returning from full time work and the husband has been at home. That's the case in my daughter and my son-in-law's life.

But sometimes it's that idea that recognizing and realizing that whatever we're giving up in space or air or elbow room, the husband has had to give up something too. They may have given up the dream career or they may have given up the job that gave them a reason to get up in the morning. We all have our needs, too, we have our needs as a couple; and addressing those, not neglecting those is another element that helps if we're aware that it's a possibility. And then we talk about it. Like Becky said, just we have to talk about everything in kindness, and courtesy, and the kind of sensitivity that we would exhibit with any other human being other than the one we're living with.

Cheri Gregory

I love how you talk about us approaching the home as a business. That really resonates with me. And yeah, you know, one of the things that irritated me the most when my husband would go shopping during the pandemic, is he bought things that weren't on the list. And when I say things, I mean, he became a cheese connoisseur. And so these things came with \$15 price tags that were not in my budget, let's be clear, it felt like my budget. And yet those choices were important to him. And he was experimenting. And you know, it was one of those things that gave him some agency and some joy. But it did take me some missteps, shall I say, to realize this is not my business alone. So that's a great way to frame it.

So here's the curiosity question. What did you each learn about yourselves and your marriage, as you wrote *Spouse in the House*?

Becky Melby

I hate to admit, but one of the things that I learned as we started to write is just how selfish I really am. Because, you know, we kind of felt like we wanted to put it out there right in front, that we are not experts. We're not marriage counselors, we're only writing from a place of experience; but we felt we needed to also be writing from some sense of victory, at least in you know, in quite a few areas in our lives, and to realize that I wasn't as victorious as I wanted to be. But I'm so grateful that this project gave that push that I really needed. We are in, I mean, I thought we were in a good place, our marriage when we started writing, and I know, Cynthia thought the same thing. But I think we would both say we are, our relationships are much better, much richer, house is much more peaceful. Because we had to look at all of these issues. How are we sharing our time? How are we sharing our space? And really, we had to implement some things, we had to put some, some plans in place.

Cynthia Ruchti

I think for me, one of the things – in addition to exactly what Becky also learned, but for me, one of the things was that this marriage deal is a lifelong learning experience. I kind of thought when I got married 100,000 years ago, that if I could make it through the first couple of years, and we could iron out some of those wrinkles, in the first couple of years, we'd have it made close to the rest of the way of marriage, it would be natural, everything would be natural, it would just get sweeter and sweeter as the days go by.

And the truth of the matter is if we're not intentional, our entire marriage, and especially in those days, when we're coming to – either by season of life, coming to a place where we will be spending more time together and things have shifted, everything is shifted, how many people are living in the home, what we do with our time, how much time is

available to us; or it's a sudden shift like it has been for many in the past couple of years. If we're not intentional about that, it's a real easy place for ugly stuff to start to come in and – coasting just like anything, if you're riding a river and you decide you're not going to paddle anymore, you're going to be going in the wrong direction. You can't just lay the paddle aside. You're in the same canoe, that's great, but you won't be going where God intends you to go. So for me one of those things was I need to constantly be learning through the process of writing the book, I learned a whole lot about myself, what I needed to be more overt about, there were things that I thought my husband knew about how much I appreciated him. And then I realized he needs my applause. Even though verbal affirmation isn't his primary love language, he does need it. So even if he looks like he's a little Cheshire Cat smile, if he did unload the dishwasher that day, my appreciation of it as opposed to thinking well, it's about time, but my gratitude for it is going to build a relationship rather than decrease it. So that for me was one of the primary things.

Amy Carroll

Well, that's good, and it really ties into this next question. You guys had a great quote in the book that says “Couples go to premarital counseling before saying ‘I do,’ why doesn't someone create pre-retirement counseling so we're ready to say ‘I still do’ all the time.” So what were some of the things that you learned as you wrote that we can do in preparation for this stage of life?

Cynthia Ruchti

For me, I think the preparation had so much more to do with heart, my heart and my internal thinking and my internal language, than it even did the externals, but yes, we had to talk about things. We had to talk about them honestly but kindly. One of my main eye opening moments for me was realizing that I was living with my brother in Christ, who is my husband, I was living with somebody who was related to me by the blood of Jesus. I know that sounds terribly spiritual. But it was an important thing for me to

realize. So God had said a lot in his word about how we're to treat one another within the family of God. And then I realized, oh, those verses also mean my husband, and not just the verses that specifically say, husband do this, and wife do this. But those other verses that are talking about that overt kindness, or that showing love and everything, or that enduring and being patient when with one another, think about applying the fruit of the spirit to the marriage relationship, or any of the other principles in the Word of God that I might have skirted over and thought, yeah, that's for something else.

So my internal adjustments were a big, big part of our being able to handle this and then realizing that as we talked about it, we had to figure out. And Becky has a lot of great things to say on this particular subject. But we had to figure out how much it meant to have conversations and be okay with having conversations that were completely honest.

The other day, I had an opportunity where my husband needed something from me, which I knew in my mind didn't have to be done right that minute. And I was in the middle of a big work crisis. And I had the courage to say to him, honey, I love you. But I can't do that right now, I will get to it just as soon as I can, once this problem is solved, but this one has to take priority right now. And because I said it kindly, he could accept it and not feel like he was being second place in what the need was. We had to build that foundation where he could trust that I was being honest with him, but in a kind way, and vice versa.

Becky Melby

I think when we think of the questions that are asked, you know, if you're meeting with a pastor, before you get married, it'll be things like, you know, how would you will you discipline your children when the time comes? You know, what about budgeting your money? You may have, very often, there's the budgeter, you know, there's the nerd, as

Dave Ramsey says, the nerd and the free spirit, which is what we were, I was the let's just go with the flow. You know, how are you gonna spend your time? What are your hopes and dreams, what's on your bucket list?

You talk through those things, delightfully talk through them as you're dating, you know, you're looking forward to this wonderful life together, well, then you've got, you know, decades of raising children, separate careers, all of a sudden, boom, you're in a brand new situation that isn't all that dissimilar from, you know, walking into marriage. So sitting down and having – and it doesn't have to be 'We need to talk,' it can be let's go for a walk, let's go for a drive. And, you know, start asking those questions like so, you know, now that we're both not working or now that we're both working from home, what do you want to do with your free time? How are we going to spend our separate time? Which is another whole topic.

That's so important, you know, I think just kind of looking at it like you're walking into this brand new phase of marriage and and look at it, it's an exciting adventure, it's not something to dread. This is wonderful. We all have friends who have lost their spouses. It's that's a good reminder that we don't know how long we're going to have. So just looking at every day as being precious and and trying to, you know, let the good always you know, overshadow the those little irritations. But I think even even making an actual list of questions that you can go to go through is going to be really helpful.

Cynthia Ruchti

I love that Becky has often said that she because she works from home writing, and her husband has much more free time in that balance arena, that she'll often say something like, "My best writing time is ____." And then give him a time. "I need two hours to devote to my writing every day. Where can that fit best? For me, it's most comfortable from this hour to that hour, does that work into your plan? Or how does that work into your plan?" And sometimes it'll be something like if we want to go on an outing together

or my husband suggests something that we can go do together, my Zoom schedule or my work schedule may not coincide with that, but if I can tell him I wish it could be today it can't, but I'm wide open Thursday, are you? And then intentionally actually do that. Block off time for us together. It's another hint, but it's one of those things that unless you talk about it just like you would if it was in premarital counseling, it's not going to happen naturally, the time and our own desires can fill up the space real fast.

Cheri Gregory

I love the intentionality that I'm hearing from both of you. And one of the things I'm realizing is in premarital counseling slink, we were all starry-eyed, and this all sounded so fun and so romantic. Like all of it, even conflict sounded exciting. But now all these years later, there's just all these assumptions. Because after all, we've done life, it should be natural by now, it should be easier by now. And some, for some couples, it probably is; for other couples, you know, over the years, actually, they might have accumulated a bit of baggage that gets thrown into the mix. And so I love your practical advice here about having conversations about expectations around time and space and, and scheduling.

What are some of the discussions that you feel need to be recurring discussions? Like my – I tend to be very much one and done. We talked about it, we made the decision, you ought to remember it. I said that three years ago, I still mean it now. So are there – as you've been talking to other women, and in your own lives, are there certain decisions that need to keep recurring in order to keep that respect and appreciation going?

Becky Melby

We have to realize that we are not the same people we were in our 20s, and not the same people we were a couple months ago. So to constantly be talking about – I keep saying hopes and dreams, but I think that's crucial, because the things that I wanted to

do even last year have changed. And I have new things that I'd love to try or do. So just to having those conversations all the time about, you know, what sounds fun to you? What would you like to do? Is there anything that you have been doing tour wise that you're just, you're not enjoying? Is there a way that I could make it easier for you? We bought a double recliner, loveseat recliners. And we intentionally got one that didn't have the console in the middle so that we have our snuggle time while we're drinking coffee in the morning or at night watching a show.

But we use that time to say, so what does tomorrow look like for you? And then, you know, he shares the things that he wants to accomplish or do for fun, I share the things, you know, like Cynthia said, it's usually "Well, I have to have two hours, or I have a Zoom call schedule that," you know, such and such a time, he's a lot more flexible right now. And so we just we try to talk about those things before we're right on top of them. So if he's hoping to go for a motorcycle ride, and I've got, you know, two phone calls I have to make he isn't, you know, he isn't shocked or disappointed. So just staying on top of everybody's desires and what they how they want to use the day.

And then there's there are long range things too, that need to be discussed, how – what are we going to do for vacation, or we have to spend time with the in laws, so you know, the long range goals are so important too.

Cynthia Ruchti

There were some things in the discussion that came up in our house that turned out to be one or two word changes that were pretty significant. One of them in our household was that for many, many years, way more than I can – I'm one of those people who loves to move, and we haven't moved for 42 years. So there's a little thing there. But our house, for most of those years had a real tight pinch point of 18 inches that was the main traffic flow area that doesn't meet code anywhere but it's 100 year old farmhouse. So we were always having to be single file through that pinch point. My husband

changed his “Excuse me,” when we were both trying to go through that same spot, he changed it – almost, let's say supernaturally, he changed it to say, “Excuse me, my love.” And that little bit that he put on the end of that sentence, all of a sudden made that pinch point a place of endearment as opposed to a place of irritation.

And for me, I had been asking him in the mornings, “What's on your agenda for the day?” Expressing it that way, and got silence from the other end. Or he said “I don't know.” And all of a sudden I realized he doesn't want to have a pre-planned schedule. He's had a pre-planned schedule his entire life. And the concept that he would have to know already at breakfast what the day is going to hold was not what he desired. I had thought about mine the night before, I was ready to go. That was my personality. And when I saw this look in his eye, where he was resisting that question, I realized that's not the way I can best ask that question for him. And so I had to readjust just a couple of words of how I was going to ask what he was looking forward to in that day, or was there something in his day that I needed to be aware of so I could work around it.

Becky Melby

We had a similar thing before my husband actually retired. I kept pushing him, saying you need to make a list, you need to put down all these things you haven't been able to do for, you know, 40 years and – because that's how I would have done it, I would have been looking forward to ‘Oh, now I can do this now I can, you know, pick up this craft or this hobby,’ and same kind of thing. I was getting this resistance and I just couldn't understand it. And he finally said, I can't wrap my brain around having free time. And when I accepted that, that he would have to be in it, and experience that, you know, no schedule feeling before he could actually think ‘Oh, I think I'd like to, you know, do this, I'd like to go to the to the shooting range,’ you know, just different things like that. And now he has found things to you know, that keep him busy, but I had to just back off on that.

Cheri Gregory

Friends, we so appreciate you tuning in each and every week.

Amy Carroll

And we're especially grateful to Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby, co-authors of *Spouse in the House: Rearranging Our Attitudes to Make Room for Each Other*, and their publisher, Kriegel Publications, for making this week's episode of Grit'n'Grace possible.

Cheri Gregory

Check out this episode's web page at gritnegracethepodcast.com/episode253. There you'll find this week's transcript and a link to Cynthia and Becky's book, *Spouse in the House: Rearranging Our Attitudes to Make Room for Each Other*.

Amy Carroll

Be sure to join us next week for part two of our conversation with Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby, co-authors of *Spouse in the House: Rearranging Our Attitudes to Make Room for Each Other*.

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!

Cheri Gregory

So –

Both

take it!