

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST

Episode #256: How to Stop Dieting and Live in Peace with Food (Part 1)

Cheri Gregory

Well, it's time to diet again.

Amy Carroll

Nooooooooo! Wwait, everybody just turned off.

Cheri Gregory

No, no, no, actually after the first second they couldn't hear you because you like, totally blew out the speakers. Like, you were, I just watched your mouth moving and you were completely dead silent because you expressed yourself so forcefully.

I know. But it seems like this thought, that it's time to diet again, rolls through on the regular. And that expression, rolls through on the regular, has got to be a southern expression.

Amy Carroll

Stop. Stop. We're not talking about roles today.

Cheri Gregory

Yeah, it makes me want to make snarky comments about all sorts of roles, but okay.

Amy Carroll

Well, what if it was possible to end our love/hate relationship with food and live in peace?

Cheri Gregory

Hmm.

Well today, Kassandra Baker, certified health, life, and mental health coach shares the good news that finding peace with food can be our new reality.

Amy Carroll

Speaking from our own personal experience and recovery from two eating disorders, Kassandra leads us to freedom from diet culture.

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 Kassandra Baker. Kassandra Baker knows what it's like to have a love/hate relationship with food and her body. It's her own personal experience and recovering from two eating disorders that drive her passion to encourage women to find freedom. She's a certified health, life, and mental health coach and a public speaker helping women who are trapped in unhealthy habits such as perfectionism, disordered eating, legalism, and people-pleasing so that they can live free in Christ.

Cheri Gregory

Do you feel exhausted from trying to be perfect?

Amy Carroll

Trapped in the diet cycle?

Cheri Gregory

Tired of the unhealthy eating behaviors you can't stop no matter how hard you try?

Amy Carroll

Do you feel hatred towards your body?

Cheri Gregory

Are you afraid to break the rules?

Amy Carroll

Controlled by what other people think of you?

Cheri Gregory

Alone in your struggle with unhealthy habits?

Amy Carroll

Through her one-to-one signature coaching program, Kassandra helps women who are trapped in unhealthy habits such as perfectionism, disordered eating, legalism, and people-pleasing so they can break free from dysfunctional behaviors in order to live free.

Cheri Gregory

Kassandra can help you uncover what's been stopping you, slowing you down, or keeping you from having a healthy relationship with food,

Amy Carroll

develop a powerful vision for your life of freedom and what it will mean for you and those around you,

Cheri Gregory

discover which lifestyle habits are keeping you from freedom, and how to get it with authenticity and grace,

Amy Carroll

and become crystal clear on a step by step plan to break free from dysfunctional behaviors.

Cheri Gregory

Now, Cassandra has a special offer for our Grit'N'Grace friends. And if you're listening right now, that's you! So the first five Grit'N'Grace listeners who email her at info@kassandrabaker.com, that's kassandrabaker.com, will get a complimentary breaking free strategy session.

Amy Carroll

Kassandra, we're so happy to have you on Grit and Grace today, would you share your story with us and our friends who are listening?

Kassandra Baker

Yes, I would love to. So growing up, I grew up in a strong Christian home, I have a younger sister and parents who love me. And so outside looking in my life looked pretty great. But underneath there were these several things going on that were coming together to create this perfect storm. So the first was, I really probably started struggling with depression, anxiety in fifth sixth grade. Now that I can look back, I started dieting around the same time. I'm a sensitive person and recently learned that I'm officially a highly sensitive person.

Cheri Gregory

Welcome to the clan!

Amy Carroll

We love HSPs here!

Kassandra Baker

Oh, I wish I would have known that then. And of course, you know, I was growing up in a society that said in order to be somebody, in order to be beautiful, and valuable and lovable, you have to look a certain way. And so all these came together, and they did culminate in two eating disorders, the first binge eating disorder, and the second is orthorexia. This is actually a new kind of eating disorder defined as an unhealthy obsession with healthy eating.

Cheri Gregory

Wow.

Kassandra Baker

So for almost two decades, I battled who I call Ed and the gang. So Ed stands for the eating disorders, of course, and then the gang represents the people-pleasing perfectionism, legalism, those isms that seemed to go along with a lot of those who struggle with disordered eating or eating disorders. And to say that my life was difficult and painful living with depression, anxiety, and these eating disorders just doesn't really convey the depth and agony of what I live there. So I like to give a word picture.

So imagine I'm laying on the ground, I'm about 5'3", not super tall. But this several ton rock is completely covering my body. It's huge. There's so, so much weight that there's no space between the ground and the rock. So I'm paralyzed, I'm crushed. There's no light, there's no oxygen. And that's basically what I describe what my life was like for almost two decades of my shames. And perfectionism said I couldn't let anyone know, right, because from the outside looking in, things looks really great. I did well in

school, had friends. And then I would say my recovery really started in 2011 when I started this intensive Bible study, I got into counseling, and the Lord really started working on those root wounds.

So I had a lot of little 't' traumas in my childhood growing up that I, you know, hadn't been aware of. And so the Lord really started to work. But that was also when I developed the orthorexia though. I became obsessed with clean eating, I wasn't going on a diet, I was eating healthy, but it just snowballed, because all of a sudden, I started losing weight that I never lost before. And so all this praise started coming in. And, you know, even close family and friends, you know, were like, wow, you look like a brand new person, you look incredible. And Ed was like, "See, I told you, you would be more lovable and valuable if you were thinner. So you have to keep going. We did this much. Let's see what else we can do."

And then it really wasn't until July of 2014, when I experienced the first of four traumatic brain injuries, that the Lord literally knocked me on my back, took me out, knocked me out. And in one moment, all my day to day regular functioning abilities went out the door, let alone being able to do the extreme behaviors it took to stay in that body such as like, you know, 10 to 12 hours of food prep on the weekend, because of course, I couldn't eat anything off my good and clean food list. And then of course, it took hours and hours of obsessive exercise in order to be in that body.

And so that was – soon after that is when I came across intuitive eating. Because see, I thought I had found freedom because I was in a smaller body. I was, you know, not anywhere close to what they say, but I was

definitely closer than when I had been. And so it really was a blessing in disguise. Even though the recovery from the traumatic brain injuries were very difficult and painful. But it really wasn't even an option for me to do those. Because I could barely get up and go to work.

And so that's when really, the Lord helped me recognize that I needed help. Because Ed was really going crazy, not being able to do these behaviors. And so I reached out to a dietician who specialized in eating disorder, I talked to my family doctor, I told her the behaviors I was having, and she formally diagnosed me. And I brought in some family members and these family members came around me. And they had tools, education, information, and love to start chipping away at that rock. You see, I thought that I had to get myself out because my type A personality says if I work hard enough, I will achieve it, I will do it.

Cheri Gregory

Mmhmm.

Kassandra Baker

But it would have been impossible for me to do it on my own. I didn't have the resources or capabilities. So very slowly and painfully Ed and the gang came off, and I'm able to live in freedom. And so now the Lord has opened up doors for me to be able to go back and help other women who are trapped under their own Ed and the gang, and to be one of their team members to come around them. Or for some people just as I share my story for me to just get down on the ground and be say, to let them know I'm here. You're not alone. There is hope. Don't give up.

Amy Carroll

I love how you painted the picture of healing and community and then you're offering to be part of that community. Beautifully said.

Cheri Gregory

Absolutely. Well, and I'm very familiar with Ed, those of our friends who've been listening to Grit'N'Grace for a while know that I spent six weeks in a neuro-psychiatric hospital when I was 17 and became familiar with the personification of an eating disorder as an abusive boyfriend, as Ed. I find that a very powerful way to think of it. Not necessarily him, but it.

So on your website, Kassandra, I read it – you say “I help women who are trapped in unhealthy habits such as perfectionism, disordered eating, legalism and people pleasing, so they can break free from dysfunctional behaviors in order to live free.” And my first reaction was how dare you call me out like that? Such specific words. Like how did you know? Get out of my brain. But this is something I'm so fascinated with is why, why is it that these topics that Amy and I have been writing about, we've been podcasting about for, I'm going to say a decade at least, perfectionism and people-pleasing; why are these so intertwined with legalism and disordered eating? I'm not sure most people would necessarily see them connected.

Kassandra Baker

Yeah, I understand. For so many years, I thought I was alone. And I was the only one suffering. I hadn't heard anyone else tell me about how they were struggling and drowning. Or give me a picture of what was kind of

going on. I could tell you that my life situation was miserable. But I couldn't tell you what, why I mean. I would have blamed it on the eating the food issues, but I wouldn't have been able to say why I had those. So as I started to share my story, I realized I wasn't alone. In fact, the quote from C.S. Lewis that comes to mind, he said, "Friendship is born at the moment when one person says to another, 'What? You too? I thought I was the only one!'" And it just seems that there tends to be similar personality traits that tend to go along with the Type A personality, the highly sensitive person. And let me reassure everyone: to be human is to have dysfunctional behaviors.

Amy Carroll

Well said, yes.

Kassandra Baker

So there's no shame and condemnation with it. But probably because, you know, since I've been there, I can, I use language, and I use things and I share things in a way that only someone who's also been there can really get because unless you have lived under the tyranny of the gang, or you know, your own gang, or an eating disorder, or just honestly, chronic dieting and disordered eating, you don't have to have a full blown eating disorder to be trapped under that that rock.

Cheri Gregory

Well said, well said.

Amy Carroll

So diet culture is a thing, obviously. Define it for us, Cassandra, what is diet culture?

Kassandra Baker

So stats say about 75% of American women have disordered eating. So there's a eating spectrum. So let me kind of give this picture on one side, you have a really healthy, good relationship with food on the other end of the spectrum is like the full blown diagnoseable eating disorder. And we can move along the spectrum at different points in our life, but in the middle is majority of that is disordered eating. Okay? So most women are within that disordered eating realm, either moving maybe towards the eating disorder, or coming away, depending on maybe life circumstances going on. And honestly, so many women are struggling with this, but they don't even, most of us don't even know what diet culture really is. So I'm going to use the definition by Christie Harrison. She's an anti-diet dietitian. And she says diet culture is when we worship the newness and equate it to health a moral virtue. It promotes weight loss as a means of attaining a higher status, demonizes certain ways of eating while elevating others, discriminates and oppresses against people who don't match up with it. Supposed picture of "health." And this includes the new wellness culture, you know, I'm not dieting, I'm just eating healthy.

Amy Carroll

You're stepping all over my toes.

Cheri Gregory

Well, and I appreciate Cassandra, how you pointed out that you went from one eating disorder to another. That was really cloaked. I mean, it looked so healthy, and it got you so much positive feedback. And yet – on the external, it looked great. That's the perfectionism bar. Go ahead, Amy.

Amy Carroll

Well, I was about to say, that it's the perfectionism. Not only does it look healthy, it looks virtuous, right? And you've connected the whole virtue piece to it as well. It's – man, it's fraught.

Cheri Gregory

Absolutely.

So you've defined diet culture for us. So with so many women dieting, and my goodness, my heart broke that you started as a fifth and sixth grader, and I know this is true. I mean, as a former junior high and high school student, I watched my girls making choices that broke my heart. So, so many women are dieting. Why don't the diets work?

Kassandra Baker

Right? So statistically, 95% of diets fail. People will lose the weight and gain it back within three years. And you know, if you went to the doctor, and you had a health condition, he's like, I'm going to prescribe this pill for you, but it has a 95% failure rate. You'd be like, let's try something else. This makes no sense for me to try it.

Amy Carroll

And this side effect on the side. Keep going, sorry.

Kassandra Baker

I actually want to reference the Minnesota starvation study, which actually took place in World War Two. And I think this study really gives the best scientific evidence of why diets don't work. So during World War Two, there was a study where these conscientious objectors volunteered, and they started out by having a normal amount of calories, and that was approximately 3500 calories, then they were put on a semi-starvation diet. Okay, this is not a full starvation diet, but the amount of calories were around 1500, which is actually 300 calories more than what most diets say you should be eating.

Amy Carroll

I was about to say, because I've counted those calories, so I'm a little shocked. Keep going.

Kassandra Baker

So. The symptoms that came about other effects of the semi-starvation were startling, though, include a metabolic rate decrease of 40%. The men became obsessed with food. They had heightened food cravings, talked about food, and collecting recipes; their eating style changed. They went from ravenously gulping to stalling out the eating process so they could eat as long as possible. Some men reported episodes of bulimia, some exercised obsessively to be able to eat more. And personalities changed. And in many cases, there was the onset of apathy, irritability, moodiness, and depression. And this is staggering. But during the refeeding period,

when they were allowed to have the regular amount of calories again, they experience hunger pains, which became more intense, and hunger was insatiable, they would have binges that would add up to 8,000 to 10,000 calories. And it took them on average five months to normalize their eating after.

Amy Carroll

Wow. Okay, so you've got something better for us. Good news is coming. What is this intuitive eating, Cassandra?

Kassandra Baker

Yeah, so intuitive eating is a non-diet, weight-neutral, internal versus an external approach of diet. So it basically means that we're not going to look at what external people are saying that we should eat, we're going to actually listen to the body that God gave us, which we know from scripture, there's only one of us never been one before, and never will be one again. And so intuitive eating is really about learning how you were created, and how to best care for the body that God gave you. And there's 10 principles. So I want to read those. So reject the diet mentality, honoring your hunger, making peace with food, challenge the food, police, discover the satisfaction factor, feel your fullness, cope with your emotions with kindness, respect your body movement, feeling the difference and honoring your health with gentle nutrition.

Amy Carroll

That sounds really engaging.

So, our faithful friends who listen to Grit'N'Grace always have the best questions.

Cheri Gregory

So the first question that was submitted here, I'm going to take a little twist on it. I'll go ahead and read it and then take the twist on it. She asked "What is the best scripture reference in regards to healthy eating, exercising and taking care of ourselves?" And that question made me first wonder what Scriptures or biblical teachings have you seen women use in ways that are harmful to their bodies and their beliefs?

Kassandra Baker

So I think one of the biggest detriments is when we take diet culture, and we believe it has Biblical truth. So for example, we really have bought into diet culture that says, if you aren't, then you aren't healthy, and therefore you aren't taking care of the body that God gave you. And therefore you're not godly and holy.

Cheri Gregory

Wow, I don't know that I would have thought of it that way. But you're 100% correct. Like that is a slippery slope with only a few dots to be connected there.

Kassandra Baker

And I want to use my my own story experience as an example. So when I lost the weight that I never lost before with orthorexia, I was in a smaller body, people would look at me, they were praising me, they would probably

been looking at me have said that I had been healthy, but it was taking an eating disorder for me to be there. And then there were a lot of physical things like, you know, I was hungry all the time, too, and not satisfied with what I was eating. I still had binging as well. But then recovery meant that I had to give up the whole good and bad foods, that God gave us all foods, right. And so to really give myself permission to eat, and when you take away that deprivation, then you take away the binging so then all of a sudden, I can eat the ice cream without going overboard because it's not the last meal mentality where like, oh, I have to eat this all tonight because I will never again have ice cream, right?

But for me, eating healthy and moderately honoring the signals that God has given me in my body, it ended up meaning that there was weight gain. So of course, as the weight came back on the, the praise went silent again. But I was healthy for the first time in my life. And so people looking at me, and who maybe especially had seen some weight gain would say I'm not being healthy. But the truth is that for the first time in my life, I had a healthy, non-obsessed relationship with food that was balanced and well rounded.

Cheri Gregory

You know, here you were using words like satisfaction, and, you know, losing the restriction, like, there are so many fraught words in all of this. And like Amy said, so much in them about value, and I'm listening to you, and I'm thinking, you know, being able to listen to your own body, being able to trust yourself... I mean, these are things that as Christian women –

at least, I wasn't raised that way; I was raised to trust external sources of authority, certainly not myself.

So do you have a particular scripture that you find is helpful that can help a woman engage in healthy eating exercise and taking care of herself?

Kassandra Baker

So Genesis 1:27, comes to mind. God created mankind in his own image. And I think, do you think that takes away our value and our worth as image bearers versus the animals who don't have that value as image bearers? And then also we're image, not actually God. So when we buy in a diet culture and believe that our bodies need to be the most important thing, and they become an idol, then that also means that we're not living as image bearers because we are trying to be God?

Cheri Gregory

Well, you just stepped on some toes.

Amy Carroll

Gracious, it's good. It's good. Hurts so good, we always say.

What would you love for people to understand about the connection between diet culture and disordered eating?

Kassandra Baker

So diet culture, dieting, creates disordered eating and eating disorders. If you want to, you know, mothers, in their best intentions want to help their

children, you know, with eating, but so often I hear again, and again, you know, I started dieting with my mom. Research is staggering. 14 and 15 year olds were studied. And those who dieted just moderately were five times more likely to develop an eating disorder. And those who did extreme restriction with their diets, 18 times more likely. And so I just really encourage moms, particularly because I've a heart for teens, because I, you know, started struggling as a pretty early teen to just really encourage to work on their own relationship with food and body image without diets because dieting will negatively affect the children.

Cheri Gregory

Yeah, I was sharing with Kassandra earlier that – and I don't mean to throw anybody under the bus here, my mother has passed, and she certainly did the best she could with the tools she had. But I remember she's the one who taught me to weigh myself on a weekly basis, she would weigh herself and I would weigh myself and she had a sign on the fridge that said, 'Nothing tastes as good as being thin feels.' And you know, for me, that was just normal. I grew up seeing that on the fridge. And now that I think about it, I'm like, Well, clearly, there's a lot of food she'd never had. Because I'm sorry, that just is not true.

Amy Carroll

She hasn't been to France.

Cheri Gregory

Exactly. And just more than anything, that is a sad thing to me, that that was the major magnet on the fridge. And then for lunch, she had this

substance called figurines, and the best way I can describe it is to slap thin slabs of styrofoam with sawdust in between dipped in a brown substance that on a box said chocolate, it tasted nothing like chocolate whatsoever. But you know, it just reminds me of what you're talking about, Cassandra, in terms of deprivation, and in terms of the need to fit into the size to as being such a mark of value, and you know, the importance of breaking that pattern for the future generations.

Kassandra Baker

So another verse that really totally changed my life, because I do believe obviously, that we are temples of the Holy Spirit and God, so it's important to take care of ourselves. But diet culture says it has to be an idol. And it's a one size fits all. But the Biblical worldview, I believe, says, we serve God, not idols. And he's the creator of big and small. So Psalm 1:25 says there's the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number. Living things both large and small. And I thought, you know, everywhere we look in creation, like if you walk through the forest, trees are a wide variety of different sizes. So why then did I really believe, and I did, that all women were supposed to fit this very narrow, small?

Amy Carroll

Wow.

Kassandra Baker

It just, I just don't see that all around me is that is how God works and creates.

Cheri Gregory

That's a great observation.

Amy Carroll

So you're pointing us towards freedom. What do you mean by living free in Christ? Kassandra, for the woman who feels trapped in this diet culture and mentality, what's possible for her?

Kassandra Baker

Well, the reality is none of us will be 100% free this side of heaven. So it doesn't mean that my life has become perfect, and everything is just wonderful. But living free means that my thoughts are not always focused on food and my body, I actually have space to think about other things and actually live my life. When I'm hungry, I can now eat. So I don't have to obsess about food, I can enjoy food, I move my body in a way that feels good not to contort into this size that was not how I was created. And the other thing too, is now I have tools to be able to specifically address Ed and the gang when they come up, because in many ways they are a gift. I suddenly start having the thought, oh my gosh, I need to get them again. Because I need to get in control of my life. I'm out of control. That to me is like 'Warning, warning, warning, there's dysfunctional behaviors going on,' which means there's stuff underneath that needs addressed, I'm hurting, I'm having thoughts that are triggering these behaviors. So now I can see them, recognize them. And then I can use the tools that I've developed in practice and habits to be able to counter them.

Cheri Gregory

Hmm, that all sounds so appealing, and so self compassionate, very, very, very compassionate. So you're a certified health, life, and mental health coach, could you tell us a little bit about what that means. And then also tell us about your coaching and how someone would book a complimentary breaking free strategy session with you.

Kassandra Baker

Right. So as a coach, I very much focus on the present. And one of the things I love is that I'm different from a counselor and that I work with my clients in between sessions through text and email. Often we struggle right in between, you know, I know in my counseling sessions, like have to make my list of things I need to bring up right in counseling. But where change can really take place is like when you're triggered when you're feeling overwhelmed to reach out and have someone help you think because right your prefrontal cortex goes offline, and you just can't think in the same way, as before. And so I can act as one's prefrontal cortex and help them to bring it back online, and to really kind of coach them through in the moment.

And then what that does is that interrupts the neural pathways that have been going to those old behaviors for decades, many times and start slowly to create new pathways. And it's slow, and then it doesn't happen overnight. But having someone ahead of you saying "This is normal. This is part of what this looks like." Helps you from giving up. Sometimes, you know, there's battle fatigue in regards to just doing the work and so someone just said, okay, let's just take a little easy this week versus the all or nothing thinking that so many of us, right? 'Well, I messed up, might as

well just eat the whole gallon of ice cream.’ So helping women learn how to not live in black and white, but swimming in the right, which is so scary for those of us who like the black and white, the legalism.

Amy Carroll

Yes, it still sounds good, but daunting a little bit.

Cheri Gregory

Okay, so Amy, I think I hear – Kassandra, I think I hear you describing one of our favorite words. Neuroplasticity.

Amy Carroll

Yes! We’re brain geeks. We love that.

Kassandra Baker

Yes, me too.

Amy Carroll

Kassandra, what closing words do you have for our friends who are listening to help them live free in Christ?

Kassandra Baker

Well, I really I'd like to offer five of your listeners a complimentary breaking free strategy session. So the first five who email me at info@kassandrabaker.com – and Kassandra with a ‘K’ – I would be happy to schedule them, one of the 90 minute sessions. But okay, so the thing I want to leave your listeners with is, there is hope. It's possible to live free

and never give up because the only way that you will for sure never know what freedom living is like is if you give up.

Cheri Gregory

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

Amy Carroll

And we're especially grateful to certified health life and mental health coach Cassandra Baker for making this week's episode of Grit'N'grace possible.

Cheri Gregory

Check out this episode's web page at gritnegracethepodcast.com/episode256. There you'll find this week's transcript and a link to Cassandra's website. And remember, the first five Grit'N'Grace listeners who email her at info@kassandrabaker.com – that's Cassandra with a K – we'll get a complimentary breaking free strategy session.

Amy Carroll

Be sure to join us next week when we'll be talking with Cassandra Baker again and this time about how perfectionism and people-pleasing can be part of our problem with food. Plus, she offers a new understanding about the way we eat.

Cheri Gregory

For today, grow your grit.

Amy Carroll

Embrace God's grace.

Cheri Gregory

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

Amy Carroll

we'll be cheering you on! So –

Both

– take it!