

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST

Episode #259: How to Trust that Your Messy Story Can Be Redeemed

Amy Carroll

There's bad news and good news about your messy story.

Cheri Gregory

The bad news is that messy stories are straight-up painful! What's the good news?

Amy Carroll

The good news is that you aren't alone.

Cheri Gregory

Ahhh ... yes. That IS good news! Today, we're talking with with one of my absolute favorite Bible study authors: Shadia Hrichi, author of multiple Bible studies, including her latest study, ***Tamar: Rediscovering the God Who Redeems Me.***

Amy Carroll

Listen up as Shadia shares hope-filled truths about how God Himself cares for and transforms our painful places.

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 is the first of two fascinating conversations with Shadia Hrichi.

Shadia is a passionate Bible teacher, author, and speaker who stirs the hearts and minds of her audience through personal story, illustration, and her unwavering confidence in the authority of God's Word.

Shadia holds a master's in biblical and theological studies as well as a master's in criminal justice. Shadia is the author of several Bible studies, including *TAMAR*, *HAGAR*, *LEGION*, and *WORTHY OF LOVE*.

Shadia speaks frequently at churches, conferences, and women's retreats and loves to set aside one day each week for "a date with Jesus."

Cheri Gregory

Nothing can thwart God's plan for your life — *not even you*.

Amy Carroll

If God can choose the Canaanite Tamar to continue the line through which Christ would come, can anything keep Him from weaving your story into His redemptive plan?

Cheri Gregory

Tamar, daughter-in-law of Judah, is the first woman listed in the lineage of Christ.

Amy Carroll

Mistreated, widowed twice, betrayed, and used as a prostitute... it seems impossible that God could redeem her story.

Cheri Gregory

But His plan of redemption was prewritten for all eternity — and nothing can get in His way.

Amy Carroll

Through this six-week, in-depth Bible study, you will discover that no matter life's twists and turns or your sins and failures ...

Cheri Gregory

... there is a God working behind the seen, redeeming it all for His glory.

Amy Carroll

Liz Curtis-Higgs, best-selling author of *Bad Girls of the Bible* shares:

"If you enjoy squeezing every delicious drop of truth from the stories found in Scripture, Shadia Hrichi's new study on **Tamar** will delight you. She handles God's Word with exceeding care, pointing us to the many vital lessons worth learning and applying to our own lives."

Cheri Gregory

Francine Rivers, international best-selling author writes:

“After going through Shadia's Bible study on Hagar, I couldn't wait to see what she would do next. **Tamar** is another outstanding Bible study, rich in historical detail, cultural insights, and applicable life lessons for us today. I appreciate Shadia sharing personal stories from her own life (some heartbreaking, some amusing), which help shine light on Tamar's story. Perfect for personal and/or group study.”

Amy Carroll

Shadia, we're so happy to have you with us today on Grit'N'Grace. Welcome.

Shadia Hrichi

Thank you. I'm just delighted to be here. I appreciate you having me on.

Amy Carroll

We are so happy to talk to you. Tell us about the title for your series *Behind the Seen: Exploring the Bible's Unsung Heroes*, including the play on words that you did on *Behind the Seen*. It's S-E-E-N.

Shadia Hrichi

Yeah, yeah. And, you know, I actually had – one person asked me if that was a typo. Like, no, it's very intentional. You know, many of us are so familiar with, you know, the famous stories in the Bible, the famous characters, you know, Abraham, Moses, Esther, but, you know, I kind of want to know about the characters in the background, the people in the shadows. I mean, don't they have an important place in God's story? And, you know, of course they do. And Hagar was actually the first unsung hero that I wrote about. And rather than focusing on the story of Abraham and Sarah – of course, they're weaved into the study, but I wanted to know about Hagar.

And in my most recent study, Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law, I wanted to know how her story played into human history because, I mean, she's the first woman listed in the lineage of Christ. And so this whole idea of that God is working, and each of their lives behind the seen, behind what we can see, they're often kind of in the shadows and overlooked and I want to draw their stories out. Because just like God was working in each of their lives, He's doing the same thing in each of our lives. And so that's what that is all about, these unsung heroes that God is working through. Behind the seen, behind what we can see.

Amy Carroll

The first two that you listed are women who are very often behind the scene. And so I love that you've pulled them out for us to see.

Cheri Gregory

Well, and Shadia, you tend to write on what you describe as the messy stories in the Bible. I'm remembering when I was younger, and my mother was in charge of the children's classes, there were often lessons she would pull that she thought were inappropriate for children, like they wouldn't look good on the flannel board, or, you know, we just we didn't want to taint young minds with those kinds of – and I think it was always the messy stories. So tell us more about what you mean by the messy stories, and why you're attracted to the messy stories?

Shadia Hrichi

Yeah, um, so when I think about the messy stories, you know, as I mentioned, the first study I wrote was on Hagar, you know, she's used by Abraham and Sarah to produce a child, you know, and it was it was, you know, not part of her her plan and expectation. And then the next study I wrote was actually – before Tamar, I wrote a study called *Legion* based on the man rescued from an army of demons who possessed him. He becomes an evangelist. So there's actually a beautiful story there. And then the newest one on Tamar, I mean, she disguised herself as a prostitute and ends up in the ancestry of Christ. I mean, could you could you think of a bigger dichotomy there?

Amy Carroll

And sleeps with her father in law. That story's kind of gross. Not just messy, but gross.

Shadia Hrichi

Talk about messy, you know. But all of these characters share something in common. They were looked down on or overlooked by others. They all suffered. But they were overlooked, both in the time in which they lived, as well as in our preaching and teaching today. And that's what gets me. I want to know their stories. If no one else is going to talk about them, I want to know about these messy stories. God put them in his word for a reason. You know, All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching and so forth. And so, I want to know, their stories.

And, and the other part is I can simply relate more easily to their stories. You know, I want to know what I've been missing in the Bible, what insights will I discover about God through their stories? Because, you know, these unsung heroes didn't go unnoticed by God. And I feel like sometimes I have felt like that maybe you have felt like that maybe someone who's listening has felt like that. And I can just relate more easily to the characters who suffered or who were overlooked or misunderstood, undervalued. And so I just love the life lessons that we can gain from their stories. And so yeah, that's what I love about their stories, their stories are just messy, and I feel they're very relatable.

Cheri Gregory

I love your sense of curiosity. I mean, it's almost as if these are the opposite of Instagram, where everybody is beautiful and perfectly coiffed. And their makeup is impeccable, it's almost like you have the curiosity for the opposite of what our society is putting so much into striving towards these days. I love that.

Shadia Hrichi

You know, the Bible says that God is drawn to the brokenhearted. And I think we can you know, just expand on that aspect of God's character, that He sees those broken lives, those

broken places. And I think He's drawn to that, because that's it. That's when we're at a point where we are so desperate for Him. And we might be more receptive to His voice and his prompting to come to Him. And so, yeah, it's just a beautiful aspect of God's word.

Amy Carroll

Well, as we're talking, I'm thinking, Shadia, about how, you know, I've been studying the Bible, probably, gosh, 40 years. And then we still stumble on these kind of obscure stories, because in sermons they're so often skipped, right? When you hear lots of sermons about the same people over and over, and then these other people are skipped. And I don't think I've ever seen a Bible study based on Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar. So you've told us a few of the things, are there any other inspirations for choosing to study her story in particular?

Shadia Hrichi

Tamar's story is very interesting. I mean, she took risks. She found herself in a terrible position. She suffered quite a bit – I draw out more in the story in this study. And yet, her choices changed the trajectory of human history. Within the bounds of God's sovereignty, of course, but, you know, I think about those things. And I'm just like, I'm drawn to that, like, I want to know, you know, how did this all happen? And at the same time, her story gives me hope. Because, I mean, I look at her story. And I think, you know, if God can step into that hot mess, and turn it into something beautiful. I mean, what can he do in each one of our lives, if we're willing to surrender our stories to him? And I want to remember these are real people. They really lived. This is real human history, they had real problems, they experienced real challenges. And you know, from the outside, Tamar's story is so messy, but none of it is beyond God's redemption. And that's the beauty of it. That's what gives me hope. Because, you know, the truth is, we're all a mess. We're all in need of God's redemption. And I love the fact that God was willing to invite Tamar, a Canaanite teenager raised in a pagan culture, probably fairly ignorant of who God is at the beginning. And He weaves her into the very lineage of Christ. I mean, wow, I mean, talk about redemption. Yeah, so her story is very attractive to me. And again, because few have explored it, so I feel like it's sort of uncharted territory for me, and that just makes it all the more fun.

Cheri Gregory

So during your study of Tamar's story, were there any surprises that came up?

Shadia Hrichi

You know, several of them. You know, perhaps one of my favorites was realizing that in the book of Genesis where Tamar's story appears, God Himself has actually disappeared from the text. He's not mentioned for two full chapters. And He doesn't reappear until the moment Tamar enters the story and experiences suffering. And then God is mentioned, and I just love that there's something to be really meditate on there, that God steps into the story when Tamar is brought in.

And then I think one of the biggest surprises was discovering parallels of the larger aspects of Tamar's story, parallels to the story of Noah and the flood. And you know, and it sounds very, like how does that connect? Well, I really don't want to give a lot away because there's actually some work you need to do with with the Hebrew words and some some aspects of God's judgment going on. But but these kinds of connections are what makes studying God's word so fascinating. Because, you know, so often we'll study a passage in isolation, or maybe we'll look at a few paragraphs or the chapter before and after. But we have to remember that all of God's word is interconnected, all of it, it all connects together. And when we take the time to explore those connections, you know, God will often open our eyes to understand passages in a fresh light that we didn't see before. And so and so I love that. And that was very surprising. But again, you kind of have to read through the study to expound on it, because it would take a lot of time to go through that connection with Noah and the flood, but it is amazing.

Amy Carroll

Well, I love that you gave us the teaser and you didn't give it all away, because we're gonna put the link to your study in our show notes.

So the subtitle of your study is *Rediscovering the God Who Redeems Me*. Can you expand on that? What do you hope your readers will come away with after this study? What do you want for us that go and buy your book?

Shadia Hrichi

You know, my heart's desire, you know, for any of my studies really is for readers to get to know God more deeply, you know, just to fall in love with Jesus all over again, as we see him in a fresh light through fresh eyes. And in this case, through the eyes of a Canaanite teenager named Tamar. And, you know, seeing God through fresh eyes, through the stories, helps us, you know, kind of just really get a closer look at aspects of His character that we may not have, you know, dwelled on before in depth. And so, when we think about redemption, you know, as Christians we claim its truth, we say the words and we have a general understanding of it. You know, Christ died on the cross, paid for our sins with His own blood, He was raised to life, and He redeems us from the curse of death in hell. But what does redemption look like? And so sometimes nothing drives a powerful theological truth home like a good story. And parts of Tamar story, you know, they might make us uncomfortable, there's sexual abuse, which we talk about, prostitution, I mean, this was not the half of it. As you mentioned, Amy, you know, this prostitution is with her father-in-law. I mean, these messy stories have some powerful life lessons in them that we will not gain until we spend our time exploring it. But the beauty is, is these are stories we are not soon to forget. And so the theological truths that come with that are also going to be ingrained in our hearts and in our minds and in our spirits as we study these stories.

Amy Carroll

So, so good, because redemption is not just for eternity, right? We are redeemed here in this life. I love that truth, Shadia.

Cheri Gregory

Well, Shadia, before I ask the next question, I am sure that some of our listeners are trying to figure out why you are pronouncing her name Tamar, when many of us grew up calling her Tamar, could you help us out there?

Shadia Hrichi

Yes. And you're not the only one I had to relearn her name as well as some other characters in this story like her Judah's son, it's called Er, E-R, but it's actually 'Er' and I had to learn that as well. It's just the Hebrew pronunciation. It's just the way it would be pronounced in Hebrew, the the accent is on the second syllable rather than the first.

Cheri Gregory

Alright. And Amy and I are word nerds so we just love we love any detail like this. So I'm like, okay, it's Tamar. I will say that from now on.

Shadia Hrichi

I call myself a word nerd all the time.

Amy Carroll

Well, especially with my southern accent, Shadia, it's like three syllables, "Taaamaaar." I'll work on it.

Cheri Gregory

Alright, so the story of Tamar, as we have already been discussing, include some scenes that – how shall we say it delicately – are rather risqué?

Amy Carroll

R-rated! The Bible!

They are. So in your study, how do you approach these themes? So I think that's a really good, valid, practical question.

Shadia Hrichi

Yeah. I kind of just I approached it sort of head on in other words, I'm like, let's just state the obvious. This is a hot mess. And as I share in one of the teaching videos, you know, this is no children's bedtime story. I mean, this Bible study would probably be rated PG, I don't know, maybe 15? I mean, think about when was the last time even as an adult, you've heard a message preached on Tamar. You know, it's so tempting to sidestep the hard stories, as you were talking about earlier, Sunday School, Cheri, you know, but here's the thing. You know, as I said earlier, the Bible teaches that all scripture is breathed out by God. And if we're going to skip over their stories, if we're going to shy away from the hard stories, you know, we're really only cheating ourselves.

You know, I picked Tamar, precisely because I'm attracted to the messy stories. I want to go where few have gone before. I just, you know, it's exciting. It's fun, it's new, and it's fresh. And, you know, I mean, some of the events in Tamar's life can be very hard to talk about. But the reality is that through it all, God was watching over her, and he saw the injustice, she suffered, but He didn't just abandon her there, He steps into her story. You know, and until we study Tamar's story more closely, it's so tempting to question, you know, her methods and her choices, you know, prostituting herself to her father in law, really. But the thing is, that what we discover is God is more interested in her motives. You know, in the end, Judah actually describes her as being more righteous than him. I mean, that's a powerful statement right there. Scripture tells us that, you know, we so often judge things, you know, from what we see from the outside, but God, he's looking at the heart.

Amy Carroll

So, so good. We get a little glimpse here that readers of your studies have praised them for being very deep. And you've been given the extreme compliment of being compared to Kay Arthur. So do you worry, though, whether the depth of your studies can be an obstacle for some people?

Shadia Hrichi

Yeah, that's a great question. And I would say, I mean, perhaps some, if that's possible, I mean, you know, my studies tend to appeal to those who really want to dig deep into God's word, and not just read deep. In other words, they don't want to just read what I've learned. But I write my studies in a way where I kind of require the readers to do some work to dig deep into the word so that they can enjoy that self discovery of what God's teaching, you know, and I'm there serving as the guide, I mean, I'll get them to where we need to go. But I want the readers to enjoy that discovery that I find when I discover God's word.

And, for example, you know, I'll invite readers to look for structural patterns in part of the text or do a couple, Greek or Hebrew word studies, learning how the background sheds light onto a passage and always, always, always examine how the passage fits into the Bible as a whole. Because all of this groundwork prepares us to step into the sandals of characters like Tamar. And so, rather than gauging the events through our personal biases, or our cultural lens, you know, I aim to help readers see the events through her eyes, how she would have experienced these things. And then all of this serves to bring her story to life for us, as well as to put it into proper careful perspective by following, you know, proper Biblical, you know, rules of interpretation and so forth. And so, all of these things, you know, really can bless readers as they go through the story.

And at the same time, however, I do recognize that, you know, many of us are busy these days, especially when we're doing Bible studies, and members of the group might have different levels of time available to do this study. And so every single one of my Bible studies actually offers readers a choice of four levels of participation. They can do you know, it's like, you got 15 minutes a day, then take this route, you've got moderate, you know, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, all the way up to what I call all in, 60 minutes a day. And then with optional teaching videos, you know, I encourage many readers, you know, take the six week study extended into 12 weeks, giving you more time to go through the material. And so, you know, these tools will help those who, you know, it might be a bit in depth, but it's not hard. It's just gonna take some time and some and some energy and you know, you kind of get out what you put in. But if you

only have 15 minutes a day, do the 15 minutes a day, enjoy the group discussion, you'll get so much out of the study. No matter what level you choose, you know, God knows where each one of us are at, and he's gonna honor your commitment of whatever commitment you make.

Amy Carroll

Well, I love the scripts are deep calls to deep. And I'm like that there's something in me that really responds to that. And I bet our listeners too.

Cheri Gregory

And Shadia, I love how you said they aren't hard. Having had the privilege of being your message development coach, I really wanted to say, it's not complicated. It's not complex. It's not convoluted. It is a matter of being able to – and for me, I love being able to just linger. And I wanted to go deeper. It was never the sense of this being a burden. Oh, my goodness, it invites the deeper study. And so I love that you give those different levels of pacing.

Shadia Hrichi

You know, you just reminded me – I had a reader once reach out to me, and she said that she had always... how did she say it? She said, “I never thought I could really study God's word in a deep way. I always felt I wasn't smart enough,” I think is how she put it. And she said, “And your studies make it accessible. And I realized that I can study God's word on a deep and profound level.” And so that just truly blessed my heart, because that's my desire for my readers. I want –God’s word is meant to be accessible. And so I just appreciate that

Cheri Gregory

Spot on. That resonates with my experience as well.

So when we asked you for a focal scripture for this interview, you gave us Isaiah 43:1, which says, “But now thus says the Lord: fear not for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine.” Why is this verse especially meaningful for you?

Shadia Hrichi

I think that we've all experienced times when we feel, you know, unknown, unwanted, and, you know, to think that the God of the universe actually reaches down to save us, I bet he calls us by name. I mean, that's so personal. I think he knows us more intimately, that we even know ourselves. And despite all the ways we've rebelled, and we've sinned against Him, He doesn't turn away. And in fact, He actually draws closer. And despite the fact that we're so undeserving, you know, when I think about my own past, you know, like you asked, you know, how is this verse especially meaningful to me personally – you know, I have abortion in my past, alcohol, drug abuse, divorce... and those are just the highlights. It's so easy to wonder "How can God look past all of that?" That's what makes His redemption so beautiful. The reality is that if any of us could, you know, come to Him based on our own merits or our own goodness, I mean, there'd be no need for redemption.

And I love the fact that at the end of this verse, it says, "You are mine." I mean, what a precious thought that we belong to the King of the universe. And if we belong to the Almighty one, no one can take us out of His hand. I find that to be such a tremendous comfort, you know, and even though this verse, on first reflection, when you look at the whole passage in context, you know, your first thought might be, well, this was to Israel, this is specific to Israel. But the principles behind this verse apply to every person who belongs to Him. And so we can embrace those principles for ourselves. Personally, we belong to Him, and no matter what we've done, or will do, none of it is beyond God's redemption.

Amy Carroll

Well, Shadia, you've already given us so much – that last little bit had me tearing up – but what closing words do you have for our friends who are listening, especially for the woman who just longs to believe that God can redeem even her messy story?

Shadia Hrichi

You know, I would say that, first of all, you're not alone. The reality is that from from God's perspective, anyway, every one of us has a messy story. We've all suffered from sin and

circumstance, you know, and perhaps somebody listening here has suffered a tremendous hurt or made some terrible choices that can't be undone I know I have. And you may wonder, you know, can God redeem it? But the blood of Christ – I mean, can we really look on the price that God paid and say, “That's not enough?” I mean, just let that linger there for a moment. Is what Christ has done not enough? There's no higher price that God would pay. And the fact that he would pay this price demonstrates how personal redemption is; He gave what's most precious to Him, to redeem us from how we have rebelled against Him. There's nothing that we can do, where Christ's blood is not enough.

And then, you know – and here's another thought for those who might still struggle with this, that, you know, there's a reason that Jesus, when He was, you know, on the earth, and in his ministry, he taught in stories, you know, so often we're told that to overcome our unbelief, or our fears or our shame, we need to meditate on Scripture, we need to memorize Scripture. And that's true. But Scripture is more than a string of verses, you know, and it's by and large, the Bible is a book of stories. And when we explore the stories in the Bible, of how God redeemed his people, like, you know, Tamar, or Hagar, the man with the demons, or the new study I'm writing on Rahab, we begin to see how these stories apply to our own lives. And that's why they're in there. So that we can learn from them, that we can take these stories to heart and see how God is at work in our own lives.

You know, in the Old Testament times, you know, people didn't have His written word, a very few select, you had a few copies, and then they would teach it, but they would learn by memorizing the stories, and they would tell stories to one another and remind each other of how these stories, you know, apply their situation or whatever they're struggling with, because it's a powerful way to remember, as I shared earlier, there's no better way to really drive home a theological truth than to display it and teach it through a story or parable and that kind of thing.

And so I would say that, you know, to meditate on these stories, and to remember these stories and how they apply to our life. And then, if somebody is still struggling to see how this

applies to themselves, I would say, bring your confession to God, bring your struggles to God. He already knows. And ask Him to show you what might be standing in the way of accepting these truths that He has written in his word, and, and help you to be able to embrace them for yourself personally because they're written for you, for each one of us.

Cheri Gregory

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

AmyCarroll

And we're especially grateful to Shadia Hrichi for making this week's episode of Grit 'n' Grace possible!

Cheri Gregory

Check out this episode's webpage at <https://gritnegracegirls.com/episode259/>

There you'll find this week's *transcript*, a link to Shadia's newest Bible study — *Tamar: Rediscovering the God Who Redeems Me*, and a link to Shadia's website where you can get her "Tips for a Sabbath Date with Jesus", 7 Ways to Refresh Your Quiet Time, plus other free premium resources when you join her e-mail community. While you're there, be sure to check out her next online Bible study!

Amy Carroll

Be sure to join us next week for a second conversation with Shadia, when we'll be talking about dealing with the feelings of unworthiness that result from our poor past choices.

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 ...

Amy Carroll & Cheri Gregory:

So TAKE IT!