

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST

Episode #268: Becoming an Influential Woman in an Uncertain Time

Amy

When we're going through uncertain times, just keeping ourselves afloat can feel like a challenge.

Cheri

It's counterintuitive to believe that uncertainty can be a pathway to our greatest influence.

Amy

Yet, that's exactly what we see in the book of Esther.

Cheri

Today, I have the honor of talking with co-authors of a brand-new Bible study on Esther — Amy Carroll and Lynn Cowell — about 4 biblical steps that can lead us to influence in our most difficult days.

Amy

And it's our great honor to be here on Grit 'n' Grace with Cheri Gregory!

Cheri

Well, this is Cheri Gregory ...

Amy

... and I'm Amy Carroll

Cheri

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

Once again, we're talking with Lynn Cowell ...

Cheri

... and Amy Carroll! who are **co-authors** of ***Esther: Seeing Our Invisible God in an Uncertain World.***

Amy

Lynn Cowell is part of the Proverbs 31 Ministries' speaker and writing teams. She is the author of several books, writing for women of all ages. Lynn calls home North Carolina, where she and her husband, Greg, and the occasional backyard deer are adjusting to life as "just us". Along with their three adult children, the Cowells love hiking, cooking, and anything combining chocolate and peanut butter.

Cheri

Amy Carroll finds delight in gathering a community of women with tender hearts and strong voices. She's a speaker and writer for Proverbs 31 Ministries, a speaker coach, and the author of *Breaking Up with Perfect* and *Exhale*. A woman who adores a great story and a challenging idea, Amy has branded co-hosting the Grit 'n' Grace the Podcast "one of my favorite things." Amy and her husband live in lovely Holly Springs, NC where you can find her on any given day texting her adult kids, typing away at her computer, or trying to figure out one more alternative to cooking dinner.

Amy

What do you do when God seems to have vanished?

Cheri

When you have a decision to make, when your stability is shaken, when your sure-fire plan fails—when everything is spinning out of control...

Amy

Esther is the perfect partner for seeing our invisible God in uncertainty.

Cheri

Though she lived centuries ago, Esther speaks to us when we run into limited control and resources.

Amy

We find in her a strength and fortitude you and I need today. A strength we discover as we follow her process of listen, feel, do, and speak.

Cheri

We'll see that Esther carved a pathway, not only with faith but with influence, for all women who find themselves walking through uncertainty.

Amy:

Esther: Seeing Our Invisible God in an Uncertain World is a six-week, in-depth study of the book of Esther. It's a gritty dive into a woman's story that teaches us to:

- * Listen to wise people who fill our gaps of understanding

Cheri

- * Embrace your feelings as a catalyst for God-directed action.

Amy

- * Do the work God assigns you even when in doubt.

Cheri

- * Speak up with confidence, knowing that God has a place for your voice in His story.

Amy

This study guide includes biblical and historical background insights, Bible study, practical application, and questions for reflection.

Cheri

You also have a free resource for those of us who order during the month of July — tell us about it!

Amy

Digger Deeper into Esther is a resource to accompany the Bible study for those who like to go deeper yet. You can find all about it and the book at <https://estherbookstudy.com/>

Cheri Gregory

So, Amy and Lynn, welcome back to Grit’N’Grace! We are going to start with a couple of listener questions. As always, our friends who are listening submit amazing questions. And you already alluded to this, but we didn't talk about why God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther, even though He's obviously very active in the story. Why do you think this is?

Lynn Cowell

You know, while the author doesn't state His name, he does make his intention clear with this literary tool of not saying God's name, the author doesn't use God's name, but he does show us God's hand at every turn. So the plot twists back and forth in a way that could only be God himself, as God moves to protect and rescue his people. So the author's style of not calling out God's name outright causes us to dig in deeper looking for what's not just handed to us.

Amy Carroll

You know, I love this looking at Esther with literary tools, you know, and that's something that Lynn and I saw a lot of commentators do, it's very, very interesting. But one of the things that Lynn and I have done in this Esther study is that we're trying to work ourselves out of a job. So by that, what I mean is that we love that you bought our Bible study, but we really want to encourage women that they can do Bible study on their own. And so one of the things that we've done is we've woven these little Bible study tips and tools throughout the book, and then gathered them in an appendix at the end. So that when you finish our study, that you have this whole

toolbox full of tools to use in your own personal private Bible study, and whatever book of the Bible that you are studying. So we're really excited about that. And proud of that.

And one of the things that – we did a consultation with Muda Mele at the beginning, and it was so fascinating. And one of the things he said is like, look for all the things that are missing in Esther. So the name of God is missing. Also there's no mention of the law and following the law. And there are no supernatural miracles in Esther. And there are in lots of other books of the Bible. And so one of the Bible study tips that I'll leave with our friends and listeners today is when you are reading, consider what is not there as well. And so, look for what's missing, because sometimes the Bible is also speaking to you through what is missing. And then you ask yourself and seek God, what purpose is there in leaving this out? And sometimes there's some real insights to be found there.

Cheri Gregory

I love that. I love that.

Lynn Cowell

And let me just say, it's not missing as if God missed something. It's like, you know, it's like what was left out?

Amy Carroll

Purposefully.

Cheri Gregory

Well, I mean, what I hear you saying is things that we might have found in other books of the Bible, or in other other stories. And now that we look for it, it's like, oh, that happens to be missing, like the supernatural events, you're making me remember my college days. I don't have a lot of things I saved from college. But I have a little one inch binder that has a unit plan I did for Esther as a short story, because of course, as an English major, and I went to a Christian college and I took a class called Literature of the Bible. And so I have this whole unit story that went through and analyzed it from the perspective of being a work of literature.

And that's not, you know, that certainly wouldn't be a primary way to look at a book of the Bible. But it was I remember it being an illuminating way of looking at it. So when we do literary analysis, we do look for what's there. And we also look for what's not there. So it's one lens, it is a lens, that can be a lot of fun.

Alright, so the next question is a very personal question. How do you stay patient during the uncertain times, and let God do His thing? And I want to add a twist to this.

Amy Carroll

Oh, boy.

Cheri Gregory

When you were younger, like in your 20s and 30s, how did you handle uncertainty? And how are you doing it differently now? Like, how have you grown and matured to stay more patient now? That's the Cheri twist on the question.

Amy Carroll

Yeah, that's such a good question. Because I'm a 1 Enneagram, and I like things black and white and clear, and you know, this way or that way, uncertainty just tears me out of frame. I don't know how else to say it. But as I've matured, I've done better with it because I know God more. And that's my kind of thing I want to share today, is when you are in uncertain times, as Lynn said, go back to Scripture, that is where God is speaking, and ask this specific question: What does this tell me about God?

Because when we know God's character, then we trust Him. You know, our friend, Suzie Eller, who's been interviewed here on Grit'N'Grace several times, as well, and all three of us adore her. I don't know how to explain it, but Suzie has been through the worst five years I've ever known anybody to go through. I mean, we could just list and list and list the crises and the tragedies that have happened in Suzie's life in the last five years. And the other night, another thing had happened, she had sort of experienced a miracle that looked like it had reversed. And she said all she could do was lay in bed and say to God, just whisper, I trust You. I trust You. I trust You. And you know, that level of trust only comes from walking with God through

those hard times, through these times of uncertainty. But also going back to Scripture, and learning what God says about Himself, and then watching Him be faithful over and over and over again, until in those times of uncertainty that we can too whisper, I trust You, I trust You.

Lynn Cowell

I would say that when I was younger, I would come up with a plan. You know, if I didn't think I knew how things might go, well, then I can come up with a plan. And then I can manipulate people and things and circumstances to shoot in that direction. And you can just ask my husband how well that went over. Not very good.

But my tool, or the thing that I use, is similar to Amy's in that I rehearse the faithfulness of God, to me personally, the faithfulness to God to my family and my friends. And I literally write out in my journals, the times that I remember that God came through for me, how He answered my prayers, and even how He orchestrated things that I didn't even know could have been a problem that He took care of.

So one of the things I do is I keep a prayer journal, and I write the date. And when I'm praying for in my journal in black ink, and then when God answers, I come back with red ink, and I write down the day He answered it, and you know, I write some kind of, you know, description, and thank you. And then when I am feeling uncertain, I can pull that out and look for the red letters, look for the red letters of when He's come through and when He's answered my prayer. And I even have wondered, lately, if Esther might have employed a practice kind of similar to this, because as a Hebrew, she would have grown up hearing the story of Joseph. And even this week, I read another book about Esther, and it just paralleled how Esther's story and Joseph's story have so many similarities. And so I just wondered that, you know, for instance, when she was taken from her home and taken into the palace, if even that event triggered in her mind, oh, I have someone in my history, who has gone through this, and this is what God did for Joseph. And I just believe that would have fueled her own faith for what God can do in and through me.

Cheri Gregory

I love that. And just to double check, Lynn, by any chance when you were younger, and you were making all those plans, and now as somebody who can look back at it and realize you were manipulating people, but at the time, by any chance, did you think you were helping them?

Lynn Cowell

Of course I was, of course I was. I can't think of how many times I would lay out the flyer for my husband about the man's meeting that was going to be at church on Saturday. And then of course I would offer "I'll mow the lawn," you know, and just try to you know, make everything just perfect so that he would go and then I've come home from grocery shopping and lo and behold, his car would be in the garage, and I would be – okay.

Cheri Gregory

We may need to post a portion of this video just so you can see Lynn's face.

So, I'm reading a book right now that refers to the righting reflex. R-i-g-h-t-i-n-g. That those of us who are helpers have. I'm like, oh, oh, this is so painful to hear. So again, I just thought I would share it with those of you that I thought could maybe empathize. And the problem, of course, is that righting reflex is there for certainty, which means the mystery of God disappears. And, and once again, we are not embracing our humanity.

So let's talk again about Esther. What process did she go through that helped her not only hang in there, which is a phrase we use with each other, hang in there, it's bound to get better, but to actually become a person of influence of time that her life was truly uncertain?

Lynn Cowell

Well, you know, the whole Book of Esther just starts out with uncertainty. I mean, the very first chapter is, King Xerxes, you know, being uncertain about how his wife's going to behave. And so he takes things in his own hands and gets rid of Vashti. I mean, it just comes right out of the gate. And then Esther is taken, implying against her will to the palace, as the king is choosing a new queen, and she has no idea whether she'll live the rest of her life on a throne, or in the corner of a harem. And so what does a gal do when she realizes that she doesn't know what she needs to know? Right?

Like she's supposed to go in and win the king over. And you know, she's been in this palace for less than a year, what does she know, probably not much of anything. But I see an Esther that, she realizes that, and so she wisely chooses to listen to someone who does know what she needs to know. And in this listening, she gains the wisdom that she needs to move and make the moves she needs to make.

Amy Carroll

And then Mordecai is the reason for Esther's second step where she feels. And Mordecai finds out about the plot to annihilate the Jews. And it says that he goes in sackcloth and ashes and he wails loudly and bitterly. So he's out – basically, he's outside the palace, because there's kind of a, there's a gate where mourners can't go past. And I write a whole lot about that in the book. That was a fascinating insight. But Esther hears about Mordecai, you know, her adoptive father, and he's in sackcloth and ashes and wailing outside the gate. And she's worried about him. So she feels for him, she sends him clothes, and he rejects that. And so she's like, what is happening? So she sends people to get the message about what's happening. And then when she hears about the annihilation that is coming, then she feels you know, I believe that's not really written in there. But she's concerned about Mordecai. And her concern for Mordecai becomes alarm for her people and even herself.

And so our feelings can be a catalyst for righteous actions when we handle them the right way, like, Christians are so scared of feelings, you know, we can't be led by feelings, the heart is deceitful above all things, and that is true, but our feelings are God created. And our God has feelings, and we're made in His image and they have a purpose. And that their purpose is to launch us into righteous action.

Lynn Cowell

Action. So I think that sometimes when we're reading our Bible or listening to a sermon, it's easy to get excited. Like we might even say "Amen!" about doing something for God. So we get excited, you know, uh, you know, we hear something and we get really excited and we might, you know, think, 'Oh, I can't wait to do this thing.' But then somewhere between that emotion and the actual execution, the action never happens, the doing never takes place. And there are all kinds of reasons that happen from you know, fear

to apathy. And yet James 2:26 says that “faith without works is dead.” And so Esther models what it looks like to have our feelings move us to positive action to doing

Amy Carroll

And then speak is the last step that Esther takes. And you know, it's fascinating because unlike me, Esther waits (laughs) to speak for maximum impact. I mean, she's so intentional in going through the steps. And in the study, we unpack all the amazing lessons Esther teaches us about speaking up in uncertainty, because, as Lynn said earlier, we know the outcome of Esther's story, she did not know the outcome of her story. And so Esther becomes influential, like actually life-changing for people, life-preserving for people in the most uncertain time of her life. And it's such a testimony of God's power. We don't need to fear uncertainty, it may be the time of our life that God wants to use the most.

Cheri Gregory

Wow, I love that. I love that. Two things that I'm going to just comment on. Before we move on. One, is I totally agree with you, Amy, that too many Christians are afraid of emotions. And in my experience, they aren't even talking about emotions, we're talking about reactions. They label it emotion, but it's reactivity. Reactivity, we should all be concerned about because that's a sign of immaturity, or that something is significantly wrong. But emotion and reactivity are not the same thing. Okay, I'll get off of that soapbox.

And also I'm challenged by this idea that we do and then speak because I have a habit of talking about what I'm going to do. And then I feel fabulous. Because it's almost as if I've done it. (Laughs) The importance of the order of these steps, I just think is so incredibly powerful in so many situations. And I love how you walked us through – let's see if I got it by memory: listen, feel, do, speak. Did I get it?

Amy Carroll

Yes, yes!

Cheri Gregory

Alright. Through the story of Esther.

Alright, well, let's get let's get really practical now for our friends who are listening, what is your hope for the women who go through this study?

Lynn Cowell

You know, as women, we experience uncertainty every day, you know, it's an in different ways. I know for me, it gets real ramped up when I watch the news, or when you're talking to friends about struggles in their lives, or even when we're interacting with our own families. And I hope that studying Esther will help women see unpredictability, uncertainty as an invitation to lean into God as as an invitation to partner with them. And that they'll begin to recognize that fear wants to shut us down and cause us to retreat. But it can actually be the catalyst to begin the process of listen, feel, do and speak. And that faith and influence can actually grow in the ground where doubt and hesitancy want to flourish.

Cheri Gregory

I love that. I love that. I feel like this is such a relevant study at this time in human history. I know this isn't true for everybody. But for me, the last two years, two and a half years, really involves me shutting down a great deal. And so just even thinking about being able to listen, I think I could do that; feel, I'm starting to feel like I can do that more. It just feels like such a healing process to go through for many of us.

So I'm already thinking of doing this on my own. Is this something that is designed to be done only by oneself? Or could it also be used for small group study?

Amy Carroll

Well, this study is part of the Inscribed series that HarperCollins Christian has been putting out. And Lynn has another one coming out later in the fall, being rereleased, so we're excited about that. But the beauty of these studies is that you can do them in a small group, or you can just as easily do them by yourself. So at the end of every week, there are additional questions that you could use in a group discussion. But if you want to journal about them personally, you can do that, too. So it can be used equally well either way.

Cheri Gregory

Very cool. And in the show notes for this episode, we'll put all the links of how people can connect with you online, where they can get a copy, or a whole stack of copies of your study.

Amy, I want to ask you specifically how our friends who are listening can support you specifically as Grit'n'Grace listeners and – actually, I'm going to read your mind. I'm going to try right here. Okay, so my first thought is that one of the best ways they can support you right now is to buy your book.

Amy Carroll

Yes!

Cheri Gregory

I'm getting another message in my mind here. The other way they can do this is by submitting a review on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and that sort of thing. So why do these things matter so much? And why do they matter now more than they've ever mattered before?

Amy Carroll

Well, you know, the publisher world has really changed post-pandemic. And if you love to read and you love books, you should support publishers because they're really, really struggling. And so, but particularly, you know, I just want to call out to my friends. I feel like our Grit'N'Grace listeners are my friends. And I would love to have your support by pre-order or an order of *Esther: Seeing Our Invisible God in an Uncertain World*. And, you know, I hope you've come to know me well enough over the years, and also Lynn, because Lynn's been on Grit'N'Grace a bunch of times, that you will, you know, be interested to see what did we find in Esther that was new.

We were really excited about Barb Roose's endorsement, another Grit'N'Grace favorite, and I was so pleased because Barb is such an amazing Bible study teacher and she said that she saw Esther in a whole new way after reading our study. And so, so excited about that. And, and mostly, we want it in your hands, because we believe the message in it has changed us, and that it will change you in a really wonderful way too. And then reviews are huge. Because Amazon, you know, is like the giant right?

And so, especially Amazon reviews, with – at 100 reviews, more people get to see Esther, the Esther study. And so I would just ask our Grit’N’Grace listeners to help us out here, to get us to those 100 reviews.

Cheri Gregory

Sounds like a plan. And Lynn, what closing words do you have for our friends who are listening, who really want to trust God through the uncertainties in their lives?

Lynn Cowell

When we hit up against something new, and it, you know, sometimes in life, it feels like the trials get progressively bigger, you know, like, you know, even if you think about raising children, right? Like when they're little, like potty training was huge. Like, if you would just go potty that would be awesome. But now, you know, it's like, if you would just not smash my car and kill yourself, that would be awesome. And then, you know, I've had three kids get married in four months. And so it's like, you know, there – it gets bigger, it just gets bigger.

And so I feel like the same thing can happen in in our relationship with God, that the things that we need to trust Him for get bigger. And so I just really want to reiterate the power of looking back and seeing God's faithfulness to you in the past. And for me writing it out, just it's like it solidifies it when my eyes can read this is what God has done for me. It just feels my faith to say I can trust Him again.

Amy

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

Cheri

And we're especially grateful to **Lynn Cowell** and **Amy Carroll** for making this week's episode of Grit 'n' Grace possible!

Amy

Check out this episode's webpage at <https://gritnegracegirls.com/episode267/>

Cheri

There you'll find this week's *transcript*, a link to Lynn and Amy's new Bible study *Esther: Seeing Our Invisible God in an Uncertain World*, and a link to their book's website, where you'll find a free resource for those of you who order during the month of July! Amy, tell us a bit about it!

Amy

"A Deeper Dive into Esther" is a resource to accompany the Bible study for those who like to go deeper yet. You can find all about this BONUS resource and the book at <https://estherbookstudy.com/>.

Cheri

Be sure to join us next week for Part 2 of our conversation with Lynn Cowell and Amy Carroll! ...

Amy

... as we continue our conversation about *Esther: Seeing Our Invisible God in an Uncertain World*.

Cheri

For today, grow your grit ...

Amy

... embrace God's grace ...

Cheri

... and as God reveals the **next step** to live your ONE life well ...

Amy

... we'll be cheering you on ...

Amy 'n' Cheri
So TAKE IT!