

## **Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules**

*Episode #35: An Unexpected Key to Improving Relationships, with Shaunti Feldhahn*

**Amy:**

Do you have any difficult people in your life? Maybe there's this one relationship that would be so much better, **if only** ...

**Cheri:**

One listener shared that for the last 18 years, she has wanted a close relationship with her in-laws, and has tried various things but nothing seemed to work. Another listener put it this way "They are lovely people, but... [they] can really do a number on me sometimes."

**Amy:**

Well I've got great in-laws, but I've definitely had relationships just like that. And I know that many women are nodding their heads in agreement.

**Cheri:**

Well, this is Cheri Gregory...

**Amy:**

...and I'm Amy Carroll...

**Cheri:**

...and you're listening to "Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules."

Our guest today is Shaunti Feldhahn, author of ***The Kindness Challenge: 30 Days to Improve Any Relationship***.

**Amy:**

Her groundbreaking books, such as *For Women Only*, have sold more than 2 million copies in 23 languages.

Shaunti, her husband Jeff and their two active kids live in Atlanta and enjoy every moment of life at warp speed.

**Cheri:**

Today, Shaunti is sharing **THE** most effective tool for improving any relationship ... especially with that "difficult" person in your life.

**Cheri:**

Alright. So start us off with telling us why a book on kindness – I mean is there a meanness problem that you're aware of or something?

**Shaunti:**

Not at all. There is no problem with meanness at all in this country or in any relationship in it. None. Every church is filled with sweet, wonderful people. It's actually really interesting. I had no idea when I started all of this research stuff years ago, I had no idea how many threads would come together to really make it clear as I started this last project – that basically if you want to fix anything in your life – if you want to fix any relationship – if you want to fix our culture – really, there's one answer. And it's kindness. The problem is that we already think we kind of are kind and it's all those other people that have the problem.

**Cheri:**

Oh dear! Let's just be clear right here – Amy and I are really kind and we have you on to talk to our listeners, so we're so glad you're here, Shaunti.

**Shaunti:**

I'll have to confess here, because I have found as I was going through the research that I fell prey to this assumption all the time. That really I'm fine – it's all those other people. Those mean drivers on the road you know, it's *them* that's the problem. Those difficult people that I work with – that's the problem. And instead, as I started cataloging this, I started to realize there are ways I am unkind and mean – actively mean, every single day. And I had no idea. And that's really the problem. There is so much of us that is really blind to some of these things. Once you start a purposeful effort – and there's a few specific things that really need to happen for you to do that – it's like your eyes open that God drops the scales from your eyes or something – and suddenly you see all these ways that you know, "I've got a long way to go."

**Amy:**

Give us some examples – it makes me a little nervous to ask because I feel like some things about me *might* be revealed, especially since – Cheri, we were just kind of snarky to our guest. Oh boy! We might be in trouble! But go ahead Shaunti!

**Shaunti:**

No, no, no! It's not like you have to be nice every moment of the day and you can't joke around obviously, however, here is basically – let me outline what we found are the steps that have to happen – and this is what opens your eyes. And then I'll tell you what I discovered about myself. So I should explain we spent basically 2 years of intense research and then there were probably 6 or 7 years before that where we were kind of dabbling in it. To try to figure out what does kindness actually mean? Because you can say 'be kind' – and we all kind of think we are, and we don't really know what that means. And so really kindness means 3 different things and we put it together in something called the 30 Day Kindness Challenge. And it's really doing three things for 30 days. You pick somebody - it's actually just one specific person by the way, this is really the secret sauce of why this matters so much.

**Cheri:**

So we don't have to be nice to *everybody* for 30 days?

**Shaunti:**

Imagine that, you know? So it's just that one person. Yeah – no. You know it's funny. But if you pick one person that you want a better relationship with – and it could be somebody like your spouse – maybe you already have a good relationship you just want to make it better. Or maybe it's, you know, your mother in law's kind of difficult and you really kind of need a good relationship with your mother in law – or your kids, or your colleagues or whatever just pick a person. And for 30 days do three things. First you don't say anything negative about that person either to them or about them to somebody else and that is usually where we trip ourselves up right? Because I can be really sweet to my mother in law but if I drive away in the car with my husband and I go complaining about how she's always passive aggressive, I've completely sabotaged that relationship and how I think about it. And I just haven't realized it. And so that's the first thing. Nothing negative for 30 days.

Second thing is to every day find one thing that you can sincerely praise or affirm and you tell that person that thing and you tell somebody else. So you can't complain about the fact that she's passive aggressive, but you're kind of looking for things, because you have to find something every day to praise – and you notice, you know, "Mom, you always watch the kids, every time we ask. Really appreciate that about you." And then when you drive away, you tell your husband, "You know, that's really sweet of her." And what you're doing is focusing on what God says, *whatever is lovely and worthy of praise*, rather than what's worthy of driving you crazy. And you're putting that in your mind. It's – God has given us the ability to heal these relationships if we will heal how we feel about the relationships.

And then the third thing is every day for 30 days is to do one small act of kindness or generosity for that person. Just one little thing. Like – you know on your way over to drop off the kids you stop and pick up her favorite coffee cause you know she ran out of coffee the other day and you get her a bag of coffee. Or whatever – I mean, it could just be that she needs time on the phone with you, and you really don't have it, and you really don't want to give her that time on the phone, but you give her that 15-20 minutes anyway. It's just doing something that says, "I care about you. You're worth caring about."

With all those three things you're reaffirming how you could feel about that person. And God changes your feelings because you're suddenly focusing again – not on the things that really are there that are there that really are concerns, but on the good things that really are there. And it's remarkable what happened in the research! When we did this before and after...you know how we do surveys – 89% of relationships improved which is a *huge* number! I mean that was a big deal. And here's really the thing that I found – is that it opens my eyes to the ways that I thought I was kind. I thought I was positive. I thought I was affirming already. And once I have to say nothing negative, oh my gosh! Then you realize how often stuff comes out of your mouth.

**Amy:**

Is the 30 days a magic number?

**Shaunti:**

Well here's what we actually found. Yes and no. We had a lot of people who were like, "Uh, do you have the 2 Day Kindness Challenge?"

**Amy:**

Sorry, but that was kind of the underlying question.

**Shaunti:**

Sorry but that does not work! We found in the research that there were actually cliffs – and it takes about 2, 3, 4 days for your eyes to be open and for you to go "Oh my word! Like, I had no idea that I was unkind and I was negative or I wasn't affirming, like everything I thought." It takes several days for that to happen. And then what we found, is that over the course of about 2 weeks, you're basically practicing – it's like learning any other skill where you realize, "I was completely incompetent at this and I had no idea." And now you're practicing and learning this new skill – it really is a skill of kindness. And then the last 2 weeks are making that a habit. And you don't have to think about it so much. Like the first 2 weeks you're having to think about it all the time. The last 2 weeks are developing a habit so that by the time you get to the end of the 30

days, that was roughly when we saw that people didn't have to think about it anymore they just did it and it became really more of a lifestyle, which is really what it should be anyway, right? It's just this is the way to get there.

**Cheri:**

What's the difference between kindness and niceness?

**Shaunti:**

This is the way that I think of it. I think of niceness as being – it's not like it's bad – but it's very surface-y. You know? It's a surface politeness, pleasantness – there's nothing wrong with that, it makes the world much more fun, but it also...because it's surface-y, it's also not this deep sense of caring about the other person. And that's really what we're called to do. Right? We're called not just to be nice. We are truly called to be kind. And that means, truly, no matter what this other person has done to us, that we are supposed to love and care for them as if they were treating us very well. We are supposed to show them – this is really what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, right? This is the golden rule. Where we think, you know do unto others as you would have them do unto you – we're like, oh that's so sweet – that such a nice sentiment!

Ugh, no, actually – read it. He is talking about situations where there is active injustice– and what he's saying is, you are supposed to treat the person who is actively being awful to you in the kind, grace-filled way you wish they were treating you. That is what that means, and that is true deep kindness and it requires a lot more strength of character, it requires a lot more reliance on the Lord, because there's no way that I can really do that. I can be nice and surface-y, and then when I drive away, "Raw – raw – raw – raw – raw!" but that's not kindness, it's going to sabotage myself, I'm never going to have a good relationship with that person. But I'm called to try as far as it depends on me to have a good relationship with that person because that person needs to see something of Jesus in me.

**Amy:**

Shaunti, did you guys do any um research as far as talking to the person who had the actions done towards them?

**Shaunti:**

You know it was interesting a lot of the people, we had about 700 – I have to look it up – 700 and something people were in our study group who went through the 30 day kindness challenge and different iterations of it as we were trying to figure out what worked, what didn't, all that. Most of those 700 if I had to guess I haven't looked it up but if I had to guess, probably about 600-650 they did not tell the other person they

were doing the 30 Day Kindness Challenge because they thought it would be discounted. You know, “Oh you’re only doing that because you have to, or whatever.” So most people didn’t.

However, of the people who did, yes, I actually did interview quite a few of the spouses, or kids, whomever it was that was the recipient, of the kindness, and it’s interesting. Because there was this – there was this sense of, *there’s something different but I can’t put my finger on it*. Like, it wasn’t like they were constantly thinking about the fact that this was happening – it was just, things were pleasant. It was happy. It was...it was...just a temperature in the home or whatever. The temperature changed, and everybody enjoyed life more. And that’s really the cool thing. About this is that this tool of kindness really is a tool. It truly is. We joke that it’s a superpower, but it’s a tool. And you want to make your home a positive environment, you want to raise the tone, you want to have it be pleasant you want a relationship to be a good one rather than a contentious one? Use kindness.

**Cheri:**

Okay so Amy and I are both recovering perfectionists, so I’ve got a big question for you here. Chapter 6 is on *nix the negatives*, chapter 7 is on *practice praise*...The problem with those of us who are perfectionists, is we are like expert at noticing at what other people are doing wrong. We know exactly how to fix them! If only they would listen to us! Which they never do! It’s so frustrating! Which just makes us all the more upset and it’s so hard to be kind in situations like this! So, what if one of our listeners is currently feeling convicted that maybe, maybe she should take a different approach, and focus on, you specifically say, “Instead of focusing on what other people aren’t doing, or what they’re doing wrong, to focus on what they are doing.” But it’s not reaching 100% so how do you reward something that’s 95% rather than 100%? Help me Shaunti! Help me! It’s me; I don’t know what to do!

**Shaunti:**

I know, believe me, and this is really, actually you’re going to laugh, but this is the origin of this entire research project comes out of this exact question believe it or not. Because years and years and years ago I was doing some work with Nancy Lee Demoss, now Nancy Demoss-Wolgemuth, and she was telling me, “You know we have a lot of women in hurting marriages and you know, we issue this thing called the Husband Encouragement Challenge.” And a couple of these pieces, these elements like you know don’t say anything negative to him, and find something everyday to praise, she would issue with that challenge.

And I was so struck by that because I started to see that solve basically what you just said – which is one of the big things that many women struggle with without actually the self awareness that you have – like they don’t even know – we don’t even realize we’re

doing it. We're just like, "Well, why did you only put them in that sweater, husband? You know, instead of the coat? I mean they'll get cold!" And the husband's thinking, *I gave them a sweater; I thought that's all that was needed. But fine, you dress them next time.* You know? I mean... Or you know, "the dishes don't go in the dishwasher that side, they go in that side." And the guy's like, *I did the dishes.*

When you're not allowed to say anything negative, that's really the answer. And then when you're forced to say the positive, then that makes you go, "Holy cow batman! Like, snap the forehead, you know? He's doing the dishes! Why am I focused on the fact that he turned the dishes the wrong way? Like really? I mean, who cares? That's my way of doing it, why does it have to be the only way of doing it?" And suddenly, your eyes are opened to all these different ways that they've been doing all these amazing things for all this time and you really haven't been giving them credit for it. And so, the answer to your question is, how do we do this? We do *this* - you don't say anything negative either to them or about them, you find at least one thing to affirm, you tell them and you tell somebody else, and then you do that one little act of kindness which is an active way of saying, "I value you."

#### **Cheri:**

What closing encouragement would you have for one of our listeners who's like, "I think I want to try this, but I'm scared!"

#### **Shaunti:**

Well honestly here's what I would suggest. Don't do it alone, right? Grab some girlfriends. Grab a group of people who can go through this. We actually even have completely free small group materials for this, because we know so many people will want to go through it, so you can find them at [jointhekindnesschallenge.com](http://jointhekindnesschallenge.com). You can even sign up – if you want, you can sign up for reminder emails. And everybody sign up to start on the same day and then do the 30 Day Kindness Challenge together. And we all kind of know that; that it helps to sort of when you're walking a path to walk it together. I mean that helps as women especially, you know, it's a big deal. But, it really we found in the research, there's actually a difference that happens. When you are in that phase of, "I'm going to kill him. I'm going to kill him. I'm going to stop." Or "I can't do this anymore." Or whatever, right? To be able to have a girlfriend to call and say, "I'm going to kill him!" And then they can talk you down off your tree.

And give you the perspective, "Remember, he came home early all last week, you know. He took the kids to soccer every day so you could be home with the baby." *Yeah but the baby was sick and that was his job!* "I know, but you can still say thank you!" You know? And that kind of input is valuable, and you'll see as you go it makes it so much easier. And then suddenly you really wonder, you get to the end of the process and you really wonder, what all the problems were about back then anyway.

This Kindness Challenge project has been really life changing for me and I really, really, hope that everybody does this and is part of this movement of kindness.

**Cheri:**

It just about killed me to edit this episode down to under 20 minutes.

**Amy:**

How much was left over?

**Cheri:**

There's 8 more minutes!

**Amy:**

You didn't delete it, did you? EVERYTHING Shaunti said was so fabulous!

**Cheri:**

I know!

**Amy:**

Couldn't we ... couldn't we just do a 2nd podcast this week?

**Cheri:**

Hmm. You mean, like Episode 35 1/2?

**Amy:**

Yeah!

**Cheri:**

You have THE BEST ideas! Okay. Give me a few days ... and Episode 35 1/2 will be live ... let's say it'll be live by Thursday!

**Amy:**

Head over to [GritNGraceGirls.com/episode35](http://GritNGraceGirls.com/episode35) to enter this week's drawing for a copy of Shaunti's book: ***The Kindness Challenge: 30 Days to Improve Any Relationship***



You'll also find some great freebies from Shaunti, this week's Digging Deeper Download, Bible verse art, and transcript.

**Cheri:**

We hope you've enjoyed Episode #35 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules!

**Amy:**

Join us next week, when Cheri and I will be processing with you what we learned from Shaunti.

**Cheri:**

For today, **grow your grit ... embrace God's grace ...** and when you run across a bad rule, you know what to do, go right on ahead and

**Amy 'n' Cheri:**

**BREAK IT!**