

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST Episode #272
“A Faith that Does Not Fail (Part 2)”
with Michele Cushatt

Cheri Gregory

Hey friend, it's 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.

Let me give a quick little reminder that this episode — like the two before it and the three that follow it — were all recorded at the end of July 2023.

Last week's episode was Part 1 of our conversation with Michele Cushatt about her book *A Faith that Will Not Fail: 10 Practices to Build Up Your Faith When Your World Is Falling Apart*.

If you haven't heard it yet, let me strongly encourage you to listen to Episode 271 and then come back to this episode!

An experienced communicator, Michele Cushatt speaks internationally to a wide variety of audiences and has published three previous books, including *Undone* and *I Am*. A three-time head and neck cancer survivor and parent of “children from hard places,” Michele is a (reluctant) expert of trauma, pain, and the deep human need for authentic connection and enduring faith. She and her husband, Troy, share a blended family of six children, including biological children, stepchildren, and foster-adopt children. They live on eight acres outside of Denver, Colorado. For more information, visit www.MicheleCushatt.com.

(That's “Michele” with only 1 “L” and Cushatt with 2 “T”s!)

Michele Cushatt

I think it's really important too, let's talk about the fact that in Jewish culture, lamenting or mourning a loss or if something happened that was painful or contrary to the way things should be, they would tear their robes. They would rip ... there was a — and this is part of lament — a demonstrative expression of the tearing of the soul and the heart.

We have so varnished Christianity at this point, in some circles, I will say, we have so varnished and become so hyper-controlling of the expression of it that we have actually amputated our ability to walk out this real life, right?

And so allowing ... you know, there are some people I'm sure when they heard me say breaking plates that they're like, "Oh, she needs an anger management program. She's out of control."

What if I'm not? What if, and I'm not talking about hurting anybody. But what have taken a couple of old plates after you lost somebody that you love dearly, and they just died unexpectedly. Taking those and smashing them as an expression of your grief? Who says that that's a bad thing? I mean, I'd rather not tear my favorite dress, so why not a plate instead, right?

But what we're talking about here is telling the truth about our pain, and then exposing our broken hearts to the only person that can truly heal it. And that's God Himself.

The only person that can be healed is a person that admits they're sick.

Amy Carroll

Well, and I'll just own up that I was the one kind of venting to Michele when we first started recording, and I said to you how much I want to tie everything up in a pretty pink bow. And that is the opposite of throwing plates. And yet, it's the throwing plates that would lead to healing. And so I love that contrast.

So I mean, I'm gonna ask this question from the bottom of my heart.

Michele Cushatt

Uh-oh, okay. I'm bracing myself!

Amy Carroll

It's not a question written down, but real talk up in here. How do I just – talk to me, Michele — **How do I cope with all the big emotions that accompany a struggle with grief?**

Like, I feel overwhelmed by my big emotions right now. On the regular. And so how do the practices in the book, how are those going to help me, and maybe somebody like me that's listening?

Michele Cushatt

Yeah. Well, first of all, thank you for telling the truth about that. Because we need more people telling the truth about the big feelings. I mean, it's courageous. It's honest. I believe when we finally are honest about that, that's when God can do his best work. I mean, all of that. And quite honestly, Amy, even as we were sharing before, every time

we risk and open ourselves up in relationships, that vulnerability creates a deeper level of community, which is actually God's conduit of healing, right?

So when we choose to stay polished and “neat bow” it all the time, we actually cut ourselves off from the healing that God's offering because God has always used community to bring healing, always.

Amy Carroll

Well, and that community piece let's go there ... because at one point I said to Cheri, “I'm gonna go live on a desert island. Will you come visit me?” She said, “No, I won't. But I'll come to you in North Carolina.”

I don't – listen: I'm just gonna be real. I'm at a place – I have some relationships that are painful that I'd like to get away from. Church has been a hard place for me. I'd like to get away from church. My real reaction is being a hermit sounds amazing. Why can't we do that? Michele, will you come visit me on a desert island?

Michele Cushatt

No I won't, but I'll join Cheri in meeting you in North Carolina!

Amy Carroll

Okay, all right.

Michele Cushatt

Withdrawal is a means of self-protection. And we could talk about attachment styles and all that kind of stuff. But withdrawing is a means of self-protection. And when we withdraw, we cut ourselves off — we minimize one kind of pain, but we add another. Okay, so we cut off the potential of one kind of pain, but we add to our pain, the pain of isolation.

So think of it in this way. God has always operated in community because he's part of the Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Okay, even before we came around, He had community, right. And then He made us in His image. And even after He made Adam and Eve, it's not good for man to be alone, okay. But you saw it even when Jesus walked the earth, He was still communing with the Father and the Spirit, He was still part of community as he was walking in community with his disciples and everybody else.

There is something about community and relationship that isn't just an optional good thing when it works. It is part of our DNA because we are made in God's image.

Amy Carroll

I wanted to roll my eyes at you, Michele, but you're winning me over.

Michele Cushatt

Well, I think I saw them start to go back.

(All laugh)

So now what we need to do is – because the truth is, is a lot of my pain in my life has come at the hands of relationships. I have been so wounded and betrayed by relationships that were close to me. And so I get the desire to shut down and isolate. Cheri knows! She's known me a long time; she knows I can shut down and isolate with the best of them.

Because it is scary to be vulnerable. And we do risk something in relationship. But there is something of the reality of God and the future promise of our redemption that can only be experienced in community — as broken and as flawed as it is.

And so at some point, and I said this to you earlier, before we started recording, there's a part of us that has to just let ourselves feel. We'll come back to your initial question of how do we deal with the big feelings.

What if the big feelings aren't our enemy?

What if the big feelings actually bring us closer to the foot of the cross?

What if the pain in our relationship is also the mechanism to deeper relationship, which is actually what we want.

I know ... you can roll your eyes with me as much as you want.

Amy Carroll

I'm thinking bad words.

Michele Cushatt

(Laughs) You're allowed.

What if – you know I prayed, prayed, prayed from – I was a praying child and teenager. I prayed, prayed, prayed that God would make me, I remember praying “God makes me like Moses.” I remember reading Deuteronomy, where it said, at the end of Moses' life that no prophet has existed before or has come since Moses that talked with God face

to face, like a man talks with a friend, that there's nobody else that's been quite like Moses, I remember reading that going, "God, I want that. I want that. Talk to me face to face, like a man speaks with a friend. Because I want that kind of closeness with You. Make it happen, do whatever it takes to make it happen."

And He did. (Laughs) I just didn't expect the mechanism, right?

And the mechanism was the **pain**, the **challenge**, the **suffering**, the **big feelings**.

Those were the doorway to the kind of faith that I had wanted and prayed for all along. I would have never chosen that road. And yet that's kind of the odd, severe mercy miracle of its own, that through that very thing that I hated so much and wanted to avoid ... when I leaned in and trusted the story, that was the thing that delivered what I have longed for my whole entire life.

Now practically speaking, Amy Carroll (you too, Cheri) but practically speaking, how do we deal with the big feelings? And you know, for those of you who are listening, I know I'm talking about really intense serious stuff. So if this is – If you can only handle so much, you can pause and come back to this later, okay?

But dealing with big feelings. One thing I think we need to do is realize that we may have bought into a false belief about feelings: that they're bad, that feelings need to be contained and hidden and swallowed and stuffed. That feelings, and any kind of expression of feeling, is an evidence of weakness. **I think that is a false belief.** When I look at God of Scripture, He is a passionate God. When I look at Jesus, and how He was so moved to tears, and at times anger and joy and all of it.

He was an emotional Redeemer.

And I mean, just read the Bible front to back and you will see all evidence of God being a God of big feelings, and justifiably so. Now, you and I, we can't let our big feelings cause us to commit homicide, that would be bad, okay? We need to not take a baseball bat to somebody else's car, okay, that would be bad.

But the feelings themselves are an indicator of something that's happening within our spirits.

And sometimes they are things that are like a big old flag, that's trying to get our attention, and we need to stop and pay attention to it. So rather than stuff it to actually notice it and pay attention to it.

Part of my growth – because I have a lot of big feelings, and I was raised in an environment where to have any kind of feelings and express them was "unChristian," and as a woman, it was, you know, if a woman had a feeling well, women can't be trusted, you know, because they're so emotional, they're just too much, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Well, I think that's garbage. I think my emotions are one of my greatest

assets, because I can connect with somebody in about two seconds flat because I am intuitive and empathetic and emotional.

So one, **we need to acknowledge that we have some false belief.**

Two, I think **we need to acknowledge that we are under-practiced in feeling and coping with and expressing emotions.** Because we were told for so long that we needed to stuff them, we don't know what to do with them when we come. So we need some practice.

Three, how do we practice that? **We become friends with our emotions; we stop shaming ourselves for them.** Rather than saying things like, "Gosh, I'm such a bad Christian, because I'm having questions or doubts or I'm overwhelmed," say, "Wow, I'm going through a season of a lot of questions. I have no doubts that this wrestling is going to strengthen my faith muscle. So I'm just going to sit here and go through the wrestling."

I know, right? WHAT?

Amy Carroll

Everybody should be able to see my face. Big aha moment.

Michele Cushatt

Remember, we don't go to the gym to sit and look at the equipment and hope to build muscles.

Amy Carroll

Some people don't.

Michele Cushatt

(Laughs) For those who want to build muscles, they go to the gym, and they actually enter into the experience and experience the pain of working out.

Because they know that the testing of their faith will produce perseverance, and perseverance produces character, and character produces hope.

That's the reason.

So when we sit there and allow ourselves to ride the emotions like a wave — ride it and stay connected to it ... be curious about it, allow God to do the work through it, and trust the story. Then all of a sudden, we don't feel like we have to keep a lid on our Christianity. We can just walk with God through these hard things.

Amy Carroll

So helpful, Michele.

Michele Cushatt

Not easy, not easy.

A big piece of all of this is we've got to start getting the shame narrative out, and instead get the unconditional, unsurpassed love and grace of God in. The shame has to go.

We have got proof that we have a high priest who is sympathetic with our weaknesses, that we can approach the throne of grace with confidence, even with our questions. That's the God we serve, not one that expects us to be buttoned up and varnished and polished. He wants us, the real us.

Cheri Gregory

Okay. So one last question. I have so appreciated everything that you've been saying here. I'm over here nodding like a bobble head dog –

Michele Cushatt

I'm probably talking too much!

Cheri Gregory

Not the least!

Michele Cushatt

As you can tell. I'm so passionate about this.

My heart breaks for the many women who are living in this place of self-recrimination and shame.

And it's not – just so you guys know, God does not look at you with disappointment and shame. And He's not sitting there telling you “Well, if you could just be a better Christian, I would love you more and your life would be better.” He could not love you more. And that's just – I'm so passionate about this, because **it's time for the women of God to break free from this false narrative about who we were supposed to be.**

Cheri Gregory

I wish I had my pom-poms here, because that would be waving them wildly.

But the question we'll wrap up with is: How do you keep going and keep fighting when you're completely worn out? How does spiritual surrender look different from giving up completely? Let me say that one more time, because I think it's such an important question:

How does spiritual surrender look different from giving up completely?

Michele Cushatt

Yes. So a couple of things. How do you keep going? Sometimes you don't. And this is what I mean. We – again, this is part of this works-based righteousness that is so ingrained in us, that we think we have to “keep going.” And I mentioned this at the beginning of the podcast, and I was hesitant to even call this book, you know, 10 practices, that the practices are there, because all of us women are gonna think it's homework that we need to make sure we do all ten every day, and we're going to create a spreadsheet, and we're going to log our ability to do these practices.

This is not about doing more work; it's resting in the work that's already been done.

And sometimes we can't keep going. We can't, right? And so we get to rest. Sometimes it's literal rest. I've gone through a couple of months now where I do very little work because I'm emotionally, physically, spiritually exhausted. And in some ways, I feel like I'm very unproductive. And yet, you know, I sit there and remind myself I am yoking myself to Jesus, because His burden is easy, right? I'm yoking myself to him. He's doing the heavy work; I'm resting in Him.

So how do we keep going?

I used that yoke verse, but let's talk about it in terms of a car so we know the difference between surrender and giving up.

More often than not, the three of us – and many of you listening – we love to be in control of our own lives. We are like Class A control freaks, like, I am so in charge. Oh, I tell Jesus, He's in charge, but we both know, Jesus and I both know I'm holding the wheel. I got it, right.

And so we're driving our car — let's say we're trying to get to a promised land, a destination, some kind of vacation spot, a dream spot, and we're driving there, but things keep happening. We get a flat tire, then our transmission goes out, we have to get it replaced, there's construction on the road, we're blocked. mean, we have been trying to get to this destination for 51 years now, trying to get there and I keep running into obstacle after obstacle after obstacle.

And it's not happening.

And at some point, I'm so tired of trying. I'm trying so hard to get to that good place. But everything I tried doesn't work. Things keep going wrong. I'm exhausted.

Giving up looks like stopping my car right there in the middle of the highway. I'm done. Dropping the keys in the driver's seat, getting out of the car and walking away. I'm done. I'm giving up, right?

Surrender looks like, "Hey, Jesus" – Jesus is sitting in the passenger seat – "I've been driving my own car. I'm not making very good headway. And I go, I have absolutely no idea what to do at this point. Jesus, I have no idea. All my GPS, my maps, my strategies. Everything's gone. I have no money left. I have nothing left to give." He's like "Good. Now you're ready." He gets in the driver's seat.

I sit in the passenger seat and I say, "I trust this story. You lead me. You lead me home. I'm with You. I have nothing to give anymore. But I know that You can carry me there and I trust you."

That's surrender.

Cheri Gregory

I'm going to call that where we end. That is beautiful. Michele, I feel like we just done church here. Thank you so much.

Amy Carroll

Or therapy, or both.

Michele Cushatt

Or both! And you know, we talk about this stuff on podcasts, it's not easy.

And so for those listening and for you two, and for me, this is hard. This is our life's work, is to sit there and try to be a disciple of Jesus and just walk his road, one step at a time, all the way home. But ultimately, we have to trust. This is our current reality. So we can lament that, we can mourn that. But there is future promise. And it's coming. And I believe Jesus when He says, "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you," I believe it. And so that's what keeps me sitting next to him as we walk this out.

And for those of you listening, as hard as it may feel right now, it's impossible – You're not alone. He's walking this out with you.

Cheri Gregory

Perfect wrap up. Thank you so much, friend,

It was exactly what we needed, it was exactly what I needed. I'm going to cut it and do it in a part one and a part two, so that they get a little bit of goodness one week and a little bit of goodness another week. Thank you.

Michele Cushatt

Don't you wish we would have learned this when we were little?

Cheri Gregory

Yes, I do as a matter of fact. And that whole – you know, the thing I will say I'm glad about – I keep thinking about the fact that our mothers never got any of this, and our mothers' mothers didn't get any of it. And so as much as I'm like, angry about all the things I believe that were just plain wrong, and I based my life on things that were just plain wrong ... and I can't fix them and I don't have the money or the insurance to undo the damage or repair. I'm still glad to know now. And as tiring as it is, as exhausting as it is, to be able to do some recalibration moving forward I do feel is better than not.

Amy Carroll

Hand something better to our kids.

Michele Cushatt

But remember – and this, this is kind of a downer. But it's the same pattern through all of history. God's people have always been building towers of Babel to try to reach righteousness, and those tumbled down. And they've been building, you know, Pharisees, Sadducees, Sanhedrin, building their righteousness to try to get God and it gets torn down.

And I mean, it's just the same. This has been from the Garden of Eden until Revelation, this is the pattern of us, trying to earn holiness and then having to come face to face with the fact that we can't, and we superimpose that on our kids. And then we try to change it and it gets better for a while and then we make other mistakes.

So it's never going to be completely changed until Heaven. But that's why it's important to see that pattern, not just in the last 100 years, but throughout all of time. It just – **it's why we need rescue**. This is why not believing in God doesn't work. We have no ability to save ourselves. All right. I'm totally preaching.

Cheri Gregory

We love it.

Amy Carroll

We love it.

Cheri Gregory

We hope you've enjoyed Episode #272 of Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST!

Check out the webpage for this week's episode at
<https://GritNGraceThePodcast.com/episode272>

There you'll find links to Michele's book — *A Faith that Will Not Fail: 10 Practices to Build Up Your Faith When Your World Is Falling Apart* — and her website, which is full of fabulous resources.

And be sure to tune in next week when Amy and I will be processing what we learned from Michele in Episodes 271 and 272!

For today, grow your grit ...

... embrace God's grace ...

... and believe Him when he says, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you."

You're **not** alone. He's **always** walking this out **with** you.