

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode 28: Jesus, the Savior – Wounded for My Wounds

Cheri:

Hey, this is Cheri Gregory, and you're listening to Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Joining me is my de-LIGHT-full co-host, Amy Carroll, just a few short days before Christmas. You all ready for the “big day”, Amy?

Amy:

I'm so ready! I've been preparing my heart by spending time in Luke and in Liz Curtis Higgs' book, *The Women of Christmas*. Bring on da noise, bring on da funk! (I do have two boys after all.)

Cheri:

I love it. :-)

Well, we seriously considered not doing a podcast at all these two weeks before Christmas ... we know how busy this time of year is for everyone.

But we think you'll be really glad you've joined us for today's Holiday Break.

Amy, tell everyone why we changed our minds about skipping last week's and this week's episodes.

Amy:

We've addressed a lot of topics, but we couldn't end without the reason for the season. For these last two episodes, we want to focus on Jesus. Thankfully, our friends Suzie Eller [Episode #27] and Michele Cushatt gave us the perfect material for our focus in their interviews earlier this year.

Michele, over the years I've read some of your blog posts. I always love what you have to say, because you're so honest. How does the love of God and understanding the love of God allow you to be so honest?

For the rest of us it's such a prize. It's such a treasure, Michele. It really is.

Michele:

Thank you. Goodness. It is a very hard thing for me to be that exposed. I almost view it like I do going for a run. It is so painful to actually do, and yet I know it's good for me. And so I force myself through the exercise.

The other motivator behind trying to be vulnerable in the blog is that there was a period of my life in the church where I went through a divorce back in the '90s. To be a ministry person going through a divorce in the church in the '90s was not an okay thing. I ended up feeling very alone. I was a 26-, 27-year-old young, single mom who wanted nothing more than to be in ministry her whole entire life. I was divorced. I felt like I carried around this label that excluded me from any kind of participation in the kingdom of God.

That loneliness was devastating for me. I remember sitting in a counselor's office and she's like, "Why is this so painful for you? Why is this bringing up so much emotion for you?" My comment to her was, "I never want anybody to feel *that* alone. I never want anybody to feel *that* alone."

That is truly, I don't even know if I've shared this anywhere else before, but that's truly a driving force in the way that I write the way that I do, because nobody finds companionship in perfection. Nobody finds comfort in somebody else's shiny, polished, perfect life. Nobody does. But boy, we find great company with somebody who's bleeding like we are, and with somebody who's grieving like we are, and somebody who knows what it's like to doubt, or to question, or to struggle.

As best as I can, I want to be the church through the blog, or through the book, or through these conversations like today's podcast, because there is no reason why anyone of us should have to go through the unexpected life alone.

Cheri:

That kind of transparency is a good weapon against perfectionism.

Michele:

It is. Absolutely. I know it's good for me even though it's hard. The hard part, back to our topic today though, is when you make yourself that vulnerable you completely open yourself up to criticism, and to misunderstanding, and to conflict, and all of that. Again, the whole idea of vulnerability is letting your guard down and pulling your shield down for a minute. The truth is that people will misunderstand you. They will criticise. They will disagree, and disagreement is not bad, but for those of us who are perfectionist we don't even like disagreement.

Those are realities. Choosing to be vulnerable and authentic, I think, it's truly something that I do too, because I know my own sense of my own rough edges need the softening that comes with that kind of exposure.

Cheri:

I always saw disagreement as invalidation of who I was, and thus annihilation. If you disagree with me I don't exist.

Michele:

It's personal attack, right, because if you don't agree with me that means I'm dumb and what I had to say wasn't worth it or wasn't valid. Absolutely. Ask my husband. That's all I need to say. Are we still recording?

Cheri:

Yeah, actually. Of course. ... Seeking that kind of validation also meant that I was limiting myself in terms of growth. I surrounded myself with people who agreed with me, which was fun, but I-

Michele:

Very stagnant though. It's fun, and it's easy, and it's comfortable, but it's incredibly stagnant. You will not grow in that place. You will not be challenged in that place. You even might be buying into a complete false way of living simply because you haven't invited or allowed any other dialog or conversation. It's an interesting thing. It's a very safe way to live, but it's really not living I don't think. I think it's a prison.

Cheri:

No, I agree.

Michele:

That whole being able to receive disagreement and offer it? There's really no room for perfectionism there. That's the odd thing is that we really need people to be trustworthy, insightful, wise mentors.

But nobody will have the courtesy to do that if we haven't demonstrated that we're okay with missteps and failures. If we're not okay with things not being perfect it's not a safe thing for anybody to do. It takes both. It takes two people who are equally comfortable with their own failures and have that kind of humility around their life than both people who are equally comfortable with the sovereignty of God to even have those engaging discussions.

Cheri:

Once again perfectionism is self-reinforcing *externally* as well as internally, because I will choose the people I allow in my life or the conversations that I will allow to happen based on wanting them to agree with me. So one way out of perfectionism is learning to tolerate — I won't say embrace — you can see my face...

Michele:

I'm feeling the nausea again. I can feel it coming.

Cheri:

...learning to tolerate disagreement. I've started seeing a new counselor. In our first session together she pointed out something that had never occurred to me. She said, "Inconvenience is normal."

Michele:

Ohhhh. It's so true, but it's so revolutionary.

Cheri:

I'm, "Oh, really."

Michele:

Yeah, I would even take it further with that whole comment, because as I'm raising my children I think of how often I have tried to prevent any kind of discomfort for them. As mothers, right, our goal is to make their life as comfortable and happy as possible. Yet, I'm now realizing that I'm doing them a disservice, because they aren't being trained in the reality that life is unexpected and that inconvenience is normal. They don't know how to cope with that if I'm constantly preventing any kind of mishap. How to appropriately—age appropriately—and wisely allow them to experience the inconvenience of life and the unexpected nature of life? So they realize that this is normal, and that they can't have the expectation that every person behaves the way that they want them to behave, and that everything's going to go according to plan. It's not realistic.

Cheri:

I do want to talk about the post that you put up on Facebook, but then became a blog post that you then ended up sharing this.

You said, "I'm learning that the more passionate, vulnerable, and heartfelt your words the more you open yourself up to criticism and misunderstanding. That isn't always easy for this girl to take. For that reason I'm contemplating writing about safer topics. Perhaps '3 Steps to Eating a

Chocolate Bar,' or 'The Reasons Why Sleep is the Best Part of Every Day,' or for the win, 'Doughnuts the Sacred Calling'" Worthy topics and far less conflict."

My question is how do you keep helping hurting people when you know they're going to hurt you back? What keeps bringing you back to topics ... although I think we should definitely have you back on for 'Doughnuts, the Sacred Calling.' I definitely want that one.

Amy:

Me too. I want that book.

Michele:

I love doughnuts. Since I lost most of my taste, because of cancer, I can't taste much anymore. Doughnuts is one of things that I really miss. God and I have an agreement. At least I have made the agreement, and I'm assuming that god is in full support of it, but when everybody else has the waiting supper of the lamb, mine is going to be doughnuts.

Amy:

Yes. That's an excellent plan.

Michele:

We can do that podcast later.

How do you help hurting people when you know that you're going to get hurt in the process? Boy, that is a very tough thing to do. Some days I want to run away. I have a couple of close friends that I confess quite often, "I think today I'm going to quit. I think today I'm going to be done. I'm going to stay home, and read novels, and make cookies for my family. This has been fun, but see you all later." It's a very hard thing to do. The temptation is always to ... We don't like pain.

We don't like pain. Our natural inclination is to shrink back from anything that's painful.

How do I press in to it? It begins here. And I might get emotional here:

I can't stop thinking about the cross.

The place of God's greatest pain was the place of God's connection to us. The very place that caused him to bleed out and die was the only place where we could finally approach him. If he had shirked back from pain and suffering to preserve himself we'd all be completely lost. If I'm serious about this call to be a Jesus follower, I have to be willing to lean in to the pain and not run away from it. I have to. That's where it starts for me. It has to start there. The irony that it was at the place of suffering that relationship finally happened.

Then the second is the fact that remembering that those who strike out and wound me in return—they're coming for a place where they're bleeding. They're hurt. I've been that person before who retaliated in the middle of my pain. It wasn't personal to the person that I retaliated against. It had nothing to do with them. It had everything to do with the fact that I felt like I was dying on the inside. Remembering what that felt like and having some empathy for that other person and their pain that may cause them to act out that way helps significantly.

Then the third step, or whatever you want to call it, is that I have to be doing the homework to shoring up my identity in my individual, quiet, personal life before I ever become public. The only way for my identity to withstand the beating that we sometimes take is for my eggs not to be in all of those baskets. I know where my eggs are. My sense of self is very much shored up in the reality of the fact that there's this Creator that's perfect that for whatever reason decided to pick me. I have no idea. Nobody can take that away. Nobody. He picked me when I was always broken and a mess. That means I don't have to perform for him, and so having that established and reminding myself of that, then if somebody is offended by something that I write perhaps I was wrong? Okay, live and learn. Perhaps I was right and they're having a hard time receiving it? That's all right too. Perhaps it's a shade of both? Okay. Guess what—I'm not sovereign. Never claimed to be sovereign. I know who is. Story done.

Mentally processing through those things is helping me learn how to allow myself to step into an environment where hurt people may turn around and hurt me in return.

Besides all of that, I use humor quite often.

Cheri:

A wicked strain of sarcasm that I love.

Michele:

I'm sorry about that. As I told a friend yesterday, "Humor helps it all go down a bit easier."

Cheri:

I'm convinced that sarcasm is a spiritual gift that got left out of scripture. I think it's speaking in tongues, so...

But on a serious note thank you so much for sharing that, because listening something hit me that's really never struck me before. In one of our previous interviews that Amy was sharing that she comes from a very loving family, and so figuring out where her perfectionism comes from—there's no easy source. Whereas in my case I had a very distant mother. We had attachment issues. I've always laid the blame there and given myself a pass. "Of course, I don't

know how to do certain things, because I've never had a mother to teach me. How is a girl supposed to know how to do these things without a good role model?"

I've been raised as a Christian. I had lots of gold stars on my memory charts. I never thought of looking at Christ as my role model as to how to treat people who are hurting me.

I'm a little embarrassed to say that, because I guess it should have been obvious, but it wasn't. I'm recognizing that we can all go to the cross. We can look at Christ as a role model of how perfect love deals with pain. That's powerful. That's powerful for me.

Amy:

It is. I thought that when you finished. I thought *I feel braver just hearing Michele say all of that.* I do.

And "I can't stop thinking about the cross," that's going to run around in my heart and in my spiritual ears for a long, long time.

Michele:

I'm so glad.

If this makes you feel better, Cheri, that is a relatively new insight for me. I mean within the last few months.

Cheri:

I was going to say I don't expect that I know everything that's going through your head, but I haven't heard you say that before, so I'm excited.

Michele:

God's always doing a new thing. I'm so grateful for that. I've been going to church since I was 6 months old, that's a relatively new insight as far as we've heard about the cross. We talk about Jesus's willingness to give up his divine experience for a human experience. We get all of that, but to understand that we really could not approach God until that moment on the cross. That was the supreme moment of his pain and suffering. That's been really big for me. In multiple ways as far as a relationship with others, but also in my own sense of ... it's often when we are hurting that we feel God is furthest. Perhaps we are very grossly mistaken, because when we are in suffering, that's perhaps when we're the closest to the cross when he was closest to us.

It's an interesting thought, huh?

Cheri:

Sorry for the pause. Slow processor here. It's sinking in.

Michele:

I'm still exploring all of that. But we know this, right, as believers we sit there. God's made it very clear the cross was it. The cross was it! But I don't think we fully understand the ramifications or the implications of what that means on a personal basis for us. Personal.

Cheri:

Maybe I need a tattoo of the cross. A temporary tattoo.

Michele:

What I actually did is I got a tiny, little, wooden cross, especially while I was so sick, and I help on to that as a reminder that it all comes back to that. That's been a big token, but something for me to hold and remind myself that that's really the anchor of who I am.

Cheri:

Some of us need these reminders, because at least me, I forget everything so fast.

Michele:

Yeah, me too. I'm with you.

Amy:

That was amazing.

Cheri:

I think we just had church.

Amy:

Seriously, I found myself tearing up over and over. Not because she was so emotional, but the truth she was saying was like Boom! Boom! Amazing, amazing.

Cheri:

If you head on over to the web page for today's episode at [grit n grace girls . com](http://gritnGraceGirls.com) — that's Grit, the letter "n", Grace, girls (all one word) dot com, you'll find several free downloadables, including this week's "permission slip."

It's reminder that you don't HAVE to obey the bad rule that says

"You should shut out all the people who hurt me."

Amy:

Instead, you can focus on the fact that

God gives imperfect people His perfect grace to walk together in Christ.

Cheri:

We hope you've enjoyed Episode 28 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules.

Amy:

Join us for next week's final HOLIDAY BREAK episode, when we'll be WRAPPING IT ALL UP.

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!