

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode 31: Overcoming Procrastination When Perfection Paralyzes You
with Glynnis Whitwer

Amy:

How do you to tell the difference between aiming for excellence and striving for perfection?

It's tricky, isn't it?

Cheri:

One of our listeners put it this way: "My biggest struggle is knowing when enough is enough. Where is the balance of putting enough work or effort into something, *without* crossing the line into perfectionism?"

Amy:

SUCH a great question — I've spent so many years trying to figure this out. And I know SO MANY women are asking the exact same question.

Cheri:

Well, this is Cheri Gregory...

Amy:

...and Amy Carroll...

Cheri:

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

Today's guest is Glynnis Whitwer, author of *Taming the To-Do List: How to Choose Your Best Work Every Day*

Amy:

Glynnis Whitwer is on staff with Proverbs 31 Ministries as the Executive Director of Communications.

Cheri:

If you've been trying to find that line between aiming for excellence and striving for perfection, your search is over. Today, Glynnis has a fabulous answer, just for you!

Amy:

It is so good, we made her say it *twice*. Listen for it.

Cheri:

What's the relationship between perfectionism and procrastination? I find a lot of women don't even think they're related.

Glynnis:

Well, can I start with the definition of procrastination?

Cheri:

You can do whatever you want Glynnis!

Glynnis:

Because sometimes the definition of procrastination is confusing to people. And you think you're procrastinating when you're really are just a good planner. You know, if you schedule things to be done on Saturday because you have more time or you have more energy, that's not really procrastinating. Procrastinating is postponing what's in your best interest to do now.

Cheri:

Oooh...

Glynnis:

That's really where a lot of us have an issue, you know. We put off what we really should be doing. So perfectionism – how do those two things relate? Well – not every procrastination is because of perfectionism, but I think for a lot of us it is, and I think when we struggle with perfectionism, we have an external or an internal vision of how things should be done. And, how they should be done *right*. And sometimes they come from other people but most of the time it comes from within. And it's based on other people but we have this idea of how things should be done right, and if we can't do them right, then it's good to put them off until – whatever. Until we can do them right, or sometimes – we never – we never get to them, because we figure, we'll never do them right! So that's really it. Perfectionism is that – that little voice inside our head that says, 'Why bother? Because you won't do it right.'

Amy:

Now I love in your book how you talk about that there are twelve years of our life – that reinforces that whole idea. What's that?

Glynnis:

Amy I bet you and me would be alike and maybe Cheri too, that I bet you loved school as much as I did.

Cheri:

I'm still in school cause I know how to do school right. It's the one thing in life I can do well!

Glynnis:

I know! And then if you have the slightest little instinct towards perfectionism, school is your happy place because you know what's expected of you. Like, you know what to do to get an 'A'. And I can remember even that first test just thinking, 'okay, if I can make it to the first test, I'll know exactly what the teacher wants, and then from that point on, I will know how to study for my tests, I'll know how to write my reports, I'll know how to do this because I will figure out what that teacher wants and I will do it. I knew how to get an 'A'. Now that doesn't mean I could always get an 'A'...I would've failed Chemistry – let me just put it that way. Even a girl who loves school hits a brick wall once in a while. I realize that I'm too concrete – if I can't see it, if I can't touch it, it doesn't exist. So, anyway, thank goodness my lab partner was a Chemistry Professor's daughter. That's how I passed. With my 'F's' on the test and her 'A's' in the lab, I got a low 'C' and I passed. So anyway, that's it. My twelve years of reinforcing. Here's what you need to do to get a good grade – and then you get out and there's no teacher. There's nobody telling you how to get an 'A'. And if you're a perfectionist, that can drive you nuts! Because that's when you start setting, 'here's what I need to do to get an 'A' and a 'B' is not acceptable! It's not! Not for an 'A' student. It's not! So.

Cheri:

You know I had never thought of it in terms of – you know what you're describing is an external locus of control. Needing that outside authority to tell me what's the right thing to do.

Glynnis:

Oh yeah, and I'm telling you it is *huge* in this generation coming up. We call them Millennials. If anybody works out in the professional world with Millennials, being told what to do is huge. It's hard for them, even worse for us, to be self-starters, to know – is it okay? When is it okay to do something? So, we're all in this journey of realizing that there's no teacher anymore once you get out of school. And you know I work with writers all the time and I think its really hard for a writer because you had your English teacher and that red pen or however you got your grades back – that teacher is *there* –

she's sitting there outside your head all the time and you're so afraid of her! So you just are afraid to start or you're afraid to finish and it can drive you nuts.

Amy:

That's true and for me, that's the thing that I've started realizing had killed my soul. For a while, that perfectionism got me gold stars.

Cheri:

Yeah.

Amy:

And then, it starts to kill your soul because you just walk around trying to read the room all the time, just like you read your teacher for so long.

Glynnis:

Yeah – or your boss, or your mother, or, or somebody who's respect you really wanted. And it's a process of peeling off those layers of expectation to discover our authentic self. That's a years long process. I'm telling you what – that is not an easy thing to do.

Cheri:

Okay – unpack that phrase, 'discovering your authentic self.'

Glynnis:

Well, that your opinions have value, that your talents have value, and they don't have value based in comparison to someone else but they have value because they're yours. That's a really hard thing for people to accept that their imperfections have value because God created us that way. And I say 'imperfections' I should put those air quotes around it because –of course we're all imperfect, but we define perfection based on somebody else's perfection. So I don't know, its just such a constant comparison battle – to not compare ourselves to somebody and be okay with who God made us to be. That's how I got Taming the To-Do List done. That's how I got it written. Because I could hardly start. Every time I started researching perfectionism, it was written by somebody with a PhD, or an MD, or a combination, or even initials that I had no clue what they stood for. I was like, 'I have no initials, you know.' How can I write on this topic? And it really was me realizing that I can write on it because God called me to do it. And he cares about my opinion, and he cares about what I think. And we all need to understand that. God cares about what we think and it's okay. How we think is okay.

Amy:

Wow. It made me tear up to even hear you say that, because I've thought so differently

for so long. One of the things that was transformative for me...you have these two major shifts I think in thinking in this Chapter 9 that we're talking about. And one of them, this is something I've been wrestling with for a while because since we've all three written on perfection, I know we've all three gotten this question – so, is it bad to want to do things well, or with excellence? You said, "Excellence is possible with some things, perfection is possible in nothing." And I thought, oh, that's such a great definition, and that definition makes me exhale, and makes me feel less overwhelmed.

Glynnis:

Yeah. And honestly that was an 'ah-ha' for me writing the book. You know? I've realized that excellence pushes us to *do* our best and perfection pushes us to *be* the best.

Cheri:

Woohhh – woah – woah – woah - woah –woah. Say that again!

Glynnis:

It's okay to desire excellence. Excellence pushes us to *do* our best. Perfection pushes us to *be* the best. And that is – that is where we get tripped up, don't you think? You know, we have to be the best. This airbrushed, social media version of ourselves. And it keeps some of us from doing anything. It keeps me from being on social media. I mean I'm telling you. I was thinking, 'Why would anyone want to hear about what I think?' And then, 'Oh, I can't do graphics well .' I mean I don't know, I can count a whole personal revelation about it. About how – I still – the chains of expectation bind me, you know? Like I want to shake them off, I want them off, but only God can take them off. And that's when we realize that we don't – there's no – He's the best! He's the best! And we just have to be us! If we're not us, then – then there's something missing in the grand His grand scheme if we're not us. We have to be us.

Cheri:

In Taming the To-Do List, you talk about having a 'fixed mindset' verses having a 'growth mindset'. Tell us a little about that and how that applies to all of the things we're talking about here.

Glynnis:

A person with a fixed mindset believes that their combination of gifts and talents is set. So, when you feel like it's set, you're constantly feeling like you have to maximize that. You have to make the most of it. You have to prove – that's probably the biggest thing – you have to prove to others that you have what it takes, and WHAOH if anybody even doubts that you have what it takes because that's what kicks you into high gear. Spoken from the person who is constantly feeling like they have to prove that they have what it

takes! Um, but a growth mindset – what a freedom! Because you realize that you are changing. You’re growing. You’re learning new things. You’re improving – what we have is in seed form. And so everything that we have is given to us in seed form. Every natural gift, every spiritual gift – is given to us in seed form. We have the ability to grow it and develop it and change it and improve it. And so, I think that’s just it – if you think that what you’ve got is fixed and there’s no more and you can’t get more, you certainly don’t want to lose it. It puts you in a very rigid mindset. A growth mindset- growing...I mean if you just think of a child. A child is learning to walk. They never fall and go, ‘Dog gonnit, I’m not gonna do that again.’ You know? They don’t! They just say, ‘okay I’m gonna get myself back up and I’m gonna try to walk. And today I’m gonna stand at the table and tomorrow I’m going to take a step toward the couch.’ You know what if we had that attitude about everything in our life? Like okay, I’m learning this. I’m doing this for the first time. I’ve never been on this day before, todays a new day for me! Wouldn’t that be freedom? If we could just say, okay, this is my first time doing this, and so I’m going to give myself grace, and I’m going to learn and expect that I’m going to fall, and I’m going to get back up again. I think that’s the difference. And do I think we can change our mindset. I think acknowledging that we have a fixed mindset is the start of anything. Acknowledging where you are is the start of anything. And then asking – thankfully we have the Lord who has supernatural power, who comes and lives inside us and gives us the Holy Spirit, and that enables us to make changes that we couldn’t do on our own. So, I think acknowledging, ‘Oh, I do have a fixed mindset. Oh, I am scared to death of failure. Oh, I am afraid of what people will think of me.’ Acknowledge that, and then go, ‘yeah, I don’t have to be like that.’ That’s your first step towards a growth mindset. I’m going to change my mindset. So, hopefully that will be an ‘ah-ha’ for some people.

Amy:

That’s terrific. I absolutely can’t wait for this to be edited and out – because my oldest son is a music performance major. He is wrestling his fixed mindset- trying to wrestle it down to the ground because it has absolutely become debilitating for him in that he’s wrestling with performance anxiety. And it’s a picture of what we all are doing. Unfortunately he has to do it on a stage standing in front of people, so. Um, but yeah, that is so helpful. Especially the picture of the child walking. Love that.

Cheri:

It’s so funny that you went straight to your son, cause my first thought was a conversation I had with my daughter last night and she is 26, and she was telling me, “Mom, I should have these things figured out by now. I should know how to do this.” And I kept asking, “But have you ever done them before? No. Has anybody taught you how to do them? No. Has these situations ever existed in human history? No.” And yet she feels all this pressure – and she even says, she doesn’t feel it from other people –

it's internal – that somehow she should automatically be able to do it. And I can be so compassionate towards her. I can talk *her* through, and then get off the phone with her and what do I do with myself? I do the exact same thing. I think, 'What's wrong with you? How come you don't have this figured out already?' So, it sounds like a growth mindset involves a fair amount of compassion for one self.

Glynnis:

I think so. You know, I think it's letting your failures be seen by others and realizing that you can survive it. I've often – lets say we're at a church setting or a small group setting. I gravitate towards the people with the most messed up lives. I love them. I love being around people who have got this messy, messy past, and it's obvious, and they're not ashamed of it, because there's something about that that makes me, like you said Amy, you exhale, like, 'Okay, okay! Alright! It's going to be okay if other people see that I have a messy past or my life is messy right now.' That's a daily thing for me to tell myself that. I think in this world we are drawn to people who authentically open about their mistakes. And if we want to have relationships with our children, we have to let them see our mistakes. If we want to have relationships with our family, we have to let them see our mistakes. I mean because people don't want to be around people who are perfectionists. They just don't. Cause you will say, "I don't tell you have to be like that." But they will *feel*, 'I have to be like that. I have to live up to this standard.' And we don't do it on purpose. I know, I know, but, I mean, all you have to do is have one person tell you – which my son – you know our kids are our best mirror sometimes, and if we can give them the freedom to speak truth to us, it can change us. I'll tell you one time, my son, my middle son had gone away to college – first one actually to go away and he just went across town. I bawled like a baby. He's 20 minutes away. I could barely get over it for like a week. And then he'd come home and I'd realize he's exhausted. Like, 'why is he so exhausted? Is he studying' Oh, no, no, no, my son was not studying. He was having the time of his life the first time being away from home. Well, that kind of bothered me because I thought he should be studying more. He shouldn't be figuring out how to get out and have fun as a college freshman! And then he would come home and sleep. So he'd be asleep on the couch and I would think, 'This is our time together, why is he sleeping on the couch?' And I got myself all worked up. And, I guess it just kind of leaked out that I thought he ought to be doing things differently. And he once said, "Mom, when you act like this, I don't even want to come home. So...

Cheri:

Oohhhh....ouch.

Glynnis:

Well that hurt but from that moment on I realized that even in just my natural *'I think this is the way you ought to do it, this is the way people ought to do it'*-

It comes off as it's like an aura, an aroma, that we give off to other people. And the more we can go, 'Okay, I messed up here.' We're talking to women who are overwhelmed, and some people are dying to not let other people know how overwhelmed they are. Okay. They are just like – I cannot – in this Pinterest world, I cannot let people see that– my house is a mess. I have friends who still won't let me come over because their house is a mess. I'm like, "I don't care! Let me come over!" That's what we're looking for! We're looking for some who says, "Okay, I'm a mess. I'm gonna open my heart up and my life up and welcome you in." And *that's* who we're drawn to. So if we want to be people other people are drawn to, we have to let go of this. My son saying that to me changed me more than anybody telling me anything. I realized 'I'm going to push my son away the more I try to keep things under control and make this life perfect.' And I don't want to drive people away. At all.

Amy:

I loved – this was a big light bulb moment for me as I read through the chapter again – was that, you said that, 'Not only do we have expectations of ourselves as perfectionists but we have expectations of others.' Which you were talking about with your son. But to switch over to talking about Jesus – he was an unexpected savior. He really was. And if his disciples had not embraced – and I love the way you wrote it – it's beautiful – let see, "They would've missed out on the wildness and beauty of God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness." I get choked up to say it because I – I tend to be the girl who would be like – God, please stay in the box. Like, just please stay there where I have you figured out. And Jesus was not what they had expected at all.

Glynnis:

No, not at all. And you know one of the things I love about the bible is how many failures they put in it. Like – really – if you were Peter, wouldn't you have fought not to have them put in that you betrayed Jesus three times? Wouldn't you have fought not to have that in the scriptures? And yet there it was for everybody to see. And don't you just think that's such a model for us? Let's just be messy together. And I don't mean physically messy and I don't mean cluttered messy, I'm saying let's just accept the messiness of this world, because that's when we get to experience the greatest forgiveness, the greatest love, the greatest connection. Yeah, it's okay to be overwhelmed at times. Of course we don't want to stay there. But it's okay to be in that messy, messy place.

Amy:

We're giving away a copy of Glynnis' book:

Taming the To-Do List: How to Choose Your Best Work Every Day

So just head to [Grit n Grace Girls . com / episode31](http://GritnGraceGirls.com/episode31) to enter!

Cheri:

While you're there, you'll find a fabulous free download from Glynnis that I think is THE CURE for perfectionism when it comes to meal planning. It's a 17-page list of mix-and-match lunch ideas. *(You know how much the kitchen scares me, right Amy? Well this has actually got me EXCITED to get in there and fix food for my menfolk!)*

And you'll also find this week's Digging Deeper, created by our amazing intern Kimberli AND the transcript of today's podcast

Amy:

We hope you've enjoyed Episode #31 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules! Join us next week, when Cheri and I will be processing with you what we learned from Glynnis.

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 BREAK IT!