

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode 43: Growing Up—Leveraging Our Marriages for Maturity

Cheri

Have I ever told you what I wrote home to my parents when Daniel and I started dating?

Amy

I'm sure *that's* interesting! What did you have to say?

Cheri

I sent this long gushy letter about how much we had in common. And then I closed it by saying, "Well, he's basically the male version of me."

Amy

<laughter> Oooooohhhh gracious! I bet that opinion changed about a day after living together. I know that's when the differences between Barry and I started to be glaring.

Cheri

And here's the thing: I missed how egotistical it was for me to say that his best quality was being my identical twin! Which, of course, he totally is **not**. But for almost 30 years, I've been trying my darndest to make him just like me.

Amy

Hmmm ... I might resemble that remark! And it sounds like we're not the only women who've tried to change our man. One of our listeners wrote us and said, "***My biggest problem is accepting others for who they are. Perfectionism nearly ruined my marriage. It's so easy to be hard on the people you love the most.***"

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."

Amy

Our guest today is **Jill Savage**, an author and speaker who is passionate about encouraging families. She is the founder of Hearts at Home and the author of eleven books including *No More Perfect Marriages*, co-authored with her husband, Mark.

Cheri

Jill is here to talk about her battle against the "perfection infection" as she calls it.

Amy

Plus she shares how discovering that Mark is an HSP — a Highly Sensitive Person — has been a total game-changer for their whole family.

Well we recovering perfectionists we love your girlfriend voice, Jill. Two of your previous books were *No More Perfect Moms* and *No More Perfect Kids* and then you have *No More Perfect Marriages*. So that last one, was that just the obvious next book or was there a deeper reason for writing that one?

Jill

Well you know it's really interesting because from the time *No More Perfect Moms* came out the book that was being most requested was *No More Perfect Marriages*. People were saying, "Awe, this book was so good – when are you going to write *No More Perfect Marriages*?" What many of them didn't know at that time – I did share openly in *No More Perfect Moms* our marriage did go through a difficult crisis with my husband leaving and then returning home. I shared all of that in *No More Perfect Moms*, but I had not shared about his infidelity. And so we were still healing from that and honestly I knew that was probably more of his story to tell than even my story to tell, at least if I started telling it he needed to be okay with it.

So about three years after all of that happened which would've been about 2 years after the *No More Perfect Moms* came out, my husband said to me, and we were about 6 months outside of our healing. We saw a counselor for 18 months past all of that crisis. My husband said, "You know I feel like we're supposed to share our story more openly." And I was like, "Okay." You know I was willing but I wasn't sure if he was ever going to be willing! And so we actually did a 10-day *No More Perfect Marriages* series on my blog but we did it together. And my blog readership went from 5,000 to 25,000 overnight.

Amy

Wow.

Jill

Yeah, I think that's how much the story was resonating with folks. You know it – what we wanted with that blog series along with the *No More Perfect Marriages* book was we really didn't want it to be about recovering from infidelity, that's just our story that we weave in and out. What we identified in our own marriage as we did our healing was something that we call the slow fade. And these are places where a marriage – where 2 people in a marriage begin to be drawn apart by centimeters, and so therefore we don't notice it. We don't even realize that it's happening.

That's indeed what happened in our marriage. Because we even said we were speaking each other's love languages. We went on dates. We went on marriage retreats. We did all the right things! So how did we still end up with infidelity as part of our story? And when we had to look at that, it was the slow fade. So we identified 7 of those and that's what we really wrote the *No More Perfect Marriages* blog series and *the No More Perfect Marriages* book about so that it applies for every marriage.

Amy

Wow.

Cheri

Now you talk in the book about a 'perfection infection' that can weaken our marriages. What do you mean by that?

Jill

Right. Well I introduce the concept of the perfection infection in *No More Perfect Moms* and then we carried it out in *No More Perfect Kids* and continued in *No More Perfect Marriages*. I identify the perfection infection as what happens when we unfairly compare ourselves to others and when we have unrealistic expectations of ourselves and of others. And I would say too we also unfairly compare our loved ones to others.

And I think that we are – the perfection infection has always existed, okay to some extent probably at least in the modern age. But I think that particularly since the invention of cable television, since people are going to movies far more than they were 20, 30, 40 years ago and the invention of social media which I personally love, I'm on social media, but if you don't recognize that perfection infection is there, what you are comparing your real life to doesn't even exist and therefore what happens when infection perfection enters in and we look at our real husbands and he doesn't look anything like the guy in the movies, he doesn't behave anything like the novels that we read, our marriage doesn't look anything like *People* magazine

says that successful marriages or celebrity marriages look like, then what happens is we become discontent. In our very real marriage. And we don't even realize that it's happening.

Again it's part of the fade and we begin to think, 'Oh, it's got to be better than this.' And so we start looking even outside of our marriage or we start comparing our marriage to something that isn't real and that discontent just keeps growing.

Amy

So you have another section of your book that I want to read that kind of reveals the way a perfectionist's brain works and you said, "My pride of thinking my way is the right way too often gets in the way. I want Mark's brain to work like mine and when it doesn't my tendency is to criticize or to change him. I want Mark to like some of the things that I like and when he doesn't, I work to change his perspective. And here's what I've learned – Mark's imperfections are my teachers." Tell us more about that.

Jill

Well I'll tell you this is that place that God has just really been growing me. And if you get right down to it, it comes down to pride. And pride often keeps us mired in our ways and determining our ways are the right ways. And pride begins to separate us in marriage.

But when we can allow our spouses' differences to reveal to us our pride, to reveal to us other ways of thinking, all of the sudden our world is expanded, our ability to give grace is made bigger, and those become powerful teachers in our life especially as we allow the marriage that we have – the very real marriage that isn't perfect – as we allow it to perfect us.

That's what I'm talking about when I say that Mark's imperfections are my teachers. Because God is using the places what we tend to rub each other wrong – God is using that to mature me. He is using that to help me to think bigger. He's using that to expand my perspective of this world. And I really think that marriage is about growing us up if we'll allow that to happen.

Amy

Fantastic.

Cheri

Now throughout the book you offer a variety of assessments to help identify differences. You call it the Personal Operating System Inventory. Now those of us who are recovering people pleasers, we work really hard to hide our differences – we try to pretend to be what other people want us to be. Why is it so important to identify our differences?

Jill

Oh this is huge, and that's definitely where my husband sat, okay? So my husband is a major

people pleaser and he so hid his differences that he lost himself and ultimately in the midst of losing himself we almost lost our marriage. Because he pushed himself down so much that then he just felt like he had to do something huge to break out of this 30-year cycle that he was in and he didn't know how. And you know we were somewhat set in the roles within the marriage and he didn't even know how to find his voice.

And I'll tell you he tells this story in the book – and this happened many years ago we were having some disagreement, I don't even remember what it was about – and he usually went passive in disagreements and this time he didn't. He spoke up and he said what he thought about the situation – and we weren't yelling at each other we were just both kind of holding our ground. And you know when he held his ground, do you know what I did? I hauled off and kissed him!

Amy

It's sexy, isn't it?!

Jill

And I was like, "Finally! Finally! I loved hearing your opinion!" You know? It was so huge! I wish he would've – that was an affirmation to him – but that took so much courage on his part. And so what happens though and he mentions this in the book is he would just let things slide, but the truth was they weren't sliding they were pooling. They were pooling that was building up and it was eventually building a wall around his heart. And he didn't even recognize that was happening.

But when temptation set in and he had this opportunity for this new relationship that in the initial weeks and months felt different – eventually it began to feel exactly the same, but you know then that was his kind of open door and when he really had to go back and look at that and both of us learned the importance of we have to have the courage to find our voice to be honest with each other and knowing that about him I had to learn to be safe for him to be honest.

And I think that's really hard especially when you know I am a strong personality and I can disagree and it doesn't – he can disagree with me and that doesn't cause me to shirk back but I have to watch because I have to understand how he's wired different than I am and I need to make it really safe for him to be able to lift up his voice and bring out his voice so that he isn't that pleaser. And begins to be more secure in our relationship and it truly does have some give and take.

Amy

So Jill what kinds of steps did you take to make yourself a safe person?

Jill

That's a great question. So one is to learn how to listen without initially responding so in essence, validating. That's probably one of the biggest things I've learned to do is to validate. And even if I disagree in the moment. Even if he's expressing something to me and I disagree with it, what I've had to learn is that might not be the moment to disagree with. I might need to go, "Oh, okay. Can you tell me more about that? Can you tell me more about what you're thinking? Okay you said this, explain that to me." So all I'm doing is letting him know that I'm hearing him, letting him know that I'm not even going to respond back – you have the floor. So then if I feel like maybe I do want to give a response back a lot of times what I'll do is I'll wait for that response and I'll say, "Will you give me 24 hours to think about that?" And then maybe we could talk about it again and I could share with you my thoughts. So then that – it made it completely safe for him to put whatever he needed to put on the table because there was no disagreement, there was no argument, there was no discussion, it was just – I want to hear you. And I would say that's probably the biggest thing is I've had to learn to hear better than I was before. I was hearing to sometimes disagree sometimes just dialogue but either one of those for him, working his courage up, didn't always help him to feel safe and so giving it a little bit more time and letting him truly have the floor and validating has been a big difference.

Amy

Ugh I feel like learned so much that I need to apply just in those few minutes that you explained it's so good!

Cheri

You know Jill as I read your manuscript, I kept thinking to myself in the early pages, 'Mark sounds like an HSP! He sounds like an HSP! He sounds like an H ... and then I got to the page where you guys said, he's an HSP he's a highly sensitive person! Yes! Eureka moment!

And I'm so fascinated because I don't know that I've actually met – and I know that highly sensitive people are in equal proportions in female and male in our society but this is really the first time I've read about a husband being an HSP. So I'm just curious from your perspective, how has knowing that your spouse is a highly sensitive person, how has this changed your relationship?

Jill

Oh my gosh. It was a game changer. It really was because I kept thinking – I kept wanting him to be more like me. And expecting that he could. And we knew – I mean we had very different upbringings. You know I was raised in a home that was full of love and encouragement and validation. He was raised in a home that was very broken and he was raised primarily by his grandmother and there was abuse in the home.

So part of the reason he still doesn't have a voice is he learned early on that your voice doesn't matter, your opinion doesn't matter, you know in his formative years. So we knew all of that and we always thought that was contributing to our differences but the other thing I knew though - and the other thing I knew though is he has such a tender heart. He takes on other people's feelings and emotions. And we've known that - you know we've identified that as the spiritual gift of mercy but when I learned about - when we learned about HSP recently - it was while we were writing the book.

Cheri

Really?

Jill

Yeah. Okay so it was while we were doing that. And when I learned about it - I shot the text over to him and he took it and it wasn't a surprise to either one of us, but it was huge for him to go, there's nothing wrong with me, you know this is the way I'm wired and I do have like extra antenna in this world. And so it was huge and I think you know it has helped me to better accept him for who he is and I think that's been huge. And then we've identified we have one daughter out of our five children who's an HSP and she has a daughter that is a 4 year old and it so obvious already. So it has been life changing for us. I wish I would've understood it when I was raising my daughter. I didn't. But now she's 25, a mother herself, and I tell you I better interact with her differently because I better understand her now.

Cheri

How so?

Jill

I am not - I'm not highly emotional, so I used to see her being highly emotional as a fault. She's very artistic and so and she feels the worlds around her, she makes decisions based on those feelings and I used to think that was a shortcoming but now I've realized no, this is the way she's wired and so therefore I often times - if she's telling me something maybe she's sharing her dreams or she's sharing something she wants to do, in the past I would be - instead of a dream maker I was a dream taker. So now I just roll along with her and listen and sometimes I'll say, "Do you want thoughts or feedback or are you just sharing?" And she'll be like, "I'm just sharing." And okay, that's good. Because I tend to be a fixer. And with her being highly sensitive and emotional I've just had to recognize that sometimes she just wants to share that and I don't need to be a dream taker.

Amy

That's beautiful and I hear the shift even from the label that we put on people from drama queen which is so negative...

Jill

Yes!

Amy

...to strong and sensitive like Cheri is labeling. You know you shift the label and all of the sudden your thinking about that person shifts.

Jill

Yes. Yes. And it changes your relationship when you can make that shift because then – I mean lets' be honest. Even if you're not criticizing them to their face, you're criticizing them in your head. And when I say that's the game changer – I'm not criticizing my husband in my head anymore – I mean I still criticizing him in my head cause I'm human, you know, but for the things and the amount of things that I used to. And I'm doing the same thing with my daughter and I think that has changed the dynamics in both of those relationships.

Cheri

Well and I'm hearing it in your voice as you're talking about them. I'm hearing warmth and admiration and you can't fake that! Those are going to be tells if you still feel a certain way about them. I just want to say I admire your willingness to change cause that's hard I mean for somebody that's logical and with your personality to accept this body of information rather quickly I just want to say thank you on behalf of HSP's everywhere! We need champions! And so as I read through the rest of the book I was like, "Thank you Jill! You get us!" You don't have to become one of us, you don't have to be like us, but thank you so much for being intentional about making it okay to be, sensitive and strong. They go together.

Jill

And you know what I would add is I think that there are elements to my husband my daughters wiring that does make me a better person. And I've learned to trust that. Like for instance my husband is very intuitive always has been very intuitive. So he would say something like, you know we'd be at the dinner table and have dinner as a family and he and I would be cleaning up the dishes and he would say, "Do you think Austin's okay?" And I'd say, "Yeah, well if he wasn't okay he'd say something." And he'd be like, "I don't know, I think something's weighing on him." And he's almost always right. And I take things at face value. I don't read body language but he does. And so I've had to learn to trust him in those things and honestly then pay attention. And when he'll say that then I'll kind of think back and go you know I need to pay attention to those things. And I'll never see them the way he does. I'm not wired that way but I'll trust him when he

says, “I’m a little concerned about this,” and I can go you know what? He sees things I don’t, and that’s one way he compliments me and I think that’s valuable.

Cheri

Absolutely. Do you have any closing words of wisdom for our listeners who are struggling with perfectionism or people pleasing in their marriages?

Jill

My biggest words of wisdom would be let’s stop looking for the perfect marriage and let’s start allowing marriage to perfect us and to become more like Christ each and every day.

Cheri

Head over to GritNGraceGirls.com/episode43 to enter this week's drawing for a copy **No More Perfect Marriage**.

Amy

You'll also find links to practical resources from Jill and Mark Savage, this week's Digging Deeper Download, Bible verse art, and transcript.

Cheri

We hope you've enjoyed Episode #43 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules!

Amy

Join us next week, as we share what we learned from our conversation with Jill!

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!