

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode 47: Writing the Word—On Paper and On Your Heart

Amy

What comes to mind when you think about Bible study?

Cheri

Do you want me to be honest?

Amy

Of course!

Cheri

I hate to admit this — when I think of “Bible study,” I think “boring.”

I spent so many years studying just to pass the test, I’m still pretty new to studying to LEARN.

Amy

I completely understand! I have to overcome studying for some kind of product or result like getting ready to teach or write. I’m trying to learn to study just to enjoy God.

One of our listeners wrote to tell us:

I have been a Christian since I was little. ... On the outside I am busy and serving Jesus, but on the inside I long for a reconnect with God.”

Sounds like we’re not the only ones who want to change we think about time with God, Cheri!

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

Today, we’re talking with Denise Hughes, author of *the Word Writers* inductive Bible study series and passionate student of the Bible. A popular conference speaker, she is

also an adjunct professor at Azusa Pacific University and the editorial coordinator for (in)courage. She lives with her husband and three kids in the Los Angeles area.

Cheri

If you long to connect more deeply with God, you're going to love Denise's heart for God's word and her strategies for studying scripture.

Amy

Okay. Denise tell us about Word Writers. What's the story behind it?

Denise

Well it all started when I was 12 years old. My brother was in a car accident and was in and out of hospitals for months. And I found myself wandering around hospital hallways quite a lot as a kid. And I found the hospital chapel. And I would go into the hospital chapel with my backpack with my homework from school because our small town didn't have a hospital, So we had to be in this big city hospital far away from home. I was bored and always had lots of time on my hands so I pulled out the notebook one day and I wrote on the first page, "dear diary." I had never kept a diary before and I thought who am I writing too? And the chapel had all these symbol but it also had a cross that was a crucifix. It had you know, the emblem of Jesus there. The crosses at my church didn't have Jesus on them. The cross is at my church were bare. But I was looking at that crucifix and I crossed out the word diary and I wrote dear Jesus. And I started just writing to Jesus. And I was telling him about the day. And you can do that when you have a lot of time on your hands to sit and write and talk to Jesus. And I just sensed such a peace in those moments. That's really kind of what started my love for writing and putting pen to paper is I felt his presence when I was doing that. And then you know time goes by and I go back to school and my brother moves back home, he's released from the hospital and life sort of goes back to normal. And I stopped writing in my notebook. But then years later when I really met God— I grew up in church, I went to Sunday school knew the Bible stories— But when I really meant God as a young teenager and I started reading the Bible for the first time by myself, I pulled out a notebook again as a teenager and I started writing out psalm 51 and then I'll write out another psalm and as I would write out scripture I just sensed his presence again. And the more I was in his word the more I sensed his presence. And so I just kept doing that. I would write out the verses that I wanted to memorize and then after a while I would write out whole psalms. And then whenever I was struggling with a passage that I didn't understand, Which especially then was quite often, I would write it out and kind of look at it verse by verse, chunk by chunk. And so that's really how word writers started, it was really just a way I practiced exploring the word and learning the word.

Cheri

Wow, okay so that is just a beautiful poignant story. I'm just going to feel a little guilty for playing devils advocate here but I'll go ahead and confess my obstacle to the whole concept so that you can triage me out of it, okay? When I hear the idea of Word Writer and writing out scripture it takes me back to school when I had to write sentences that said, "I will not talk during class. I will not talk during class. I will not talk during class. I will not talk during class."

And I don't remember any of that ever teaching me anything or imprinting anything in my brain and I hate my own handwriting. So help me out here Denise. Help me shift my thinking so that I really grasp what it is that being a Word Writer can do for me.

Denise

Yes, if I couldn't make a public announcement to all teachers everywhere I would implore teachers *never* to use when writing as a means of punishment.

Cheri

Amen sister!

Denise

That is the worst. If we want young people to grow up feeling confident in their ability to put their own thoughts into words, then active writing needs to be associated with positive learning experiences, not forms of punishment. We don't learn anything when we're just associating writing with punishment. And the writing teacher in me, because I am an English teacher, *cringes* when I hear about teachers doing that! That is the *worst!* Don't do it! Writing needs to be fun! We want to young students to discover the joy of writing and they can't do that when it's just been used as a form of punishment. So it's so sad that that has happened! I know, I remember being in elementary school having to write out, "I will not..." whatever, So, I totally hear what you're saying. It's legit.

Cheri

Okay so on behalf of teachers everywhere let me just go ahead and make an apology to anyone who's feeling this as an obstacle, we acknowledge it, but we're adults now, so we can grow past that. Right?

Denise

I think writing the words too, it's just wanted it's things were we live in a society where are it's rush, rush, rush. We are always in a hurry, we're always moving fast. We don't have time to slow down. We do our quiet time, we read our Bibles on our phones, on our apps, rather than sitting down, unplugging or turning off the electronic devices and really opening up the pages of the word and being in a printed Bible. And I love all my online apps, I love all my online resources. They're wonderful. But when I can turn those things off and open up a printed Bible, I don't have beeps, and notifications, Pings. I don't have those kinds of distractions. And when I can just write out the words of scripture, it reminds me of when David would play the harp for Saul. It would really soothe Saul's soul. And that's what writing the word does for me. It really immerses me in scripture and it's really telling God there's nothing else that I want to do right now. I just want to sit here and soak in your word.

Amy

Well, one of the things that's really heavy on my heart as a teacher of a Sunday School class at the church and a mentor is how to teach women how to really learn from the word themselves.

So talk to us a little bit, give me some tips as a mentor about how to use writing the word and using that with some mentee or someone I'm teaching.

Denise

Yeah, there are different ways to study the Bible. Obviously there are a lots of topical Bible studies that are very popular and there's a time and a place for studying certain topics of the Bible. We can do character studies where we're studying an individual person of the Bible. We can do word studies where we're looking up the different places for where that word occurs in scripture. We can look up the Greek and Hebrew of a particular word. But the kind of Bible study that I think helps us really dive deep into God's word are book studies. As opposed to a topical character or word studies, Book studies and gives us the fuller context. Even if it's a short book of the Bible, start with Colossians, it's four chapters. Who was writing it? Who were they writing to? What was their purpose? Let's move through the book of Colossians and let's see what Paul was saying to the people in Colossi. And then we really get, we grasped that fuller picture in our minds and then we move onto the next book. So I would encourage all mentors teaching someone how to be in the word to move through each book of the Bible into ask who's writing it, who are they writing to, what was their purpose for writing and then as we move through chapter by chapter. We gain a bigger picture. And then we see how each individual book of the Bible tells the larger story of the whole context of the story of redemption.

Amy

So helpful!

Well, Cheri and I speak specifically to people-pleasers and perfectionists because we might have a little experience with that. How do you feel like God's words specifically frees us from those particular bondages?

Denise

The more we read God's word the more we learn who God is. Over and over again we see that God is holy, God is perfect, and God alone is complete. And the more we have a clear view of who God is, then we also have a clear view of who we are. And I always think back, when I think of perfection, I think back to my second grade classroom. My teacher had a Native American blanket hanging on the wall of her classroom. And it was the kind that was woven on a loom, brilliant in color, full of design and symmetry. In fact, you could fold the blanket lengthwise from top to bottom and the left side would be a mirror reflection of the right side. And our teacher explained that the Navajo tradition was where the weaver would always intentionally we've a mistake somewhere into the design. They did this, it was almost imperceptible to the eye but the reason they did this, it was a sign to say they did not think perfection was attainable by humans, but only by God. To create the perfect rug or blanket or anything, that was a sign of arrogance and pride. Well the teacher explained that we were not to try to achieve perfect grades but we were to do our best, to leave perfection behind. So when we would finish our work, we could go and stand in front of that blanket and try to find a mistake. And I could never find it. And on the last day of the school year, The teacher pointed out the mistake to us. And it

was so tiny in the corner, but there it was, a slight deviation of the pattern. And I've always thought of that when I think of God, he alone is perfect and when I am trying to achieve perfection, that's a little bit like when the serpent said to Eve, "if you eat of this fruit you will be like God knowing both good and evil," well I've learned that my desire for perfection is kind of like that sin of trying to be like God. And I am not God. He alone is perfect. So when I really look at perfection, wherever my perfectionism expresses itself, perfectionism is all about me. It's all about me looking good, me appearing good. And so when I'm focusing on my perfectionism, I have to realize, hmmm, this isn't about bringing glory to God, this is about bringing glory to me because I want people to see how perfect whatever it is that I'm working on. And I think what we really desire is connection with others. We want to belong. We want to connect. Therefore we tried to impress. But then we end up on a treadmill trying to be more impressive than the next gal with just leads to comparison and competition and so I really learned that perfection hinders connection.

Cheri

Yes!

Amy

Yes!

Denise

Perfection hinders connection. And connection is what we're really desiring. But our perfection hinders connection. I also think perfection, chasing perfection is a way of running from shame. Shame over I'm not enough, I'm not pretty enough, I'm not skinny enough, whatever I'm not enough of, I'm trying to overcompensate by finding that one thing I'm good at. And I'm going to be really good at it and I'm going to try to achieve perfection in that. So being in the Word, it always brings me back to who's really perfect here? God. Not me. And too often we go to the Bible, and we see this a lot online and it's fine, to have 20 verses that will help you feel peaceful today or seven verses that will lift your spirits today or whatever, and too often we want to cherry pick scripture as a Band-Aid to help us feel good today. When in fact scripture is about revealing the character of God to us. So the more we're immersed in scripture the more we're seeing who God is and the more we have a clear view of who God is the more we have a clear picture of who we are. And then I can own my perfectionism as an attempt to have something be all about me. And I can just lay that at the feet of God and ask for his forgiveness. And ask him to give me a desire for what he desires for me.

Amy

So good!

Cheri

I'm going to switch the topic ever so slightly because Denise you're the one who helped me understand why I hate cooking. Do you remember that conversation?

Denise

I do!

Cheri

Alright, so, you helped me understand that as an HSP, a highly sensitive person, that the kitchen is just an over stimulating place for me. And I guess that should have been obvious but, it has been revolutionary for me now every time I go into the kitchen since you pointed that out to me. So I and my family are incredibly grateful. I was just curious, what has learning that you're an HSP, a highly sensitive person, why has that been an important discovery for you?

Denise

I'll be honest, I don't like the label HSP, Highly sensitive person, I'm just sensitive about being labeled sensitive.

Laughter

Cheri

I love it!

Denise

But it has helped so much. I just sort of, as a hobby, studied the Myers-Briggs for years. I studied introversion and extroversion. But I think I spent too much time focusing on the E/I spectrum – introversion versus extroversion spectrum. But I didn't pay enough attention to the N/S part of that spectrum, the intuitive part versus sensing. Some people learn/process experiences in their life through their senses and some people learn/process experiences in their life through their, through their intuition, through thinking processes. It was really chapter 4 Susan Cain's book *Quiet* that was a game changer for me. Because she described just the study they did, it wasn't harmful in any way, but that some babies are highly reactive to a stimulating environment and some babies were very calm in a stimulating environment. And what they found was that some of us are just born more sensitive to a highly stimulating environment. And that has been true of me for forever. I don't like bright lights, loud noises, itchy seams in clothes, I cut the tags out, I mean I have a tag cutting ceremony when I come home with new clothes. Like I can't have anything itchy on me. One thing I always saw as a weakness of mine, I'm too sensitive, and I've never enjoyed cooking because cooking is an all five sensory input activity. It requires not only seeing and touching with the chopping and the slicing and the stirring, but it's tasting and smelling and hearing the whistling and the bubbling and – all of it– it's sensory overload. So by the time I'm done cooking, I'm drained. I can't enjoy the meal, I'm just exhausted. And a little resentful because it just wore me out so much!

(Laughter)

So I just don't enjoy cooking because it's sensory overload for me. I would much rather put a frozen pizza in the oven and just read a book on that couch while it's doing its thing. So I have learned though that what I once saw as a weakness like, but, I'm not sure why, but women are

supposed to be the cooks in the family, my husband is a much better cook than I am. And I don't enjoy cooking. But I have learned that I have other strengths. Like for me, I love doing research. Now how many people are doing research? Some people think it's the most boring thing on the planet, But I love it! Put me in a library surrounded by a stack of books and I am in my happy place. But one of my strengths is focusing and learning and research. And that's how I share love with other people. I do all this research and then I want to share what I learned with others. But I can't be in that place of intense focus and study and research if I have all the sensory input going on. I kind of need to eliminate the external stimuli so I can really focus on the task at hand.

Cheri

It seems to me this does wrap right around to the Bible studies that you have written. And then I'm back to your description I'm just slowing down, turning off technology and hand writing God's word as a way of focusing. Almost as a relational ritual.

Denise

Yes, absolutely. It's about turning off all the external stimuli and when we see quiet time or one on one time with God that's exactly what it is. We're one-on-one with Him.

Cheri

Head over to GritNGraceGirls.com/episode47, where you can enter to win your choice of Word Writers Bible study: Philippians, Ephesians, **or** James!

You'll also find links to this week's Digging Deeper Download, Bible verse art, and transcript.

Amy

If you've enjoyed Episode #47 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules, we'd sure love for you to leave us a review on iTunes.

And, we'd love you to join us next week, when we'll be processing together what we learned from our conversation with Denise.

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!