

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode 58: Giving Up Perfection to Gain Life (And More Joy!)

Cheri

We are two weeks, not even quite two weeks out, from the beginning of *She Speaks*. And we're doing fine, just absolutely fine. We've totally recovered from perfectionism and performancism and people pleasing, and we're sleeping like babies.

Amy

Really! Do we have to talk about this today? Some people may not know what *She Speaks* is, but basically, you go and you're with 800 fabulous women where you feel like you might not be fabulous.

<Laughter>

And, you meet with publishers who **may** send you a pile of rejection letters, so there you go. Yeah, we're fine.

Cheri

I like how we've now changed our podcast from Grit 'n' Grace to the Liar's Society.

<Laughter>

Amy

The reality is I have big bags under my eyes, and I'm shaky tired. How about you?

Cheri

Yeah, I've been waking up at 2:37 in the morning with the list of things that aren't getting done rolling through my head. So if anybody out there is going to *She Speaks*, first of all, be sure to come say hi, because we would love to see you. And we would love to, I'd say autograph something, but there's nothing to autograph for a podcast, so never mind.

<Laughter>

But let's also be honest, because this morning we did have a good conversation about what we need to quit trying to get done 'cause we're just going to have to decide we're ready enough even if everything on our list isn't gonna be completely checked off. What did we decide was more important than getting everything done?

Amy

Sleep and rest and feeling like human beings when we get there. You know that really is a huge leap for both of us because in the past, oh my goodness, it would not have mattered how tired or sick I was by the time I got there. I would have finished what I committed to you and to myself to finish. We are letting it go girl!

Cheri

Absolutely! I'm proud of you for even bringing it up, to ask basically, so how much more – I think that's almost how you phrase it – so how much more do we have to do.

<Laughter>

And I, actually picked up on the desperation in your voice, which back in my perfectionistic days, I would not have heard it. I would have been like we are going to finish the thing. We started; we're going to finish.

<Laughter>

Amy

I'm so thankful you didn't do that. I might have put my head down and cried, so, yeah; grace is what I needed today!

INTRO

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 reflecting on what we learned from our conversation with Mary DeMuth, author of *Worth Living*.

Amy

I had an experience this week that tied in so well to our conversation with Mary. Mary said, "In my praxis, my everyday living, I believe that my worth is tied to performance and perfection. And so when I fall short of that goal, this is important, I freeze up. Or I try over and over and over to be perfect until I just exhaust the life out of it."

I loved that.

The fact that her piano teacher said, "You made it so perfect you just took the life out of it."

Wow. Trying to be perfect exhausts the life out of it.

Cheri

Well you know, Daniel is a musician, and he's told me that the word for music that has been edited too much and had too many computer-generated things done to it, is that it's over-processed. And that, actually, our ears do not enjoy music that is perfect. One of the reasons we enjoy listening to the old record albums is the imperfection. So that's why we love a live performance, it's called texture. It adds texture to the music. And there's something about us that resonates with us in ways that we don't resonate with a perfectly slick and exhausted, but perfect; there's no life in it.

Amy

So good. And what I experienced this last weekend as I was spending time with a friend who went through a really, a terrible tragedy, a terrible trauma in her life a couple years ago. And I knew it was a significant weekend for her. So in my brain, Cheri, I had been going, "Don't talk about blank, don't talk about blank, don't talk about blank."

And you know what I did? I talked about it.

Cheri

Yeah.

Amy

Like, in the dumbest possible way. And the minute it came out of my mouth, I just, you know that panic? That horrible feeling like I cannot believe I just said that.

Cheri

You're reaching out into mid-air trying to pull it back.

Amy

Yes, and in the middle I just went, "Oh girl, I'm so sorry." And then I just kept – refocused and talked about something else. Because I knew she didn't want to talk about it.

Amy

And but that night I couldn't sleep-

Cheri

Sure.

Amy

I couldn't go to sleep. I woke up early in the morning, just devastated and sick to my stomach.

But then I just lay there in bed and prayed, "God, would you please give me a chance to redeem this today."

And he was just so sweet to give me time to talk to her some more where she actually brought up the situation. And it was an opportunity to not be dumb. I'll just say that.

And it was so good but I just thought that over practicing in my head actually did me in.

Cheri

Yeah.

Amy

Because I talked about a subject I never talk about, because I was over-practicing in my head. Is that weird?

Cheri

No, I think it's very, very normal and the thing I really want to congratulate you for is that as you woke up and you were ruminating on it, that you recognized what was happening. Because one of the things people say about perfectionists that makes me so crazy is they're like, perfectionists just make everything all about them.

And I'm like, no we really don't, and yet we do. You know? But it doesn't feel that way. Like, you felt so bad for what you'd done because you care about your friend.

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

So really your initial reaction was about her. But there's that line that gets crossed when we are ruminating on it and everybody else would love to move on, but we can't forgive ourselves, somewhere in there it becomes about us and so you were able to give that to God and look for fresh opportunities to not stay so stuck on your mistake. It was, "Oh I'm so sorry, Amy. Does this mean you're still human?"

Amy

Well thank goodness for Brené Brown, can we just, once again thank Jesus for Brené Brown.

Cheri

Amen!

Amy

I'm not being facetious. I'm being for real, because that afternoon, after our second conversation, where God did give me a chance to redeem the situation, I was reading *Rising Strong* and just hearing her once again talking about the difference between guilt and shame. Perfectionism will lead us to shame every time. Guilt says, "I said something dumb and insensitive." Shame says, "I am dumb and insensitive."

Cheri

Oh, yeah.

Amy

And that morning, lying in bed, I actually said that. "You are so dumb. You're so insensitive."

And when I read it, gosh it's bringing tears to my eyes. When I read it in the book, I thought, Oh I've gotta switch that.

I do care about people. That's why the perfectionism is so devastating. And that's where it actually came from.

Cheri

Deep love.

Amy

Yeah, deep love, and a deep longing to connect. And yet it's what keeps us from connecting. It's so destructive and such a process to break up with it.

Cheri

So instead of saying, "I'm dumb, I'm insensitive." What did you shift it to?

Amy

That was a dumb thing to say. God, help me to redeem that.

And he gave me that opportunity; he's so sweet like that.

Cheri

And it's okay to say, "That was a dumb thing to say." If it was dumb.

Cheri

I'm not saying that to you, right now.

<Laughter>

Amy

It was.

Cheri

But it is such a difference. Because part of what you're doing is you're holding out there. You're not saying, "I didn't say that." You're not walking away from responsibility. But you're also not internalizing and saying that's part of my DNA, I am this kind of a person. You're holding it out, looking at it with some objectivity and saying, "Wow, that was a dumb thing to say. That was an insensitive thing that I said." And when you name it and surrender it, then there's actually something you can do about it.

Amy

Mary talked about performance. Her whole thing about not shaving her legs when she was-

Cheri

I was just looking on my notes on that, trying to figure out how to work that in. Can we do the permission to not shave our legs? How can we throw that in this episode? Woo-hoo!

Amy

I wish, I wish. I'm a dark-haired girl; it would get ugly really fast.

Cheri

I'm Armenian; do you want to have a competition when I visit this summer?

Amy

Yes, let's do. Poor Barry. Two girls with hairy legs hanging out at the house.

But you know, she makes the point that, by golly, really nobody else notices.

Cheri

Exactly.

Amy

We don't have to perform because nobody else is really paying attention, they're thinking about their stuff. And I just thought, "Oh, once again, this whole performance and perfectionism is so self-centered." And you're right. As we grow, we should recognize the self-centeredness when we're stuck there.

If I stayed sick to my stomach, that's self-centered in a lot of ways. It's just navel-gazing. You know, it looks like humility but it's not. It's pride and self-centeredness and an overestimation of our own importance. But when we start focusing on others, we're not performing. It really becomes caring, rather than just trying to do the perfect thing.

Cheri

You know, lately I've been discovering, and I haven't figured out exactly if there's a formula to it, but I'm finding myself recognizing sooner in a potential conversation or in an email I'm writing, the point at which I'm starting to make it all about me. Like, I'll think of something to say, and I'll ask myself, "Is that gonna move us forward? Or is that just gonna throw the spotlight over to me and make me feel good in the moment?"

And you know, sometimes I'll still say it, because I want the spotlight. But it's just, I'm recognizing this, or maybe it'll give us all a good laugh. Those are generally worthwhile.

But especially in an email where I'm finding myself either over-explaining, or going into too much detail maybe in some kind of a protective, defensive, or even look how great – I'm like, "What would happen if I cut this email down to just the first line?" Just you know, focus on the one thing rather than packing it all in. And it's really been freeing.

I'm just starting to feel like, oh, is this what it means that it's not all about me? Is this what it looks like to move on. I'm learning to spot some of that unnecessary navel-gazing.

Amy

And I know in the past that all that explaining and stuff is really, it really is all about us, and it's to get the other person on board. It sounds like humility, and 'oh I'm so pitiful,' and 'I'm so sorry,' but really it's manipulative. It's to get the other person on board with our point of view. Even if they're the ones that we've hurt.

Craziness!

Cheri

Okay, do you not see the pained expression on my face? You know you can stop talking at any moment cause-

Amy

Well, I only recognize it, because I've done it. Yeah.

Cheri

The more words I'm using, the more I'm trying to reach in and change their mind so it matches what I want them to – oh my goodness.

You know the whole conversation about prioritizing people over the tasks that we need to do:

the productivity, the performance. It took me way, way back; years and years ago. I think Dan and I had barely been married three or four years. And we went to a marriage encounter.

It was an amazing weekend. When we got to the end, and we had an opportunity to share what we had learned, I stood up and I took the mic. I didn't know what I was going to say. And I literally burst into tears, and I said, "You know, this is the first time I've understood that I've been treating my relationship like a To-Do list."

And that you can't approach relationships like procedures. Oh, that lack of finality, it could always go wrong.

I'm sure that's vulnerability and fear that takes over at that point, but I think, at least for me, that's where the performance mentality and the checklist mentality comes in, because I know how to do that and feel good about it. I don't know how to just feel good about a relationship no matter what circumstance it's in. I guess I use those performance metrics to judge my worth in the relationship.

Amy

Oh, I can so identify with that. And you know the thing that I've come to realize and appreciate over the years, is there's just no formula.

<Crying>

Cheri

You had to go speak truth again.

Amy

I mean, everything in us and everything in our world, and I hate to say, but especially our Christian world, wants to formulize everything. And especially marriage, I think, and parenting.

Cheri

Oh yeah.

Amy

If you just do these things, it's all gonna turn out okay.

And number one, that's not true. We know. And number two, to reduce relationships to a formula is so sad. It's just so sad, because we're all so different.

Cheri

Well, and of course, the only relationship I don't want reduced to a formula is your relationship with me. Because I'm way too complicated for that. I'm way too intriguing and quirky. How dare you reduce me to a formula, but I would like to reduce the rest of you to a checklist.

Okay. We just lost all of our listeners, Amy. They're never gonna tune in again.

Amy

We're so terrible.

Cheri

The thing that I kinda jumped on, and I have been thinking about ever since, is the idea of trusting vs. entrusting. And I think there's a big difference there.

Amy

Entrusting is that full surrender. It's a placing yourself completely. Really the only one we should do that to is God. Because everybody else, including us, is going to fail in some way. And so, there's inevitable disappointment if we entrust our self to a human being. And Mary pointed out. Jesus didn't even do that. He knew who he could entrust himself to.

Trust is beautiful and it's important, but it has some limits. And it has some boundaries that the word 'entrust' doesn't seem to have. I don't know if that makes sense.

Cheri

Oh, it makes total sense. I hear so often, "We have trust issues, we have trust issues." And I thought, no, it's not trust issues; it's entrust issues.

When we say 'we have trust issues,' what we really need to realize is the issue is we have entrusted ourselves to the wrong people and that, at least for me, when I think of it that way, I'm less cynical about the people who've let me down. I'm like, well, of course they've let me down. Because that's what people do. Making the distinction between entrusting and trusting allows us to take a candid look at what people actually can and can't give us. And how much we can and can't trust them without going overboard and giving them everything and being massively codependent. Or pulling completely away because you can't trust anybody, so you're just gonna go live alone on a mountaintop.

Amy

Well, and the difference is being crushed by disappointment or not.

Now I won't say that I'm never disappointed in people, but it just doesn't shock me when I am.

And so it's not overwhelming, because I kinda know, well, yeah, I'm gonna disappoint them one of these days.

Cheri

Well, you pulled out a bad rule from this episode; what is that?

Amy

Perfect performances lead to love.

Cheri

Okay, you keep doing this to me. I keep staring at these going, "Yeah, and why is that a bad rule?"

Amy

Well girl, I'm not pulling them out of thin air. They're kind of being pulled like a painful sword out of my heart.

Cheri

Oh man, oh man. Okay, but, when I step back and take a candid look at that, I know it's not true. And this, I think, is one of the advantages of the significant age that we are approaching or have reached; at some point we recognize the exhaustion, you know? When you're in your 20's or 30's, you think you can actually get there, and Mary talked about the treadmill that goes nowhere. And I think at some point you get a little more willing to say yeah; yeah, it's time to turn it off and try something different.

So, what's the new fact that we can focus on instead?

Amy

I'm already perfectly loved by God.

Cheri

Oh, I love that. And then you chose a beautiful scripture, first John 4:18.

Amy

'There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.'

And I wrestled with that, because I thought, does that really go with our conversation?

Cheri

Oh yes.

Amy

I was like, oh, all this perfectionism and performance is rooted in fear. The fear we won't be

loved; the fear we won't be enough; the fear that we won't be connected to people; the fear that we fall short. It's just, yeah.

Cheri

And I think it's important to recognize that it's legitimate to be drawn to perfection. But it's not our perfection; it's the perfect love of God that drives out our fear. On our own, as we strive for perfection, all we're gonna do is generate more fear. So, no fear in love; perfect love drives out fear.

Amy

Beautifully said.

Cheri

Head over to GritNGraceGirls.com/episode58

Amy

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

Cheri

If you've enjoyed Episode #58 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules, would you share it with your friends? You'll find super easy "share" buttons on the web page for every single episode.

Amy

Be sure to join us next week, when we'll be talking with Carey Scott, author of *Uncommon: Pursuing a Life of Passion and Purpose*.

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!!!

Outtakes

Cheri

I love that you had so many great aha moments and organized thoughts from Mary's episode. What I have is completely disorganized, so we're just gonna pretend that I am practicing

spontaneity this morning. How's that?

Amy

Oh, awesome.

Cheri

I'm gonna just let you start us off and see where we want to dive in. So, lead us off.

Amy

Yup. Well, gosh.

Mary's ... Let me start again.

Cheri

No, you don't get any do-overs on this show. You must get it right the first time!