

## ***Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules***

Episode #61: Love & Limits — Raising Our Children to Know God Through Our Parenting

**Cheri**

So, Amy if you could go back 25 years and give your younger self ONE piece of advice about being a mom, what would you tell her?

**Amy**

Oh, this is kind of easy. I'd tell myself to relax for heaven's sakes. You don't have to know everything and do everything right to be your child's best mom. You just have to be yourself.

**Cheri**

I would say the exact same thing. I think you and I are a lot like the listener who emailed to say,

**"My biggest struggle with perfectionism and/or people-pleasing is that I feel I must be ready at all times with the right answer."**

**Amy**

I feel the weight of that, and I felt the same way for so long, especially when I was a young mom. I'm glad we're interviewing such a string of women who are showing us how to do things differently!

**Cheri**

Oh, absolutely!

**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 Erin MacPherson, co-author of ***Put the Disciple into Discipline: Parenting with Love and Limits***. Erin is a national speaker and author with eleven books to her name in addition to multiple publications and

compilations. She lives in Austin, TX with her Assistant Principal husband and her three kids, Joey (10), Kate (8), and Will (5).

If you'd love to be a little less "how-to" and a lot more "heart, too" with the little people in your life, you're going to love the practical ideas that Erin has for you!

**Amy**

Erin the title of your book, *Put The Disciple Into Discipline: Parenting With Love and Limits*, I love that. So tell us where you came up with that title – what the heart is behind it.

**Erin**

You know it's interesting. When we first came up with the book proposal, the title was going to be *Stop Disciplining Your Kids*, which we knew was really going to make a lot of people mad. And I was actually at Focus on the Family, and they were talking to me about that. And they were like, "Oh...that's not going to go over well," and then they were like, "but maybe it will." But the idea is just that we have this idea of like as a parent you have to follow this rule and this rule, and you have to do this, and put your kid first, and all of a sudden parenting feels like this daunting, heavy thing instead of this way to really like disciple our kids to follow God and connect with them. And so we decided we needed to talk about how not just stopping discipline but turning discipline into discipleship. And so, that's how we came up with that title.

**Amy**

So, what's the difference between discipleship and discipline?

**Erin**

Yeah that's a really hard question; I wish I could answer it really fast.

Now I have to tell you, a lot of this wisdom is not me; it's my mother. I need to give her a whole lot of credit, because my mother was raised in a really, really messy household, and she remembers just praying that she would never be the kind of parent that her parents were. I grew up in this, like, beautiful household, where I was disciplined from the time I was born ... I'm so fortunate. And so a lot of these things are things that my mom has taught me, and things that I learned as a child, and that I'm now carrying down to my own kids. And so the difference between discipleship and discipline...discipline is like giving your kids the justice – whatever they deserve for whatever they did, so they break a rule, they get a consequence. And oftentimes, we need to do that as parents. But one of the things that my mom has always said that strikes me so heavily is that Jesus does not treat us with justice in our lives – he treats us with justice at times – there are times that we get exactly what we deserve...and then there are other times that he treats us with grace and mercy. And mercy is when, even though we deserve a consequence, He gives us mercy. And that, with our kids, can look like us saying, "Hey, I know you had a

bad attitude. You messed up. Let's talk about this. Let's start over. I'm going to give you a little bit of mercy right here. Let's figure out how we can move forward." And that's discipleship. And then, the next step is, there are times Jesus gave us grace. He died when we don't deserve it all. And that's the equivalent of our kid messing up and us taking them out to ice cream. You know what? There are times in parenting that that works.

There was a time when I was little, and I was lying to my mom about brushing my teeth. And so every day I'd be like, "Oh yeah, I brushed my teeth," and then I'd go off to school and my mom would go in, and she'd be like, "You didn't brush your teeth." And my mom kept saying, "That's really gross." And I'd say, "I promise I'm brushing my teeth." So anyway, the day that she found my toothbrush, like in the back of the cabinet, she went to the store. And she bought me a book about a girl who told a lie to her mom and how it, like, spiraled out of control. And when I got home from school that day she was like "Hey, I bought you a book." And I was like, "Score!" I loved reading. And I read the book, and during the book I was like, "Oh...I'm lying." My mom and I had this whole conversation about lying and how it affects you, and so while I did not get a consequence per-se, I got a reward for my lie – I learned so much more from that, because my mom disciplined me through it. And I think that's what discipleship looks like as a parent.

### **Cheri**

I love that example. I was going to ask what it felt like on the receiving end of this, and one of the things I'm already picking up is this takes time. Discipline would've been faster. A consequence would have been faster than going out, finding a book, spending the time to then have the conversation after you've read the book. Because it sounds like she set you up for a discipling conversation, engagement, but she had to do some work to lead to that. So she had to have a lot of intentionality to do that.

### **Erin**

Yeah, that's what I was going to say – it's not – this type of parenting is a lot harder. Because you don't have, like, "Oh, you put your kid in time out, and you're done." You have to be really intentional, and I have to find myself very prayerfully thinking about "Okay, my child did this. How do I handle it? Do I do justice? Do I give them mercy? Do I give them grace? And how does God want me to handle this? And you're right; it's a lot harder. It takes a lot more effort. It takes a lot more risk. It takes a lot more prayer. But I do think in the end, that's how you connect to your child's heart, and that's how you help them to see God for who He is."

### **Amy**

Well, that's what I was thinking is discipline is all about external consequences, whereas, discipleship becomes an internal thing in the heart of your child.

**Erin**

It does. It's hard. I mean, like, I'm working on this with my son right now who has decided to be a little bit mouthy. He likes to argue a lot. And there are times when I'm like, "Stop arguing," and there's a consequence for it. But you know, the other morning my husband and I were like, "Okay, let's try something new." And I woke him up really, really early before school, and I took him out to Starbucks and had coffee. And we just talked about having a kind, soft spirit and having a teachable heart – paired with all the other stuff – like, this is also a process. (It's not to say that you never have consequences.) I feel like I'm starting to have this conversation with my child where he understands that we're looking out for his heart and his spirit, and he also understands that we're trying to help him grow and become a man that loves God.

**Cheri**

You're making me rethink all sorts of things. The desire to go back in time and start over or to have a new child to do right – no no, I don't want to do that. No matter how perfectionistic I am, I have no desire to do that. Okay, so your book is founded on 4 pillars. The first one is discipleship, not discipline. So I want to talk about the second one, because this one is so important for our listeners who are recovering perfectionists. And this one just hit me – the whole idea of *desire, not obedience*. Can you explain what you mean by desire because that sounds so unChristian? I don't hear any sermons being preached about desire.

**Erin**

Right? And I think it also sounds unChristian to say not obedience because we are told from the time our babies are born, like, expect obedience. Expect first time obedience. I can't tell you how many times I've heard don't ever let your kids say no to you. But my mom, who I'm going to go ahead and give her all of the credit again – really believes that expecting first time obedience teaches our kids to follow the rules because they're afraid of a consequence, whereas teaching our kids to desire God and to truly desire what's right, teaches them to obey out of their heart. And while desire can be a bad thing, desiring God and desiring to truly obey God because they love Him – that's like a really huge, long-term goal. I mean I'm not there yet as an adult, but I would love it if my children, by the time they are 40 or 50, are truly desiring God in every way. And their hearts truly reach to God, not because of a rule or something that someone told them they needed to do, and it has the same end result of obedience to God, but a whole different way of getting there.

**Cheri**

You talk about perfect love is better than perfectionism. This is an Ellen chapter. I love how you guys go back and forth, back and forth. And I love her interpretation of a kid who says, "I don't care," and she says it really means, "I'm scared to care." Or a kid who says, "I can't," really means, "I'm afraid I won't be able to." The key here is to reorder her desires. To help her desire trying more than to desire getting it right. And then she goes through some reframes. So the kid says I don't care or I can't. "Oh Sarah we both

now that's not true. One of the reasons I admire you so much is because you care so much. Do you wanna talk about why you felt like you needed to say that?" Or for another example, "The kid who was able to score 6 soccer goals in his game last weekend is certainly not going to let a few long division problems stand in the way is he? Let's talk about why you're feeling that way." And I found myself just tearing up, because I don't remember anyone talking to me that way. And then I realized, I can start talking to myself this way now. I mean is this really the way your mom talked to you and the way you talk to your kids, at least some of the time? I'm not asking whether or not you do this perfectly, but I'm just wondering – is this real?

### **Erin**

Well I'm getting a little teary, too, because I'm realizing how fortunate I am, because my mom was raised in this, like, critical household where she never was able to do anything right. And so, she was so intentional when we were kids to do exactly what you just said and, of course, there were mistakes and there were times. I make mistakes all the time with my kids, but overall that was how my mom talked to me, and I find myself talking to myself that way even now. You know I hit a place in a book that's hard, and I'm like, "Hey, I've got this. I can do this" and this whole idea that trying matters so much more than the end result...it really is freeing. It is freeing. I hope its freeing to my children. I had a situation this weekend – my son, he struggled in a soccer game, and he normally does really, really well. And he basically every time he got the ball, he just threw it away. And I asked him what was going on and he said, "Well, my coach yelled at me for making a mistake earlier in the game. I lost the ball, so then I just gave it up, and I thought, "Okay. How do I teach him that it doesn't even matter if he loses the ball 100 times, but that he has to be trying every time to do the right thing?" And, conversation we're still having, like I said, is conversation.

### **Amy**

Well, what occurs to me is that before we can give this to our kids, just like what Cheri was saying, we have to give it to ourselves first. It's a whole mindset to talk to your children this way, and if our mindset is different and perfectionistic for ourselves, we can't give it to our kids.

### **Erin**

Yeah, I agree. We're so hard on ourselves when we make mistakes. You're right. And we have to learn how to do that, and then we can give our kid that same grace.

### **Amy**

So one of the things that you talk about is that a kind word turns away conflict. Talk to us about that. Your third pillar: connection, not control.

**Erin**

This is one thing that my mom has learned since I was a child. When I was little, I was raised in a household where conflict was kind of pushed aside, and we were just told everything was going to look good. And my mom has learned this in the future, and I'm trying to learn it now. That conflict is actually a good thing. Because it's what pushes us to grow closer to people, but angry conflict isn't a good thing. So when you're feeling conflict with your kid, my mom always tells me walk towards your kid instead of walking away, like press in, say more. And so, it's not to say that you should get angry and yell and have conflict, but instead you need to push into people. The more struggle you're having, the harder you need to push into them and the harder you need to work to connect with them.

**Amy**

That's really difficult for people pleasers, because it's easier to walk away.

**Erin**

It is easier to walk away. And I think it's also really difficult for – and I'm learning this with my pre-teen child who is starting to get argumentative. It seems easier to want to walk away from his arguments instead of trying to think what's fueling them. And I think, I'm imagining – I'm assuming you both have raised teenagers. That, with teenagers, pressing into a teenager who is argumentative or causing conflict seems like it would be really hard, but I'm gonna learn that.

**Amy**

Sometimes it is easier to say, "Okay, we can't talk about this anymore right now." Because that, Ooh, those argumentative teens, man, they can push your buttons.

**Erin**

I agree, and I do have to say that my mom has told me over and over. And she does with Joey, too, (that's my son) and she says, "I want to talk to you about this. I know that it's important, and we need to make this connection with our hearts. But I'm not ready right now, and neither are you, so let's set the time." 'Cause you're absolutely right – talking in the middle of the conflict is angry. So it's always the fact that you're gonna come back around, and you're going to press in. And that's a people-pleasing thing, too, like; you kind of want to run away. But by telling them, "Hey, this matters enough to me to fix it." As a people pleaser, hopefully, that will make you feel a little bit better about the conflict.

**Amy**

Absolutely.

**Cheri**

This comes back around to – then it becomes an ongoing conversation. It’s not one and done. It not, “Oh good, we put that behind us. Whew, dodged that bullet. It’s we’re going to keep coming back to it and kind of weaving it into the tapestry of the relationship.

Okay, so the fourth pillar is growth, not assistance. I saw that throughout the book, but it really it hit me, I’m thinking especially for those who are highly sensitive people; it really hit me in the chapter on bullying. And the very specific thing that I really narrowed down in that chapter was teach your kid about the flat face. What is that all about?

**Erin**

You know, my mom, she’s the director of a private school, and she’s been a school principal, school leader, for 45 years now. And she that every single time she’s had a bullying situation at any of her schools. The key is the flat face. She teaches the child who is being bullied. She basically says, “Immediately put on your flat face.” Which means, basically, take all emotion out of your face and all caring out of your face. Even if on the inside you’re torn up, just be like – no smile, no frown, no tears, nothing, and just be like, “I don’t care about this” and walk away. And my mom says, it pulls all the power away from bullies when you take all the emotion out of your face. And that’s not to say you can’t run into the office and start crying to a teacher or call your mom or your best friend and start crying to them, but the moment someone is bullying you or hurting you, take all the emotion out of your face. And I really love that, and again, this is another thing that works for adults. Like, I’m sure you guys talk about sensitive people a lot. It works right?

**Amy**

Well, I’m thinking about how well it served me as a mom to have a flat face, girl, those teenagers. They will ask you some questions and deliver some news that will set your hair on fire, and you have to practice the flat face, so you don’t show how shocked you are.

**Erin**

I’m getting scared. I’m getting really close, and I’m like, “Oh, no.”

**Amy**

It’s fun. It was the best stage for my boys.

**Cheri**

So how would one practice the flat face?

**Erin**

My mom says she tells some of the kids who are struggling with it to look in the mirror or talk to their mother or their friend and just practice. You just practice, pretending like there's a curtain going over your face and there is zero emotion. No happy or sad. And so I've, kind of, taught my kids, and fortunately, I haven't dealt with many bullying situations yet. I don't know if that will change, but it hasn't happened yet with my kids, so I don't have a lot of experience in this. But I just have them look in the mirror, just done. And then, you can call me and talk to me all you want.

**Amy**

That's fantastic!

**Cheri**

I just think it's so important to realize this is not something we do naturally. That it takes practice for most of us. And even when think we're flat face, we probably still have certain tells. I'm one of those twitchy kind of people, so I think I need to go back and do some more practicing. This is something I was taught in one of my teacher training classes. He called it something else, but you're reminding me how incredibly valuable it is just as a life skill for any of us.

**Erin**

It's all about teaching our kids growth so that they can succeed on their own and all these little skills that maybe we don't think are important. I think it's important, as parents, to connect with our kids in these ways, so they're ready. Like I said, my kids haven't dealt with this yet, I'm sure they will. We have those tiny little things that we're teaching them to grow so they can stand on their own, and their little, tiny, little growth areas that teach them to be adults that follow God and love people.

**Amy**

It moved me too to hear that your mother as a principal is teaching these things to her students. We have listeners that aren't married but may not have children, but if you have children in your life, you can put these skills into place with those children just like your mom does with her students. That's powerful.

So what closing words do you have for us, Erin, just if you think about our audience sitting there? What would you love to tell them today?

**Erin**

I think I would love to tell them that I know how hard it is to be a mom. I have 3 kids, and they're all crazy, all the time. And feeling like it's so much pressure to get it right, especially with discipline, and I wanna encourage moms that you really can't mess it up. You really can't ruin your kids for life with anything you do. But intentional, prayerful discipleship is a way that you can grow closer to your kids but also help them to grow closer to God, and so I just want to encourage them. Start on your knees. Start praying and thinking about how you can really connect with your children in this way, and I think its gonna just – God will guide you along this path.



**Cheri**

Head over to [GritNGraceGirls.com/episode61](http://GritNGraceGirls.com/episode61).

**Amy**

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

**Cheri**

If you've enjoyed Episode #59 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules, would you leave us a review on iTunes? You'll find a link on the web page for this episode.

**Amy**

Be sure to join us next week, when we'll be processing together what we learned from our time with Erin!

**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**

*(Computer noise)*

<Laughter>

**Amy**

Little, computer noises.

**Erin**

Sorry, guys. This is with my Skype. This is going to be like – you're going to have to edit this out. But, I can't turn off my Skype because we're on Skype, but people keep sending me things. I'm so sorry. Like, aah!

**Cheri**

This is the real world. We're not a perfect podcast!