

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #62: Love & Limits — Raising Kids with More Than Good Behavior

Cheri

Well, I know where I want to jump in on this one.

Amy

Okay.

Cheri

Yeah. I feel like – I want to call up Erin and tell her [that] her ... No! I want to call up my kids [and] tell my kids that it's all Erin's fault that I was not the world's best parent. That if only she had written her book...

Amy

Ahhhh...

Cheri

...30 years ago, then I could have been the parent that they needed.

Amy

'Course, you know she was a child herself when we were parenting, but beyond that.

Cheri

I'm not sure she was even born yet when we were parenting our babies!

Amy

We should demand to have access to her mother for sure, then! The way Erin described her was amazing.

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 Erin MacPherson, author of *Put the Disciple into Discipline: Parenting with Love and Limits*.

Cheri

What has lingered with you since we talked to Erin?

Amy

Well, the whole idea of switching the mindset from discipline to discipleship is just – it's so riveting to me, because I did parent as a Christian. It has always been my heart's desire that they would know the Lord, but I really do think I was overly focused as a young mom on their behavior. And, you know, to be quite honest I think I crossed some lines into creating – my brother says – we don't want to create whitewashed tombs as children. You know their outsides are all cleaned up, but their hearts are not right. And it's not that I didn't care about their hearts, but I was overly concerned about the outward behavior, because, here it comes, it reflected on me.

Cheri

Oh yeah. I'm right there with you girl.

Amy

It just hurts to say it. But it's true.

Cheri

I'm remembering one particular birthday party that we were at – the kids were probably five and seven. They were across the yard from me. I caught their eye... I did this – I beckoned to them, and I had both kids right in front of me in an instant. I suddenly noticed that other parents were staring at me in what I perceived to be awe and admiration. And you know I must have broken my arm patting myself on the back that day. Just feeling like, "Oh yeah, I got this parenting thing down." And I'm not saying that the obedience was bad. Once again, I was focused on the eternal perceptions of me, and I took in the other parent's admiration. What looked like admiration. Who knows, they could've been horrified that my kids were so trained like dogs. I have no idea what they really were thinking about me at the time. But I just remember I was less concerned about my kids and more concerned with how other people saw me at that point; that I had my kids under control.

Amy

And what Erin expressed about the way her mother parented, I kept thinking that I loved the story about her brushing her teeth. And see I would have never – I wouldn't have gotten to where her mom did with addressing her heart with the book, because I wouldn't have let one day go by without the teeth being brushed because that child was going to school and breathing on people. And goodness knows I wouldn't have wanted parents, teachers, or students to know that my child had not brushed her teeth. But her mom let the bad behavior go for a little while with a purpose. I would've never done that.

Cheri

Amy Carroll's children were gonna have minty fresh breath, right?

Amy

Combed hair and matching clothes. Ugh. Yikes.

Cheri

And you know this is something I think you and I probably both know in hindsight and that is – it will be cheapest for them to make mistakes and fail at the youngest age. When they get older and they get out of the house and they're out of our – I almost said control. Then I looked for a word that doesn't mean control, and I couldn't come up with one – you know then when they make choices like not to brush their teeth, or whatever it might be, the stakes are so much higher.

Amy

Or go to class. I shouldn't throw any aspersions around but...

Cheri

No, its okay, we've certainly been there. What I LOVED about that illustration with her mom was the intentionality. I think we must've used that word a dozen times, with how intentional she was. And what does it require to have that kind of intentionality. Well you've gotta have time. You've gotta have time, and you've gotta be able to pause long enough to think about what's really going on. You've gotta be able to process what's going on in your head, and then I would have to process my own stuff and then shift my thinking to the child and what their real, actual need was. And all of that requires that life not be moving ahead at breakneck speed with a list that's so long that there's no margin for kids to be kids and for there to be the need for discipling. Discipling takes longer than discipline.

Amy

That was my *Grit* takeaway. It really does take intention to parent this way. It takes more time, more thought, more patience, and as you just pointed out, more focus. Because I was so distracted by keeping the house clean, doing the volunteering at church. You know that mile long list that you do besides mothering. And I think I did a lot of distracted mothering and this take focus and paying attention and being present.

Cheri

Absolutely. Absolutely. You know one of the things I was thinking about after our conversation with Erin. Just contrast me with her mom's ability to be present... when Ann Marie was in eighth grade, she qualified for a spelling bee. And at the spelling bee, I think she was in the top three or four and we were thinking she might even win it. And she asked for a definition and then she spelled the word correctly, but she didn't re-pronounce it before spelling it correctly. So she was disqualified, not because she misspelled the word, but because she didn't follow the exact procedure. And she was devastated, and I'll never forget my reaction because it was so

classic. First of all, in the car, we trashed the judges and the rules. We were like, “That was so stupid, that was so dumb, that was so – it wasn’t even about spelling.” So we totally did a kind of red herring and that wasn’t about her feelings at all. It was kind of a – let’s divert it and not deal with the actual thing that happened or hear from her. And then once we got done bashing the judges and spelling bees all over the world, the rest of the drive home was in silence, and then I laid awake all night – I mean I was absolutely anxiety ridden – because I felt like it was about me in some way, shape, or form. It didn’t occur to me even in the days afterward to say, “Hey honey, how you doing? How do you feel about it? How did you experience it?” I only knew what I saw from the audience. But I had no idea what it felt like from her perspective, and I had no capacity to say to her, “Hey honey you tried your best. What did you learn? What’s your takeaway?” And just, I couldn’t sit with her. Because she did, she cried and she bawled. We used the let’s trash the rules and the judges instead of let’s just sit for 5 minutes and be sad with her. *Inside Out* hadn’t come out yet, so I didn’t know how to do that kind of thing.

Amy

What I hear you saying, and what I hear in what you’re saying is how I felt this morning in getting ready for this. Because we are both moms who are finished mothering, for the most part. You know, you’re never finished is what we’re finding out, is you do parent your adult children, but it is so very different than when they’re small. And it’s hard to look back without just a lot of regret. And yet I know you well enough to know that the same is true that is of me is we were pretty good moms. You know, not perfect moms, but you have great relationships with your kids; we have great relationships with our kids. And that’s really long term the measure of how we did, I think. What are the relationships like when they become adults? So it’s not total failure. And you know I want to go back just a minute and kind of address the regrets. Because even if you’re a mom listening that’s in the throes of parenting kids that are at home right now, here’s some good news for you. Your mistakes – your parenting mistakes – they don’t have to be fatal. If you were listening to Erin last week and you’re like, “Wow I have never done anything that vaguely resembles that;” its really okay! We really realized at one point, especially with our oldest child, Anson, that you know that first child, they’re just an experiment; let’s just be real.

Cheri

Awe. We’re so sorry, firstborns everywhere. We’re so sorry.

Amy

I know. You’re just an experiment. You are the guinea pig. And oh, my gosh, I was so hard on him, Cheri. Because in this effort to make his behavior reflect on me well, and look, here’s when I started really realizing it. Anson, when he was little, he would get a stuffed animal. And we’d say, “What are you gonna name your stuffed animal, Anson?” And he would say, “I don’t know, what do you think I should name it?” And he would refuse to name his stuffed animals. I would have to come up with the name. Now, that is cute the first time. About the fifth time you’re like, “This is really not good. This is really, really not good.” His grandparents would say, “Where do you want to go out to eat, Anson?” “I don’t know; where do you wanna go out to eat?” I mean do you hear the perfectionism and people pleasing in there? And guess who he caught it

from? His momma. That's right. So it really took some – especially, we really became intentional I'd say at the end of elementary school, middle school, particularly, where Barry and I had some hard talks and some real assessing, and we thought, we have to do some undoing of some of what we have done. We read *Boundaries* and tried to help him establish his own boundaries, and we just tried to empower him to make his own decisions even if it meant that he failed. And you know he really has come such a long way. So if you are a parent that has regrets, and I mean all of us do...

Cheri

I was gonna say, which means you're alive and breathing.

Amy

Exactly! You're a human being, congratulations! Just know that some of this can be undone and there are do-overs.

Cheri

First of all, you're right. I do have a good relationship with both of my kids even though I have regrets looking back at certain things. And in hindsight, well, I have the wisdom now that I didn't have then. We had kids so young. We're always saying if only we could have the energy of twenty with the wisdom of fifty; that would just be awesome! But we parent from who we are at the time, but one of the things I have learned is that I can take those episodes that come up. In fact, you know I hadn't thought of the spelling bee for a long time. We can bring that up with our kids, and we can have a conversation with them, after the fact. And we can say, of course, my kids are 24 and 26 now. But I will, I'll have a conversation with Ann Marie and I'll say, "Hey, I was thinking about the spelling bee. Do you remember the spelling bee?" Now, one of two things is gonna happen. Either she'll have totally forgotten it, because she truly has moved on from it and it really wasn't one of those things. And so I'm just the one who's hanging on to it and that's important for me to know. Or she'll be like, "Oh yeah, I remember the spelling bee." And it's an opportunity for healing to take place. And I know sometimes people are like, "Well, it's in the past; just leave it there." What I'm finding with both of my kids is that as God brings things to mind for me, to kind of run it by them and to let them know some of the things that I've been thinking and pray-cessing and some of the regrets I have. And the things I'd like to go back and talk with them about, and often I'm able to share some details with them that are helpful to them. Where they're like, "Oh, that's where you were coming from" or "that was what was happening," and we can apologize to our kids. We can say we're sorry, and we can make it part of an ongoing dialogue. It doesn't have to be you yank off the scab and slap on a Band-Aid if it was something that has kind of been infected over the years. You can leave it out to the open air to kind of – I'm just gonna quit using the wound analogy. I don't want to go too far. I come from a medical family. You don't wanna know how far I would take that analogy without flinching. But my point is, it probably won't hurt as badly as you think it will. The honest dialogue with an older child, in retrospect, that is a teaching moment and that it still parenting. It's a different kind of parenting. It doesn't totally fix. But it does allow...at least for me the regret is then replaced with something I can do. We can work on that thing together now rather than dance around it. "Oh I'm not gonna talk about it. We're not gonna talk about it. We're a

family that never talks about anything.” No we can talk about it. And it doesn’t mean it’s going to dominate conversation. It just means that it’s no longer on the list of things that shall not be spoken in this family. One of my goals with my kids now is that the list of things that shall be spoken is really, really long and the list of things that shall not be spoken is as short as possible. It’s a little hard, but it’s not as hard as living with quiet regrets on my own.

Amy

And what you’re talking really goes back to what I marveled at with Erin. And I feel like I had this relationship with my mom, too. Erin’s mother parented her well, but as she parented her well, she was really mentoring her to become a parent. And what you’re talking about, whether it’s your small children or your adult children, that as we talk through these things, two things are happening: You’re modeling that you know you’re not perfect and that you make mistakes, but you’ll try to make them right. And then, you’re also modeling what good parents do and should do like Erin’s mom did for her.

Cheri

One of the things that’s been so interesting for me and comforting is Ann Marie and Jonathan often do remember the things I bring up, so there often is an opportunity for some healing, but most of what they remember are things I’ve forgotten. They remember a lot of good things. They focus on things that I have forgotten in my perfectionistic dwelling on everything I’ve done wrong. They are the ones to bring up the things that I’m like, “Oh, yeah that was a thing but it couldn’t have been that important.” And they’re like, “No, most of our life with you, mom, was about these things that were more important than the things you’re obsessing on” which is really, really nice.

Amy

Well, I’ve had that kind of conversation with my mother, too. I remember five or six years ago she said to me, “You know Amy I just really regret that I spent so much time cleaning house instead of time with you.” And I just looked at her and I was honestly puzzled. Now, my mom does have an immaculate house, there is no doubt about that. But I just looked at her and said, “You know mom, the only thing I really remember about my childhood is feeling secure and loved and happy, and you know that is my overarching feeling about my childhood. You did good. You don’t have to worry about that.” And it was a gift to be able to give that to her; I could see the relief in her face, and my kids have had sort of similar conversations with me, too.

Cheri

One of the things that Ann Marie will say to me over and over again, and she tells me that she and Jonathan have conversations about is they feel like Daniel and I did the best we could with what we had. And I know that can sound like the boobie-prize, but they really mean it. They understand where both of us came from and she means it very affirming like, “You and dad have come so much further, and you really have pushed yourselves as hard as you possibly could,” and so they both have chosen to be very empathetic and very understanding, rather than bitter and resentful. And so, even if we messed up a lot, something about our home atmosphere still caused them to develop empathy, still caused them to be the kind of people

who can be empathetic and understanding of a lot of different kinds of people including their very fallible, imperfect parents.

What's the bad rule that you pulled out of these episodes?

Amy

We discipline to change our child's behavior.

Cheri

Boy again, that's so easy to make that the goal in the moment. When you're in a hurry, when you just need the kids to get in the car, when you're an overwhelmed mom. You just – and I remember those days, and I would even tell myself, "Just for today. Just for today, I'm going to do it this way." And the problem was "Just for today" became this month, became this year, became this decade of parenting. When its so behavior focused – I just need you to do what I need you to do so I can feel better right now. It makes sense in the moment, but it's not a good long-term trend.

So what is the alternative?

Amy

We disciple to shape our child's heart. It's so funny, because we know that heart and behavior are not separate from each other. That's the thing is I think it would be easy for some people to listen to Erin's interview and our talk and think, "Well if I didn't discipline for behavior, I'd have rotten kids." Well no, the whole point is is that we're shaping a heart, that then desires to behave correctly, desires to follow God, desires to walk in obedience. 'Cause even I, when I re-listened, to the interview, I was like, "Well, we do want our kids to behave!" And we do. But Erin's point was that when we shape their hearts then the behavior follows. It's just a point of emphasis.

Cheri

Good point. So we talked about the *Grit* aspect of all of this, that it takes intention to parent this way, it takes more time, it takes more patience, it takes planning ahead. How about the *Grace* part of all of it?

Amy

Well, I think as parents, even with the two of us today. It seems to have boiled up a lot of emotion in both of us to talk about it. But Erin's model is really full of grace, and all she was encouraging us to do, that I want to do. I want to be a woman like this that does this for my children but also my friends and my husband that we remember the grace that we've been given and we extend it to the people around us. And instead of the behavior thing being the focus of our parenting, that it's an all-encompassing desire to see our children living a life of grace in God's grace.

Cheri

And then you had pulled Psalm 78:1-7.

Amy

So this passage is longer than what we usually do, but I just gotta read the whole thing. It is so rich.

My people hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from old—things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell them to the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders He has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which He commanded our ancestors to teach to their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, that they in turn would tell their children.

Awh! And the angels sang. That's the goal: that our children would know the decrees of the Lord and now we live in the time where Jesus has paid for our sins so we can actually not just tell about the decrees, but the relationship we can have with the Lord.

Cheri

Head over to GritNGraceGirls.com/episode62.

Amy

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

Cheri

If you've enjoyed Episode #62 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 Chrystal Evans Hurst, author of *She's Still There: Rescuing the Girl in You*.

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!

Outtake

Cheri

Alright. I was going to tell you something. Oh, something I realized about you, about the difference between us.

Amy

Uh-huh.

Cheri

You have adult onset perfectionism.

Amy

I haven't thought about it.

Cheri

It was when I asked you how you responded to a teacher who said you need to live up to your academic potential and you would have blown it off. I was like, who is she? She's not a true perfectionist. She's not one of us. She's an imposter!

Amy

Sometimes I just think I'm a contradiction.

Cheri

No. It makes total sense. It was like this blinding flash of insight after that conversation between us. I was like, "It's adult onset."

Amy

I've never heard it called that.

Cheri

Well, I made it up.

Amy

I love it!

<Laughter>