

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #65: Finding Your Confidence – Using your Hardest Days to Find Your Strongest Self

Cheri:

So, Amy, I've been reading through my high school journals.

Amy:

Ah-hah! Anything juicy we should know about?!

Cheri:

I cannot believe how much time I spent worrying about BOYZS. That's what my best friend Lisa and I called them. Not boys, they were BOYZS. It was all wasted time because not a one of them knew I was even alive.

Amy:

That might have been my experience exactly.

Cheri:

You know, the thing I journaled the most about was who I wanted to be. And it wasn't so much who I wanted to become as a natural part of growing and maturing. But it was always how I wanted to change myself. It was always something I wanted to make different about myself overnight.

Amy:

All for the BOYZS!

Cheri:

Exactly!

Amy:

Even though we grow up, we still tend to long for instant change. One of our listeners said it this way:

“My struggle with perfectionism is the phrase 'I want to be...' and it's always followed by a way to impress others. Instead I need to accept and want to be who Jesus created me to be, the best me I can be. “

Cheri:

I love her honesty. It sounds like she is seeking the confidence that God offers.

Amy:

Yes. True change is ultimately accomplished by rooting it in Jesus and doing it for the right reasons.

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 **Tricia Lott Williford**, author of ***You Can Do This: Seizing the Confidence God Offers***. She is a remarried widow, an author, blogger, speaker, and teacher. Tricia collects words, quotes, and bracelets, and she lives in Denver with her two sons and her new husband, Peter.

Cheri:

So, if perfectionism and people pleasing have stolen your confidence, Tricia has a ton of wisdom and encouragement for you!

Amy:

Well, Tricia, as we emailed back and forth to get ready for this interview today you confessed that your book *You Can Do This* is your favorite of all the books you've written. So tell us why, why do you love it so much?

Tricia:

A lot of authors will say that they can't choose a favorite book, because it's like choosing a favorite child. But if you don't tell my other books, the truth is that this really is my favorite book. The reason is because I launched into the book-writing world after my blog went viral after I was widowed in 2010. So my first two books are about recovering from that. In the first book, called *And Life Comes Back*, it's a book about single parenting and the bottom fell out of my world and how do we move forward from that and learning to live and breathe again. And then my second book is the parenting side of that called *Let's Pretend We're Normal*. And so, that one is about helping my kids realize and work through the death of their dad and pretending like we can do this until we felt like we could. That had kind of made me an expert in grief and single parenting, and those are not things that I want to be good at or skilled in or be an expert to follow on. The reason I love, love, love this book is because it's a book that I had to write. It's the song that needed to be sung. So *You Can Do This* I feel so excited about because it's not about sadness. It's not about grief, but it's about confidence. And it's about embracing what God has for you and embracing just the confidence that you can have because you belong to him. I love that because I believe that there's something in it for every woman. It's my same writing voice so people who have read my stuff before will feel like they're still

sitting down with a friend that they remember, but it's just so joyful. And I really loved writing it, so this one's just my favorite one so far.

Cheri:

Very cool! So I laughed, and I cried as I was reading chapter 1. And what I want you to do it is tell our listeners about Mrs. Wretched, and why she was such a pivotal person in your life.

Tricia:

Mrs. Wretched, God love her. She was the first bully of my life, and she was my fourth grade teacher. I had just moved to a new school, and I had been in a private Christian school, kindergarten through third-grade and for lots of different reasons we moved to a new school, a new neighborhood. And I was suddenly going to be thrown to the wolves of public education. I walked in that very first day with my Rainbow Brite backpack, and I found my desk and found my locker and really wanted my teacher like me, and she sat behind her desk and said, "Name and bus number." Never greeted me, and I'm very highly sensitive person, and I was an even more highly sensitive little girl riddled with a lot of anxiety. And what I really needed was someone to reach out to me and say, "Hi, good morning I'm so glad you're in my class! We're going have a great year this year." And I ended up putting my stuff in the wrong locker, because I didn't know that there could be another girl with the name Trisha. And she belittled me in front of my classmates, and the first chapter unfolds with all these different experiences of different encounters with her where she just belittled me. She really just belittled me and made me feel like I couldn't do this. And there was one moment where, it was Write to Read week, which is kind of like spirit week for nerds. And so we had something special every day, like dress up like your favorite adverb or your favorite character from a book or from American history, and I chose to dress up like Betsy Ross. I came to school, and I have this long blue dress. And I had my hair all done up super cute, and I carried a picnic basket with an American flag inside. And I came to school, and I walked up to Mrs. Wretched and I said, "Where should I put my stuff for PE today?" No, I knew what to do with my stuff for PE that day, but really I wanted to give her like this holy moment to just take it all in. Here I am, Betsy Ross, the cutest thing you've ever seen. Clearly, I took this assignment to heart and you can be impressed. This will be our first positive interaction. And she said, "Why are you dressed like this?" And I said, "Because it's American history. I'm Betsy Ross." She said, "That is tomorrow! You may go and take your PE clothes, and you can change." And I walked down the hall, and I changed into my stupid jeans and dumb T-shirt. And I took down my hair, and I took off the pretty blue dress. And I stuffed it into this picnic basket that now just felt like this stupid prop. I just felt so dumb. And I could feel the tears coming, and I really didn't want them to come. But you know how that is when you can feel this happening, and you just can't stop this. And so I walked back to my classroom, and I walked in. And she said from her desk, loud enough for all my classmates to hear, "You are crying again! You're crying again! I've never met a child with less confidence than you. I certainly hope that you grow up to have more confidence as an adult than you have as a child." And I didn't know what confidence was. I just knew that I didn't have it. And when an adult sticks a label on you, it sticks. When they just decide that this is who you are. And so I came home from school, and I was like, well, I'm done with that I'm not going back. I'm not going back to this school or to this classroom. I'm not doing this anymore. And my mom said,

“Oh yes, you are.” And the very next day I went back. But she said, we have a new plan. We’re going to create a game, and it’s called operation smile first. Every time she looks at you, you’re going to be smiling. You’re going to be the girl who smiles. And every time that you go in there, every day you’re going to think of something kind to say to her, every day. And we will practice before you leave for school in the morning. We’ll think of what that’s going to be, but you’re going to be the one that smiles first so that, no matter what, you will always have a smile on your face, even if she doesn’t smile back. You be the one that smiles first. I had some serious questions about this plan of hers, because I did not think that this is going to work at all. I said she really doesn’t like me, and my mom said, of course, she does. All teachers like their students. We’re just going to work through this. We’re going to barrel through. Well, she went to a parent teacher conference shortly after that and found out that I was right. Actually, it wasn’t that she just didn’t like me; she didn’t like any of us. She should have retired long ago. She said to my mom, “You know what, I like my students. I just don’t smile.” Okay, then don’t teach the fourth grade, just don’t. Just do a favor to humanity and get a job that requires you not to interact with someone and have the emotional responsibility of creating the environment. Just do something else, but she didn’t. She chose to spend a year with me. And so we set about this task of this game, this little contest that we will have, and she never ever threw me a bone that year. I smiled every day. I took my compliments to her every day, and it wasn’t until the very last day of school that she said to my mom, “Tricia has been the most delightful little girl. I have so enjoyed her. She always has something nice to say, and she smiles all the time. What a delightful child you have!” And my mom looked at me and winked at me, like, *you did it!* And it always makes me feel really tender, really emotional to recall that, because I shouldn’t have had to be the hero of the story. I shouldn’t have had to do that. She should’ve been the grown up. She should have been the grownup who did that, but she didn’t. And she let me flounder about in her classroom and try to shine my little light in her fourth grade room. The beauty of that, I can now say 30 years later is that I learned confidence. I learned what it meant. I learned how to be the one who smiles first, and I learned how to be the one to say something kind to someone else even if they never say something kind back. And I think that actually that that’s the heart of confidence, is believing that there’s a place for you here and believing that your light can shine and believing that you can be the one who will change the course of this path, because you have it in you. So that’s the story of Mrs. Wretched.

<Laughter>

You both have tears in your eyes!

Amy:

I do! I have tears on so many levels, because I was a fourth-grade teacher and I would like to go jerk a knot in Mrs. Wretched for ruining the reputation of all fourth-grade teachers....

Tricia:

You know, it was a pivotal year!

Amy:

(In audible) And if I was your mother, I probably would have gone and punched Mrs. Ratchet in the nose. That is so amazing and beautiful. So incredible! And just, your take away from that, Tricia is so powerful.

Tricia:

Well, my mom had talked a lot about that. She and I talked a lot about that throughout the years. How she had prayed for my journey into this fourth grade classroom asking God to give me a nice teacher, and she couldn't figure out why God had said no. And for years she didn't know. She even went through a process of her own guilt thinking why didn't I take her out of that classroom, but you didn't have that kind of voice in the classroom back then. Parents now can come in and maneuver and change things to suit them and their families and their children, but it just wasn't like that then. And so she really had her own parenting journey to work through to figure out, *"God, why did you let my daughter have this experience?"* But it wasn't until I was an adult that she was able to see, *"Oh my gosh, You were there, You were in this, there was something bigger than that year. You were creating my daughter's character in that space of darkness of being nine years old in a classroom where I was bullied everyday."*

Cheri:

On Facebook, there's this meme that goes around that says, *"You can't write a new chapter of your life when you're still rereading the past."* There's like all of these slogans about how you should never look back, just look forward. And yet, in telling this story in your book, you encourage us to journal and you actually give the prompt, *"Write down what you remember about the ways your confidence has been taken."* And I found myself very drawn to that, that exercise. What do you think is the point of focusing on the past like this? Do you agree with the Facebook memes or do you disagree? Why do you invite the reader to even do this?

Tricia:

I've seen that meme as well. There's a lot of truth to it. The heart behind what I invite the readers to do is the belief that I have that the untold story goes unhealed. If you continue to move forward without really processing how you've been wronged, and the people who've said things to you that have taken your smile right out of your soul. If you move forward without acknowledging that hurt and acknowledging that pain, then that goes unhealed. And I believe that healing comes from telling the story a thousand times. And when you tell it, when you write it down on a page, and when you contribute a little bit to your journal, when you find space to do that, something inside of you heals. So later when someone says something to you, *"Hey, I'm in this really difficult situation. Have you ever encountered something like this?"* if you've written that down, then you have the words to say that to them, because it's healed a little bit. And so, I definitely advocate, as well, for not living in darkness, not living in the past and certainly taking the next step forward in doing what is in front of you, the very next thing to do. But sometimes before you can move forward, you have to acknowledge where you been so that that can heal because the untold story is the unhealed heart. And you have to identify what those things are so that you can then say, that is true. That's who I was and that's what

happened to me, and because of that, I can move forward with this new awareness of who I am.

Amy:

One thing Cheri and I have talked about a lot is how much we used to play it safe. We avoided taking risks to avoid criticism. So how did criticism impact you as you went public with your life as a writer?

Tricia:

One of the things I found is that the Internet is really a coward's playground when it comes to arguing and casting judgment and being a mean person. And I started writing for a little while for an online political magazine, and I discovered that people didn't come there to hear my charming stories. They didn't come there to hear. They came there to argue from their left or right side. And so, when they encountered my story, they were still in their left or right side argument place and in a place of defending. So they would respond to my little anecdotes and little essays and slices of life with this venomous hatred, and these horrible words that were so hurtful to me. Because they forgot that there's a person behind this. They forgot that there's a person who wrote this. They forgot that this is, actually, this is my life and my story. Now that has only happened a handful of times on my blog where I actually had a troll who would come find me and look for things to argue about that. I don't understand that approach to life. I don't understand that kind of fire starting. That's just not who I am. I don't operate that way. So one of the things that I realized is that these people – I had a friend, she said, "You know what? These people who are doing this to you are probably sitting in the dark of their parents basement eating Doritos and wearing boxer shorts, and they're not actually living their own lives.

<Laughter>

Amy:

No life, right.

Tricia:

They're in the dark cave of living in a vacuum and just attacking the people who are out there, vulnerable, living, living life. And living life is a vulnerable thing to do. And so, one of the things that I thought about is the fact that, well, it was stifling me. It was stifling my creativity in every other way, because even when I would go to write on my own blog or write my own book manuscripts or go to turn something in. I've found that I was afraid of these people, these faceless mob-like, amoebic, nebulous things that felt like they were following me into my thoughts, into my dreams, and into my home and affecting my writing voice. And I had to silence them. I had to silence them, and one of the ways that I did that, I love to throw dinner parties. That's one of my favorite things. That's a love language that my husband and I share together, and we love to do that. And one of my favorite questions to ask someone is if you're throwing a dinner party, who would you have, who would you invite to your dinner party? It can be alive or dead, current or in the past, they can be famous, they can be your next-door neighbor, it can be everyone in your family. It can be just anyone. Who do you want around

your table? And I started to think through that on this path of being so criticized, and one of the things I realized is that if I wouldn't give this faceless, amoebic, mob-nebulous crowd a place at my dinner table, which of course I wouldn't, then why am I giving them any airtime? Why am I giving them any kind of voice in my spirit? If I wouldn't invite this person into my home then why am I inviting them even deeper into my soul? And it became this boundary that I was able to say, "Oh, well, I'm set free from that actually then, because if they're not welcome at my table, and there's a lot of people who are welcome at my table. It's an open and gracious place. It's not like I only have four safe people. The bulk of my world is safe, and I would love to just have a dinner table calendar and just have people over, because that's my favorite thing. So it's not like I only have a limited amount of people that I'm willing to let in. That's not the case. But people who are mean and who will change the course of a dinner party are not welcome here. And so, if I won't let them there, why would I let them affect my life? Why would I let them change the channel of what I have to say? I won't! So that allowed me to filter what people were saying so that I can find my voice again, because I felt like I had a few things to say.

Amy:

What a great practical measure for all of us, even the listeners who don't write! We all have a voice. We all have things that we're called to say. Well, and I want to come to your dinner table, P.S.!

<Laughter>

Tricia:

I would love that! Come on. Let's have dinner. It would be so fun!

<Laughter>

Cheri:

Amy used to be my message development coach. That's actually how we got to be friends. I had heard so many Christian women get up front, and say, "Well, I'm not very smart, so I don't really know or I'm very bright so I'm probably not pronouncing this Greek word just perfectly." And I actually came to Amy and said, look, do I have to fake stupid in order to be a Christian speaker? Now, Amy gave me confidence to be Cheri Gregory the girly geek who speaks.

Tricia:

I like that!

Amy:

She's a brainy girl!

<Laughter>

Cheri:

I'm settled with that for myself, and so I'm going to ask you to answer your own question that you posed in the book, which I love! When did it become socially acceptable or desirable to be a woman who is not smart?

Tricia:

It is a question that I asked often, because I think that most of the women of the world are smarter than they let off –

Cheri:

Amen!

Tricia:

– smarter than they indicate. I did not intend to be single again later in life, but I was. And in that time and in that season, it is a whole different ballgame to enter the dating world as a single mom and as a woman in her 30s. Just a whole different situation than it was back when I was 18 or 19 when I was last single. But I found myself playing some of those old tapes and feeling like I'm probably more attractive if I act like he's my hero. If just pretend like I don't know how to do this then he gets to be the hero and gets to swoop in with all the answers. And he'll like himself more, and then he'll like me more because he likes himself more. And all of a sudden I had all of these alarms going off inside my head like, *"Wait, wait this cannot be, this is not who I am. This is not who I am."* And I feel like, we as women are forever needing to rectify the choices of the first woman whoever said, *"Oh, thank you, smart man! You're so much smarter than I am. Please let me step aside and make myself smaller, so you will feel bigger and better about who you are."* It's really difficult to be the smart girl in the room. Men don't love it. Other women don't love it, because you're changing the rules of the game. And it takes serious guts to be a smart girl because somewhere along the way we all relinquish that. We laid down that card and said, *"I'll be smaller if it makes you feel better about yourself,"* and that has to stop. And thankfully, I changed that tape in my head before I entered into marriage. I am now remarried to a tremendous man. Whose personality is naturally bigger than mine, which means that I can be as big as I want to be without him needing to work to be bigger than I am. But he also believes in my confidence and believes in my courage and believes in my intelligence and so I never had to sacrifice that in order to get his love or attention. I think that somewhere along the way we started doing that. We started saying if it would make me more popular to be dumb then I will do that. And we forgot that it's not better. It's not better! That's actually not the goal. Popularity is not the goal! Being rescued is not the goal when we are fully capable of standing on our own. It's just way better to use the tools and the skills and the knowledge and the confidence that you have than it is to let someone else be the hero of your life. Be your own hero. Stand up tall and do it because you're smart and you can! Do it! I don't have any daughters but if I ever did, I feel like that would be the greatest challenge in today's culture is to teach her to be smart. And to teach her to embrace everything that she is, to stand up and be brave and make no apologies for being an incredible woman.

Amy:

Well, smart men who embrace smart women get the best wives, right brainy girls?

<Laughter>

Tricia:

I can see that. I'll raise my glass to that!

Amy:

We might not be the easiest wives, but we're the best!

Tricia:

I agree, definitely not the easiest. If it takes guts to be a smart girl, it takes even more to be married to one, for crying out loud. It is no small feat.

<Laughter>

Amy:

So, what closing words would you have for us, Tricia? We who are reforming perfectionists, people pleasers and highly sensitive women, what do you have to say to us just as encouraging, parting words?

Tricia:

What I want to say to you is that you are here for reason and the world needs your story. The world needs for you to step up to the plate. It kind of makes me emotional, it makes me want to cry, because I want that for all of the women and all of our sisters and our daughters and our roommates and our cousins and our aunts. I want that. I want you to step forward into your life. Run hard into it and jump into it with both feet because you're here for a reason. You're here for a reason! We need, the world needs. We all need for you to live with every color in your crayon box. Live bright and bold and be brave and courageous. Because you can do this, and we need you to show up for us, for all of us. Please, you can do this!

Cheri:

Head over to [GritNGraceGirls .com/episode65](http://GritNGraceGirls.com/episode65).

Amy:

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

Cheri:

And if you'd like to chat with other Grit and Grace Girls about this week's episode, come join the conversation in our private Grit and Grace Girl's Facebook group.

Amy:

Be sure to join us next week when we'll be processing together what we learn from our time with Tricia.

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've got to oil this chair! Whenever I edit, I remember. I don't hear the squeaky chair until I'm editing. And I'm like – It's like the cat door. It's all that happens throughout an entire episode. Whap, whap, whap, squeak, squeak, squeak. Whap, whap, whap, squeak, squeak, squeak.

Amy:

And I need a pillow for my chair to get me up a little higher. And I forget until I sit on this darn, low chair every time. That's what you get for getting an office chair from Goodwill. Anyway.

Cheri:

Yes, we're professionals!

<Laughter>