

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #67: The Love Cycle: Showing Love in All the Right Places
with Karen Ehman

Cheri:

So Amy, has anyone ever accused you of “overthinking things”?

Amy:

Hmmmm... yes. Just recently a friend pointed out how much I parse and agonize over past conversations. How does your overthinking manifest?

Cheri:

The further I get from Perfectionism, the more I see — in hindsight — of course, how much it just kept me in my own head...constantly thinking and re-thinking and re-re-thinking. I was, like, always trying **so hard** to come up with the Perfect plan ... and then never really taking ACTION.

Amy:

I have come to love the term navel-gazing or maybe hate the term. And so, that’s one of the things now is I’m like, “Oh, Amy, you’re naval-gazing, stop it!” And I guess we’re not the only ones, because one of our listeners said:

I think the mental fatigue is what is most exhausting... always questioning myself, my motives, and grading myself, and wondering how I'm doing, am I doing enough and generally beating myself up all the time for failing. (Rrrr! Self-preoccupation) I think, "If only I could keep the right focus all the time! Off of me and onto Jesus!" And then I feel guilty about that, too! It's hard to escape my brain.

Cheri:

EXACTLY THAT! I am SO RIGHT THERE WITH HER! Girlfriend, if you’re listening, please know I understand!!!

Amy:

Me too! We can’t wait to talk through some solutions.

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 **Karen Ehman**, author of ***Listen, Love, Repeat: Other-Centered Living in a Self-Centered World***. *Karen Ehman is a New York Times bestselling author, Proverbs 31 Ministries speaker, and writer for Encouragement for Today. A wife and mom of three, she resides in central Michigan where she enjoys cheering for the Detroit Tigers and processing life with many teens that gather around her kitchen island.*

Cheri:

So ... if you sometimes feel exhausted from the mental fatigue of constantly questioning yourself, Karen has incredibly practical tips for getting out of your head so you can go be a blessing to others!

Amy:

Some people call it serendipitous, we would call it a God thing, but your newest book, Listen Love, Repeat, came out at just the right time. This has been such a hard year for Americans. So tell us about your title and why the subject is so timely for us.

Karen:

Well I think that in our culture over the years we have gotten away from putting other people first. You know I think about when I grew up how, I don't know, you held doors open for people. And you said, you know, no after you, you take the biggest piece, I'll take the smallest piece. And now I feel like it has completely shifted, and we're all about ourselves. What we're eating. Taking selfies. You know, documenting our every move. Sometimes I do wonder if it's really that our culture has changed. I think it has, but sometimes I also think we just have better ways of documenting it now with social media stuff. Now it's morphed into not just making life all about us and what we're doing. But now it's this unsolicited opinion slinging where we just go anywhere we can find, and we sling our opinion, and we bad mouth people. We think we're just talking to them, but everybody on their wall and our wall every time it's shared can see it, and it's just really, really ugly.

Cheri:

One of the key concepts in your book is something that you call a "heart drop." Tell us what this is and give us an example.

Karen:

It's actually something my mom did all the time when I was growing up. I just never knew what to call it until my husband and I were in a life group at church, and our life group leader Michael gave a name to it. Hearing a heart drop is kind of a way of listening between the lines when someone is talking, and they're saying something without really saying it. You know, for example, you might be talking with me and you might mention that you have some medical tests next week on Thursday afternoon, and I sense a little bit of apprehension in your voice, and I think, "Hmm, she's saying something without

really saying it.” So, I can listen for that heart drop, and then I can do something about it. I can, first of all, record it and make sure I tell myself whether it’s a sticky note or alarm on my phone or whatever, that hey, next Thursday my friend has these medical tests. I think she’s a little bit worried about them, and so I can either text you that morning and tell you I’m praying. Or I can call you that night and see how it went. So it’s just a way of listening for something that someone is saying, but they’re not actually saying the words. AND it also might be just, sometimes your friend gives you a seemingly random piece of information — I’ll give you one example. I had a friend; she and I went to a coffee house. She gave her high maintenance coffee order, which was not as high maintenance as mine...mine’s really bad. My husband has saved it as a screenshot on his phone. It’s so high maintenance he can’t remember. But one of my other friends and I were out, and she gave her little bit, high maintenance coffee order. And I didn’t know anything was coming up in her life that was going to be sad or tragic or make her feel lonely or anything. I just felt like God was taping me on my heart saying, “Hey, remember that coffee order.” So I recorded it in the notes app on my phone and that was in the spring. And then that fall, her only child who would ever grow up and leave the house and go away and go to college did just that, and I knew she was going to have a really hard day the first day that school bus went by with those high school students and her son was at college. They had just dropped him off, about an hour and a half away. And so I showed up on her porch with her high maintenance coffee order and a box of Kleenex. And I said, “Hey if you need a shoulder to cry on”... and she was, like, excited I was there. She gave me a hug and said, “What did you bring me? A Mocha? A French vanilla? And said no, I brought you a — and I rattled off her high maintenance coffee order,” and she started to cry. And she said, “How did you know?” And I said, “Because, silly, the last time we were together, I recorded it in my phone.” So just really learning to listen for these heart drops, to ask God to help you pay attention, to live alert as you go through your day and record these little bits of information whether it’s that you sense someone saying something without saying it or it’s just a random piece of information that you’re going to tuck away for later when that friend or family member or coworker or whoever it is having a rough day, you can pull out that from your arsenal and go do something to brighten their day.

Cheri:

What I’m loving is the intentionality, because I sometimes tell myself that people who do what you did, well it just comes naturally. You either have that sensitivity and a great memory to go with it or you don’t. And I excuse myself, but I hear a lot of intentionality on your part.

Karen:

Yeah, I do think for me — it does. That’s just kind of how I roll. I saw my mom do it. My mom and I are opposite personalities, but that’s one way that we’re alike. And I just kind of naturally roll that way because I was raised that way. However, I will say, there are a lot of ways to practically do what someone else does naturally. And just like you said, you can be intentional about it and learn to do it. Especially the first time you do and

you see what kind of joy it brings to the other person. It makes you want to keep doing it.

Cheri:

So, what do we need to add to our lives in order to hear heart drops, and what do we need to subtract from our lives?

Karen:

I think you just need to add in your prayer life: Lord, help me pay attention today. Help me to notice that person who least expects to be seen and do something for them. And it doesn't have to be something elaborate. It can be a simple text message or phone call. You know its just that concept of people being remembered. Like I know for me, if somebody even just remembers something very simple but sends me a text message on that day when I'm going to be having medical tests or a card shows up in the mail right around the time that it's the anniversary of my sister-in-law, who was one of my best friends, her death. Something very simple that really took less than 3 minutes for somebody to do, but it says I was paying attention and I remembered you. So I think we need to just naturally add that into our prayer lives. And then pay attention when God says "Psst, you heard what that person just said, you need to remember that. Or you need to do something for them." It doesn't mean we have to stop our life right that minute, but that we just ask Him to continue to bring it back to our memory if we aren't someplace where we can write it down and then act on it. So I think we need to add that to our prayer life. And then, subtracting from our life, I don't want to step on toes here, but I feel like there's so many things, like I was saying, in our culture that we just do for ourselves. We're always on our social media, not that it can't be a great tool. Social media can be a wonderful tool to connect with people and pray for people and all that. I'm anti-social media at all. I have it. I have it all. But, we need to think why are we on there? Are we on there for ourselves, just to tell the whole world what we're eating and what we think about the election or whatever? Or are we on there, kind of snooping around, to see, "Hey who seems like they're having a bad day? Who seems like they could use a little encouragement?" So, I just think the subtracting is the self-absorbed attitude. It's not necessarily that we need to take things off of our plate per se, although sometimes we can do that too, you know? Often we have TV shows we just can't miss, and we spend 2 or 3 hours a week watching TV. Well, maybe we could cut back to 1 or 2 hours a week and use that extra hour to help our neighbor who is a lonely widow and feels like she doesn't have a friend in the world. It's just being really prayerful and then paying attention when God nudges you to do something.

Amy:

Well, and I love having a little insight into Karen's life, because I know she made a job decision recently to cut back a little bit so that she could have the time in her life to follow through on these heart drops. So, I admire that you live out your message, Karen.

Karen:

Thank you, Amy.

Amy:

It's great to see and know — well, so I had a friend, recently, who confessed that she didn't do things for others. Specifically, in her case, it was taking meals to other people, because she was so afraid that her meal wouldn't be good enough. One of the focuses of our show is dealing with our perfectionism. So, how do we get over the barriers to make a shift to be other centered?

Karen:

I think we need to remove ourselves from the scenario of being the person taking the meal or writing the letter or buying the gift or whatever it is and put ourselves in the other person's shoes. And think about, okay, when I was brought a meal, did I care that it had gourmet presentation that looked like it was from the food network? No. I just was happy that somebody brought me a meal. I'm thinking back to when I had my children and brought them home from the hospital and was recovering from birth, I really didn't care. I was just grateful I didn't have to stand at that stove and try to make something. Especially when I had a newborn, a toddler, and a kindergartener, and my husband was working like 12-hour days. And he couldn't help. I could not tell you what any of my friends brought over, but I can tell you who brought them over. So, I think so often, we have the wrong mindset because we don't put ourselves in the other person's seat and think did it matter to me? Even when we're having people over, maybe, into our house we think, "Oh, it has to look picture perfect." But if I were to drop by either of your houses, I would be there to see YOU. I wouldn't really care what your house looked like or what you fed me. You know? But we just have these notions, because we've gotten all caught up in the Pinterest perfect world and all these fancy shows. I'm not against them, but what is disconcerting to me is if we think that we can't do it like all the experts and all the ways we see it on Pinterest, then we're not going to do it at all. And that's wrong.

Cheri:

Okay, so now you're making it sound like perfectionists really spend a lot of time worrying about things that don't actually matter.

Amy:

What!

Karen:

Yeah.

Cheri:

I need a paper bag to hyperventilate in. You know, you bring up Pinterest and there's so many ways that our culture keeps us self-centered. Focusing on ourself, like you just illustrated, rather than on the other person who could really be blessed. And in blessing

them, we could end up being less self-centered. I mean it really is a mutual benefit. How can we recognize the things in our culture that are making us more self-centered and less others-centered?

Karen:

Recognize them cause they're everywhere. But it's really a constant upstream swim to not be this way, because it used to be our culture supported us being others-centered and we expected our children to be other — and now look at, you know, everything is you only live once, you're only go around once, grab all the gust you can. And so again, I just it really feels like it comes back to your relationship with God. That you walk so close with Him that you know when you're starting to stray off the path and you're starting to be someone who is — not that you're an all out narcissist, but you're just thinking of yourself too much. And I don't say this lightly because it doesn't always come easy. And it's not wrong to think of yourself. I mean you do need to sometimes slow down, do something that just rejuvenates you. I'm not against that at all, but I feel like it's the percentage of time. It's like, we usually focus on ourselves and every once-in-a-while we might do something for someone. And we think that by putting ourselves first it's going to make us happy, but it is this totally, upside down, counter-cultural truth and this is exactly what I saw my mom live. I remember specifically, I don't remember exactly what happened in middle school, but I was upset about something in middle school — probably didn't get invited to a slumber party or something. You know in middle school you either fight through it or cry through it, you know. But I was upset about something, and I went to her and I'll never forget what she said. She said you know, honey, whenever you feel like your life is bad, things aren't going your way and you're all down and depressed. Here's what you do, you remember that there's always someone out there who has it worse than you. Go find that person and make their day.

Amy:

Wow.

Karen:

And somehow it makes your day as well. And my mom was a single mom living on a budget so tight it squeaked. We seriously sometimes didn't know how we were going to put food on the table, but I never saw her be discontent with her life. She had such a mission and she brought so much happiness to other people and in a weird way by her being so others-centered it made her happy as well. She's very opposite of me, as I said, she's quiet and shy. You can never get her to talk about herself. And I just hardly never shut up. My husband said he's going to put a period on my tombstone.

<Laughter>

Karen:

But I did just see how she didn't — she had a lot of reason to think, "Oh woe is me, I have a horrible life." She never thought that way. She just had this mindset and this mission of, "Okay, I'm going to pull myself up by my bootstraps. I'm going to keep going, and I'm going to see who I can lift up today that has it worse than me." Go find that person and make their day. It's a great way to live.

Cheri:

You talk about losing your sister-in-law, Tiese, in your book and how painful that was. Now, I'll speak from personal experience, people pleasing often shuts us down when other people are grieving, because we're afraid of saying the wrong thing and making somebody hurt more. So was there something someone did or said during that time that you found really helpful?

Karen:

Well I'll tell you what you don't do. You don't say nothing. You know I think so often people don't know what to say, but then it's just awkward when they see you in the hallway at church, and they don't know what to say, so they just say nothing. I just love when people are honest. The people that just said, "I have no idea what to say, but I want you to know that I love you, and I hurt for you, and I wish I knew what to say but there are no words. And I'm just so, so, so sorry and then that didn't follow up with "if there's anything I can do, let me know." Even though that's good, and it comes from a good place in your heart. I know people really mean it when they say it. That's the last thing that a grieving person is thinking about. *Oh, I need this done. I think I'll call someone.* They're just too stuck in their grief. I would just look at their life and think "Okay, what do they have to get done?" and I'd just do it for them. I would just say, "Hey I'm taking your kids to Wednesday night church. Also, I'm picking them up early, because I'm going to take them to out to eat someplace, or I'm going to take them to the park and I'm packing — I would just say, I'm doing this unless you tell me no, but this is my plan. And that's going to give you about a 4-hour block time if you just need to sit and cry, you sit and cry or if you need to get caught up on grocery shopping, you get caught up on grocery shopping. But I know you got to keep going in life and sometimes it's so hard to put one foot in front of the other, so I'm going to help you walk. Pray about what their needs are, think about their life, what they need to get done. And just say, "Hey, I'm doing this for you unless you tell me no. I'm going to do this." And that is so helpful to people.

Cheri:

It sounds like what you talked about earlier. Instead of focusing on how I feel, I'm putting myself in the other person's shoes and focusing on how they're feeling and what their needs might be.

Amy:

So, you used Ruth as a scriptural example of someone who really helped another person in grief. What were some of the steps she took that we can adopt in our own lives?

Karen:

I love the story of Ruth. How she stopped her life and put her mother-in-law first. And didn't just hop on a bus back to where she was from and just go on with life, but she went with her mother-in-law in her grief. And she was someone that really did model putting someone else's wishes in front of her own. And I think today we can adopt this principle of — especially when dealing with someone who is sorrowful. We would love to hop back to our regular life and put ourselves first, but we gotta go with people in their grief. You know, maybe a holiday is coming up, and you think, "Oh, I gotta have my traditional meal and my kids all home and all the people we love. And we're going to do it like we've always done because that's our tradition and that's how our family rolls." And down the street sits somebody who for the first time is not gonna have their spouse with them on Thanksgiving. As much as you want things to be nostalgic and just traditional around your house, maybe you need to say, "But you know what, this year we're going to set an extra plate, and we're going to invite that person down. And to not always have your own feelings of, I wanna say perfection, because we look at holidays and we want them to be just perfect. But sometimes we need to put another plate on the table and realize that it might be a new tradition. Maybe we have someone new every year. Maybe there's always an extra plate. That would be a fun tradition. Just to go with them, go to that place in your mind to think what is it that they're struggling with now, that they're up against in their life that I can go with them. I just love how she went. She just went. And maybe for us that not's totally like she did. We don't change locations. But we go with them in their life. And I love, too, how she went with her and said that your people will be my people. As a person moves through those various stages of grief, sometimes they don't have the energy and the emotional wherewithal to deal with their people. So you make their people your people. You take their kids places; you do whatever tasks it is they need. They might need their dry cleaning picked up. You go do that for them and say, "Hey" to their dry cleaner. Whatever it is, however they roll in their life. Those daily things that they need to do. Those people they interact with. Ask yourself how can I maybe step in and take on some of those roles and help them through this time by making their people my people. And I, too, love just the way that doing this in another person's life, really going with them in their grief and making their people your people. It can be an avenue to introduce someone to the Lord. If the person that you're ministering to in their grief doesn't know the Lord, they get an opportunity to witness up close you sharing the gospel by your very life, you laying down your life for that person.

Cheri:

I love that application of making other people our people. I have never thought of it that way. That's — that is fabulous. That will stick with me. Well, what closing words do you have for our listeners? They are recovering perfectionist and people pleasers and they're also people like me who are highly sensitive people who are trying to rely on God to be the strength of their tender heart. What parting words would you have for our listeners?

Karen:

I heard it said once, and I wish I knew who said it, because I'd love to give the person credit. People don't really remember what you said. They don't really remember also what you did, but they never forget how you made them feel. And I think that is so true. You know I think back in my own life of the people, besides my mom, like the pastor's wife who first led me to the Lord, the youth pastor's wife who was very instrumental in me becoming a Christian and helping me in my early marriage, I don't really remember a lot of what they said, I really don't, but I remember how they made me feel. They made me feel welcome when I was in their home. They made me feel important. They made me feel listened to. They made my people their people. They made my problems their problems, and they just I loved being around them. But I can't put my finger on anything specific or fancy or profound that they did. They just allowed me to pull up a chair and sit next to them in life ad to learn from them. And they just loved and encouraged me and didn't overcorrect me. I was a brand new baby Christian, didn't know what in the world I had gotten myself into. But they would just kind of let me learn my own lessons and answer my questions about the Bible. And they just made me feel loved, wanted, and important. I think that's really important for us to remember today.

Cheri:

Head over to GritNGraceGirls.com/episode67.

Amy:

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

Cheri:

We'd love for you to come chat with other Grit 'n' Grace girls about this week's episode! You'll find our private Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/gritngracegirls.

Amy:

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

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:

One of the key book — one of the key comments — it's early where I'm at, sorry. One of the —

Amy:

I love it.

Karen:

I love it when people goof up, because when I goof up, I don't feel so bad! So.

Cheri:

Well this is going in the outtakes. For once, it'll be me. Since I do the editing, I usually stick Amy in the outtakes. It's great!

Karen:

There you go.