

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #71: Making a Way Home: Embracing Our Messy Parenting Journey

Cheri:

So I got the BEST text message from Annemarie yesterday.

Amy:

Well, do tell!

Cheri:

She's a brand new teacher — this is her 3rd week of teaching college English — and this is what she sent me:

I honestly don't think I can ever become a parent.

I am less and less baffled by how guilty you always seem to feel for 'messing us up.'

LIKE — I'VE TAUGHT THEM FOR TWO WEEKS, AND I'M WORRIED THAT I'VE SCREWED THEM ALL UP ... MY LIL BABIES ...

Amy:

That girl is darling! One of our listeners said almost the exact same thing:

I want to DIE when I make a mistake, like crawl in a hole! And it is very difficult for me to recover and not show it physically. I will replay it in my head like a constant video and beat myself up the whole time and usually can't sleep for at least 1 night. It takes awhile for that "video" to go away from my daily thoughts.

When I read that I thought, "Gracious! So I'm supposed to give up middle-of-the-night agonizing? That's one of the things I'm best at!"

Cheri:

Me, too! And for me it's 2:37 in the morning. So I don't know if there's anybody else in the 2:37 club. If there are, I get it! I totally get it. Here's the thing: Perfectionism and People-Pleasing are hard enough to battle on a daily basis ... and they get ***exponentially intense*** when it comes to our kids and to our mothering!

Amy:

Hmm. You've got that right!

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."

Today, we're talking with **Lori: Wildenberg**, author of ***Messy Journey: How Grace and Truth Offer the Prodigal a Way Home***.

Lori: Wildenberg is passionate about helping families build connections that last a lifetime. She is a licensed parent-family educator and co-founder of 1 Corinthians 13 Parenting. Mostly, Lori is wife to Tom and mother of four.

Cheri:

If Perfectionism and People-Pleasing sometimes take control of your parenting, Lori has encouragement and practical TOOLS for you today!

Amy:

Lori, your book, *Messy Journey: How Grace and Truth Offer The Prodigal a Way Home*, gosh, I teared up when I read that suggests that you may know a little something about this journey firsthand. So tell us a little bit of the backstory for those who are listening.

Lori:

Well, we sort of think that if we put in all the good parenting stuff then the final result will be the child that we expect to have, and the one that we perhaps have dreamed about. And we forget that our kids have their own will, their own sin propensity, they're unique, and we've got the culture and the peers also speaking into their lives. I guess in my perfect world, prior to having children, I never would have expected to have a daughter who was same-sex attracted. And that is our journey, and she is also...she also has some gender identity confusion or gender dysphoria, so that is very challenging for us. And this book, that was written, I think it's really important for the readers to know that my daughter's voice is in this book. She's totally blessed the project, and her voice isn't filtered. So it's very raw and real.

Amy:

Oh Lori, thank you so much for speaking to this particular issue is so hot in our world right now. Hot...you know, in every way. And the Church is not talking about it. So thank YOU for talking about it. And please thank your daughter for us, too — very brave.

Lori:

She is very remarkable and very brave, and the book isn't only about same-sex attraction. It's also about — I mean we talk about these perfect lives that we envision, right? Well, there's a family in the book that, they were, and still are highly involved in the pro-life movement, and their daughter got an abortion and there's a missionary family whose son has now declared

that he's atheist. And there's a pastor whose daughter has had a sex change. So everybody's plugging in good stuff, and what we expect isn't what's coming out on the other side. It's the unexpected.

Cheri:

Sure. I think that's one of the hardest things there is for a recovering perfectionist — when what you expect and what you get are so very different. That's our pain point. You point out that when a child makes a choice with painful consequences, the first question that most parents ask is "why." You have a better question for us to ask. So I'm curious, why do we go to why, and then what is that better question we could be asking instead?

Lori:

We go to "why," because we want control. And we know the why...

Cheri:

Hang on, hang on! Amy:...

Amy:

Oh mercy!

Cheri:

Why are we interviewing her?! Whose idea was this?!

Amy:

Wow. That was like — I felt that in my chest when you said it like, ooh! Ouch! Yes.

Cheri:

Oh I'm sorry, Lori.

Lori:

We are looking for whom we can blame, or if we can blame ourselves perhaps we can fix it. So maybe the better question is "how." How can we honor the Lord in this situation in a way in which glorifies Him? How can we love our kiddo unconditionally? How can we show grace and truth at the same time — sort of your *grit and grace* idea? How can we do that simultaneously? So I think that's the better question

Cheri:

Okay, I think you're making Amy cry again

Amy:

I mean, seriously, like half an hour ago had a very — I wanted to jump through the phone and strangle one of my progenies who shall remain nameless today. I meant that is just hitting my heart, because terribly, my first reaction was to cuss, and I think that was not a good reaction to the how question. So thank you for that.

Lori:

Well, our first reaction isn't always very good. But we have other chances, right, so...

Amy:

Oh thank you for that grace, Lori. That was beautiful. So a people-pleasing mom, this might be me, is going to struggle to avoid conflict with her prodigal child and to try to put a happy face on it for the rest of her world, for herself, even for the relationship with her child. I found myself doing that today. I didn't cuss until after I got off the phone.

Lori:

Good self-control! Woohoo!

Amy:

I'm trying to be the encouraging mom, let's keep this happy and light. Sometimes that is just not possible. And so you give us some tools for parenting in these situations...one of them is boundaries...I'll just kind of run through the tools, and you speak to them: boundaries.

Lori:

Boundaries are really meant for the parents, because our kiddos have a free will. And they make mistakes; they're human; they do things. And so, especially with a prodigal, having some boundaries is particularly important. And the boundaries need to be within your morals, your faith, and your values, and if something comes in conflict with your convictions or your conscience...that's where your line is. As far as boundaries regarding putting them on the child, I think especially with a prodigal, we tend to find that they push those limits, and they don't play by the rules. So we can only put the boundaries on ourselves. For instance, let's say...there's a lot of stories of substance abuse in the book as well — families dealing with substance abuse. And a good boundary for someone who has substance abuse in their family is not to provide financial assistance, because that money is a trigger for them to go and get the substance that they are abusing. Another boundary might be — let's say your child is cohabitating with someone and they come to visit. Between you and your husband, if it is in conflict with your conscience and your convictions, it is 'A' okay to say, "Here's your room for tonight, and here's yours." So those are the boundaries that we *can* have control over, and we can enforce. It's no good to put up a boundary and not be able to enforce it.

Amy:

That's so helpful, because this parenting of adult children is very difficult, so that's very helpful. How about avoiding collateral relationship damage. What do you mean by that?

Lori:

This is really sad because if we have a prodigal, that affects ALL relationships. It affects your relationship with your spouse. It affects your relationship with your other children, if you allow it to. It affects your relationship with your friends. You may not be as honest with them, or you may find that you don't appreciate their response to you. Also extended family — very much

affects that, as well, because everybody's got an opinion on a prodigal. And everyone has an opinion on how you should move forward. To avoid that collateral damage, I think one of the biggest things is to specifically focus on your relationship with the Lord and prayer, and also, to not fixate on the things. So that you and your husband can go out on a date and not talk about the issue or even going out with your prodigal and not talking about the issue all the time either. Courtney, my daughter, she will say to me, "Mom." She'll put up her own little boundary. "We're going out and we're having fun today. So, i.e., don't talk about the thing with me." So we have to be careful not to let that issue that's going on with the child overshadow everything else. We have to keep it in its box. So that's what I mean by collateral damage. We have to be very careful with that.

Amy:

So, one of your tools, you say to find a support system and you kind of talk about how everybody feels very free in these situations to give you their opinion. So whom do we seek out and whom do we avoid in these situations?

Lori:

Well for me, I tend to want to have someone that will pray with and for me, will laugh with me, will maybe go for a walk with me. I would like to avoid somebody who is going to tell me I'm not praying properly. I haven't prayed enough, or to quote a scripture verse to me. Now, that might not seem like a very nice thing for me to say, but perhaps I've already thought of all these things. I do know the Lord, too, and I don't want someone to preach to me. I want someone to walk alongside of me. And really, to help lift me up and encourage and maybe just kind of sit with me in the grief. Because when you have a prodigal, there is grief. I think also some of the people that I've realized. It appears that they want to help you, but they're really looking for a good story or some juicy information to share with somebody else and often that comes with soliciting a question, like, "Oh, how are you doing?" And it turns out it may not be as sincere as it initially sounds. So I've learned some hard lessons as well, as to who to avoid and who to seek out. And I would say, friendship is the biggest. You know, of course, your relationship with the Lord. That is the relationship you continue to pursue and avoid the collateral damage and look for the friendships, but also there are support systems to be found, and I think we need to make use of those. Perhaps a counselor, or we have the great blessing of being able to attend a ministry called *Where Grace Abounds*, and actually Courtney and her significant other come with us to this. Some churches do prodigal things pretty well. If you have one of those churches, talk to your counselor. So that's what I would recommend. We need each other, and God has put us in relationship to help each other, not to go it alone. We're not meant to be an island unto ourself.

Amy:

Your last tool, and these are all interwoven, I can see, is "to be real." What does that mean to you? Because it sounds like you have to be careful about whom you're being real with. And then how much do you say, Lori? How much do you tell? How do you decide where the boundaries are for that?

Lori:

Well, I think you definitely have to pray for discernment and for wisdom and look at the specific person you're talking to. If someone comes to me with a similar problem, a similar issue, I feel like that's where the Lord definitely wants me to speak because that person needs encouraging and someone who can have some empathy with them. So I would say that's definitely a place. I also like to help say a little something, because people are wondering, so it's better to speak a little something than nothing at all. Because if you say nothing at all, they're left to their own devices, they will come up with their own conclusion. So I would rather put a bit of a positive spin on it. Like, I might say, "You know, we're really struggling today, and we'd really appreciate prayer, however the Lord leads," something in that way. So that way, you're admitting that something isn't going okay. The person feels, in some ways, honored that you shared a little something with them. With Courtney, because of this book, and because we've done some radio together and we've done some speaking together, we have been — it seems a little strange, because we're very open with this, but I tend to be a very private person. So it's kind of a strange mix. I watch what I say, and I do want to put a kind of positive spin on it, because I don't want someone taking it in a direction that I would prefer they didn't.

Cheri:

Our show is for recovering perfectionists and people pleasers, and then also, part of our audience is those of us who are highly sensitive people. And so we are a little bit more easily overwhelmed than the average person: our highs a little bit higher, our lows a little bit more low. You said specifically to be careful not to fixate on the problem, and I wrote a little note to myself that says, "How?" Because my brain just naturally ruminates on things, because I tend to take something personally, and somebody says, don't take it personally. And I'm like, "How do you not?" In your experience, for those of us who tend to have the natural wiring to take things personally and to fixate on them, do you have any words of wisdom or counsel for us?

Lori:

Oh, my gosh! I am completely with you, Cheri, totally, with you. I am that same person.

Cheri:

Oh good. I'm sorry, but good.

Lori:

I know. It kind of drives the husband crazy a little though. But the thing that I think that has helped me the most, I got some really good advice from a friend. And she said when I start to go down that path, because we realize it's not healthy. I mean, I know that, but what do you do about it, okay? Because it kind of seems like it starts to have a life of its own. And so, what she told me is when I start doing that is to use that as a catalyst for prayer. And let me tell you, that works! It works! So whenever I start fixating on the issue. In a way I'm doing that, because, one, I'm trying to find a way to fix it, or two, because I'm so frustrated because I can't fix it. And so this is really God's gig, right? It's God's thing. So I have to keep reminding myself of what is my job and what is the Lord's job? And I am not the Lord. I might think I'm the Junior Holy Spirit, but I'm not.

<Laughter>

So I need to go ahead and let Him handle that. So when I start fixating on stuff, it's time for me to stop and pray. So that's what I've found that helps so much. So, give it a shot! See what you think!

Cheri:

Well you can't be the Junior Holy Spirit, because Amy and I keep fighting for that position, so...

Amy:

That's right!

Cheri:

But you just gave me an insight. The word fixate... it has the word fix in it. When I fixate, I'm trying to fix, and basically, I'm praying to myself. That's what ruminating on something is...it's just, keeps spinning inside my head. Okay, Amy, you can see where...there's going to be a conversation happening after this.

Amy:

Oh, yes!

Cheri:

And then how about, you also used the phrase, "Put it back in its box." What about...some of us, and we don't do it intentionally...but when our kids are in a painful situation, we feel it as if it is our own pain. And sometimes our reactions to that can take over a situation and so you made me so curious about what does it look like, I mean, mentally. How do you put something that big back in the box so that you can...

Lori:

It is...

Cheri:

...live normal?

Lori:

It's a challenge, right? I mean, we have that momma's heart, and we're passionate about our kids. And what they feel, we feel 10 times more. And yeah, that is really hard, and it's a really — in some ways it's a good thing, right? Because we love our kids so big, yet, we can take that to a place that is unhealthy for us and for our children. And my husband has been pretty good about reminding me whose thing is what. He'll say, "Okay, this is Courtney's issue, alright? This is her struggle," and I kind of need that reminder because I can care really big. Especially as our kids get older, but even when they're little we need to be able to separate, to some degree, their feelings from ours. What I would say to myself is, like, when they were little, and I would use

this as they grow: This is my child's temper tantrum, not mine. This is my child's issue, not mine. I believe there's some self-talk that is really important to have because my initial response is to feel it heart, mind, body, and soul, right? And I keep asking God please give me a little more of an aerial view of this. Because when I start getting caught up in the emotion of the moment, I am not seeing the bigger picture. So I need to step back a little bit more. That needs to be my catalyst to step back.

Amy:

So we want to leave this as an open-ended question for you, but what word of encouragement would you like to close with for our listeners?

Lori:

I would love to tell parents of prodigals that the prodigal issue that's being exhibited in your family isn't really the problem. It feels like it's the problem, but it is a response to a bigger problem. And the problem is the child isn't against you, even though it feels like it. And they may even say that they are. It is really an issue of their relationship with the Lord. And if we can focus more on the child's relationship with the Lord, and the child's relationship with us and a little less on the problem that the prodigal is exhibiting, we will find a little more peace and a little more success.

Cheri:

Head on over to GritNGraceGirls.com/episode71.

Amy:

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

Cheri:

If you're on Facebook, come find our page, our private group, and invite your friends to join the fun! Just look for Grit N Grace Girls (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 Lori!

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

Amy

I used to have a tennis dress. It was cute, girl! It was *purple*.

Cheri

Don't say that when I've just taken a mouth of coffee, oh my word! A tennis dress!

Amy

It made me look like I was an amazing tennis player.

<Laughter>

Cheri

I'm sure you did! Okay, do you have pictures?

Amy

I might. My mother made it. It was hers, and then I absconded it.

Cheri

Oh, and I love that you used the word absconded! That is such a good word. This is a good morning already: Purple tennis dress...absconded...Oh my word!