

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

Episode #85: Finding the Courage to Live by Faith When You Don't Like Your Story

Heather Dixon Interview

**Cheri**

If we were to write a book called or a blog post called *Why Everything Is Better When I'm In Charge*, what would some of our reasons be?

**Amy**

Well, I mean my number one reason is **duh!**

**Cheri**

Like, obviously! The world should be so lucky!

**Amy**

That's the perfect book title to me; what is the problem here?

**Cheri**

Well, let's see...everything would go the way I want it to. That's obvious.

**Amy**

Because I know the best way to do it.

**Cheri**

That's right. And most people...like everybody is generally wrong...which is so irritating. And the irritating part is they don't recognize how wrong they are, you know. If they would at least recognize it, I could then be magnanimous and gracious but they don't. Argh.

**Amy**

Exactly. And then there's the fact that when I'm in charge we get the ultimate results. My desired result.

**Cheri**

Exactly. Exactly. And here's the other reason: I can sleep at night when I'm in charge. Or that's not necessarily true. Sometimes I toss and turn the whole night because I'm in charge. But we'll just ignore that part, and I'll pretend that I sleep better when I'm in charge because I'm not worrying about all the other people and what they might... Did I mention they might do things wrong?

Why else should we be in charge?

**Amy**

Well, maybe we could put one in there, like, then I don't have to worry about your feelings. I mean I'm sure people have feelings about me being in charge but...

**Cheri**

Irrelevant. Completely irrelevant. You know how in the *Princess Bride* it's inconceivable? In this it would be irrelevant, irrelevant.

**Amy**

Man, we're just lovely people aren't we? Lovely.

**Cheri**

Hey, I'm just on a roll here. I'm just getting started. But I suppose we should just admit that all of this has to do with that C word we just keep coming back to.

**Amy**

Oh the C word. Well one of our listeners said, "I equate getting things done and making people happy with success and my worth as a woman. It also gives me a sense of" ...here we go..."control which tricks me into thinking that I'm self-sufficient, although that is the farthest from the truth."

**Cheri**

No matter how much we wish we were self-sufficient, and no matter how much we wish all of our planning — that's another thing, I'm such a good planner, Amy. Everything looks so good on paperrrrrrrrrr.

**Amy**

It does, doesn't it?

**Cheri**

Well I'm Cheri Gregory.

**Amy**

And I'm Amy Carroll.

**Cheri**

And you're listening to *Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules*. The podcast that equips you to lose who you're not, love who you are, and live your one life well.

**Amy**

Today we're talking to Heather Dixon, author of *Ready: Finding The Courage To Face The Unknown*. Diagnosed with an incurable and terminal genetic disorder that she inherited from her mother, Heather is no stranger to the spiritual battlefield. When she's not writing, you might find her cooking for her husband and son, brainstorming all the possible ways to organize

Legos and superheroes, checking out way too many library books, or unashamedly indulging her love for all things Disney.

Heather, we're so excited to talk to you today. Tell us what prompted you to write a bible study about Joshua.

**Heather**

I'll answer that question by telling you about the time when God told me to get ready. Now I didn't audibly hear those two words, but you know how sometimes God just places things right in our hearts and our minds that we just have to pay attention to, and the two words "get ready" were just exactly that. And so I told my husband I don't know, I think I need to look this up in God's Word. I want to confirm what I was hearing, you know, in my prayer time. And the first time those two words appear in the Bible is in the book of Joshua, in the very first chapter when God tells Joshua, "Get ready. You are about to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land." And so I spent the next several weeks just really diving into those first five chapters of Joshua, about, it is just simply about the preparation for both the battle of crossing the Jordan River and also the blessing of entering the Promised Land, and then a few months later I suffered a miscarriage, had two found aneurisms, one of which caused a partial kidney infarction, try telling your eight-year-old that you have had a kidney infarction, laughter for days. And I had a ruptured carotid artery, which was really, really scary. But the doctors started piecing together my medical history and the fact that my colon had ruptured 5 years prior. All these things started to come together; I had a really brilliant surgeon who said, "I think we're dealing with something else here" because she knew my mother's medical history. My mother had died, I was eleven; she was thirty-seven, from complications of a splenic artery aneurysm. So many similar things and thankfully this brilliant surgeon said, "I think I know what we're dealing with, and I want you to have genetic testing done." So we did, and it was — I got a confirmed diagnosis of a genetic connective tissue disorder called vascular, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. It is a connective tissue disorder that makes my blood vessels, tissues, arteries, and organs prone to spontaneous rupture.

**Cheri**

Wow!

**Heather**

Yeah. It was. There's not a word to describe the processing of that diagnoses. There is no cure or treatment, and the life expectancy is cut short. The average life expectancy of someone with Vascular EDS is forty-eight to fifty-years old. So all of those things I faced in the fall after spending so much time in the book of Joshua. And so much of that time felt very much like the unknown. We had test after medical test as they were trying to figure out what in the world was going on, and it was the truth that I found in just those first simple five chapters of Joshua that really carried me and my family through one of the scariest times of my life. And so, I know that there are women who face the unknown. Who look into their futures, and maybe look like, if there's a woman looking into her future, like, I am so excited this is my jam. I've got everything perfect. This study is not for that woman. No, this is for the woman, right, who is

looking into her future and facing hardship in her family, or her marriage, or a medical diagnosis that is scary, or just that unknown which is so ripe for robbing our peace and our joy and our trust in God, so that is why I wrote this Bible study on Joshua to help women find the courage to face the unknown.

### **Cheri**

You told us in our email exchanges before this that your ministry goal is to help women find the courage to live by faith when they don't like their story. And I read that and I went, "Oh." And many of our listeners, they're reforming perfections who struggle, and they even feel betrayed by God when things don't happen the way they should. They are women who have a plan, and they believe God has given them talents and giftings to plan ahead, and they use that and then suddenly things fall apart, so how have you found the courage to live by faith even when you don't like your story? Because I'm listening to your story, and suddenly, I'm feeling like the things I've been complaining and whining about, they pale in comparison to what you're dealing with.

### **Heather**

Here's what I know, the little bit I know about our time on this earth is that all of us are going to face hardship. None of us is getting out of our time on this earth without walking through something that feels impossible, and I think that what I have going for me is that I'm incredibly stubborn. And I have made enough poor choices in my faith so that I know what it feels like to not trust God in those scary times. My father died when I was thirty-one. It was sudden. It wasn't expected. This was several years before what we're taking about now, and I did not handle it well. I think that I was that woman who felt betrayed by God. And I was that woman that, I mean, I literally told him I am done with you. I am done with my faith. I feel so defeated. I feel so tired of death having lost my mother at a young age. I never expected to also deal with the loss of my other parent at a relatively young age, and so those were really, really dark days for me. What I learned from that hardship is that when we make the choice to turn away from God, although everything in our culture is screaming God is a lie, and He is not for you. And He has actually betrayed you. It's not in our best interest. Those were just really, really dark days for me. I made poor choices. And so because I had been through that time of suffering, and because God was so gracious to warn me beforehand, you know. I think that He knew, okay, this one has the propensity to mess it up bad, so I need to warn her beforehand that she's going to be okay. And so, I think it was just his gracious warning to me beforehand, before we had all the medical stuff and the diagnoses. I had those truths with me. And think that I'm stubborn enough to challenge what this world tells us about life. Like, you read God's Word, and it's story after story of the impossible. Okay, let's cross a Red Sea with the Egyptians chasing us — impossible. But God says we can do that. I can do that for you. Let's cross a flooding Jordan River and get six hundred people across from a Jordan River where none of them know how to swim. Impossible, right? God says I can do that for you. Jesus, at the cross, and conquering death. Impossible. God did it. So I think that I'm stubborn enough to challenge the impossible with what I know about God. I don't nail it everyday. It's baby steps, but it is just about saying, "You know what? I'm going to get up, and put two feet on the floor this morning anyway. I don't like my story. I don't like this diagnosis. I don't like the ramifications of it for my

family, but I trust in a God who conquers the impossible. And God is gracious enough to help me do it.

**Amy**

So you have this, your father died, this terrible crisis and loss, and you dealt with it one way and then you got a diagnosis how many years later?

**Heather**

Seven years later.

**Amy**

And you dealt with it completely differently. What happened in between? What was the change that helped you to deal with the diagnosis differently?

**Heather**

After my father died, I made really poor decisions, because I turned away from God. I mean I was just face to face with my sin nature. There was a time when I turned to a glass of wine, before I would turn to God's Word. Those types of decisions that were just not healthy for me. And I saw the darkness of that, the scariness of that, and so I think that walking into the diagnosis and all the medical things that we face, anything felt better than where I had been before. Clinging to God felt better than where I had been before. And here's the thing: Jesus wooed me back before all of the recent medical stuff. Jesus is quite stubborn himself, and he wooed me back to a place of close and personal relationship with him. It was a place of obedience. I'll never forget the day when I told my husband God is calling me home. And he had prayed for this for years when I had stepped away from my faith, stepped away from the church, and my husband was just so faithful to pray for me during those times, and Jesus did call my name again. He said, "You know what? It's time to come home." This beautiful story of just him pursuing me, broken me, and so he did, and he called me to a place of obedience and getting up in the morning, four or five o'clock in the morning, just reading his word. I was so hungry for it, because I had not been in it for such a long time. And I remember Tom coming out to the porch, and he said, "What are you doing out here? And I said I just don't know. I just know this is a place of obedience that God is calling me to. He will fight my battles. I just need to be out here and be still and be in His Word. And it was that habit that I did for close to two years before any of this *Get Ready* stuff happened, because Jesus was stubborn enough and loving enough to pursue me, that became such a good gift in my life. I just refused to go back to the darkness that I had known before. It just, nothing compared to the love I had found in Jesus. And you know, I had been a Christian since I was twelve; I gave my heart to Jesus when I was twelve, so I was not a girl that found Jesus late in life. I was a girl that walked away from Jesus late in life. But I think, because I have seen the darkness, the alternative. It was like, I was going to do this with Jesus, or I'm not going to do it at all. There was no other choice, he is just that good and giving and compassionate to me.

**Amy**

That is so rich, and I'm teary. So on your website, you talk about bucket list living. What do you mean by that?

### **Heather**

Okay, so one of the things that we were told when we were processing this diagnosis and tried to understand what it meant to have an incurable disease. Our first response was okay, well, what do we do? What medications do I take? What treatment do I do? And it's 2017. We are searching for cures for anything that ails us medically, and here's what the doctor said: There is no cure. You need to prepare your bucket list and live your life well. So, you know, I thought, okay, God how do I do that? First of all, what does that look like on a daily basis? And I think for us, we always considered bucket list living, like, go do mad trips, all the crazy, tour the world and all these huge, giant things. And sure, we've done some of that. Last year we surprised my son with a trip to Disney at the last minute. We chose to take him down two days before we went; we picked him up from camp. He thought we were going to Williamsburg, Virginia, and we drove down to Florida, instead. Didn't tell him until we got there the next morning, second to him inviting Jesus into his heart, that is my proudest moment as a parent, 'cause it was just so fun, so spontaneous. And, I think, when you're living with a disease that threatens spontaneous disaster, it feels really empowering to respond to that with spontaneous joy. And so we're gonna create spontaneous joy for our family. And so we've done the big stuff; we took a big, epic trip to Nashville with my college roommates, but really, what it looks like for us is just making a day to day choice, waking up everyday with gratitude, being so thankful that I'm still here, and I think that that's a gift. That, as scary as this diagnosis is, what it is teaching me is gratitude. I mean, I wake up everyday thinking okay, I have twenty-four hours to make the most out of this day that God has given me, and y'all, that is a gift. And I — you know God is slowly teaching me to be thankful for that perspective. It's a perspective shift. It's one that is becoming really, really sweet to me to know that every single day that I face, there is the possibility of great, immense joy and gratitude. So, for us, it's just honoring the things that we hold dear; you know, we want to honor God, we want to honor our family, we want to love people the way Jesus loved me, the way he called me. We wake up every day and say how can we make a memory? Bucket list living for us ends up at the ice-cream shop in town. Like, let's go get ice cream at ten o'clock. How can we make this day special? What can we choose in this day to find some joy and some gratitude and to choose life and to refuse to let this day become a disaster? To choose things that nurture our souls and that serve God. That, to us, is bucket list living, and it's a pretty sweet way to live. We're enjoying it.

### **Cheri**

Switching topics to anxiety, which I also saw on your website. I feel like, okay wait, this is a downer. We've gone from the high of talking about bucket list living to anxiety, but I know a lot of our listeners — I know anxiety is a part of perfectionism and people pleasing, and quite a few of our listeners are highly sensitive people who tend to feel their emotions a little more strongly. They're a little more overwhelmed than the average person and often there's just this underlying current of anxiety in their life. And so I just wondering if you'd speak to how anxiety has manifested in your life and then what do you do just from a practical standpoint, especially

in light of your bucket list living. What do you do when anxiety knocks on your front door or even when it tries to sneak around in a back window?

### **Heather**

My experience with anxiety for much of my life has been as a yoga teacher. I was a yoga teacher for years before I came a writer. So I made a living out of teaching people how to live in their bodies and feel healthy and live these stress free lives. And then, I got a crash course. Anxiety was never something that I said, "Oh, I have anxiety." Until two years ago when, now, I have this disease that threatens spontaneous rupture. And so my experience with that, was as a teacher, and this is proof that God just has a sense of humor. To say okay we're going to flip that on your end and know what that feels like in your own body and your mind. And I think that anxiety manifests itself in different ways for different people. For me, it is a physical manifestation. I can always tell when anxiety is about to hit by my breath. You know, if my breaths are shallow and quick, it's just a trigger warning to say, "Okay, this is about to slip in that back door," like you said Cheri. You are not gonna sleep well tonight. You're gonna have some physical pains in your body. You're gonna be jittery. You're gonna be emotionally short. I can always tell that trigger when my breath is not even. There's something going on. I love what you said about that undercurrent, that's exactly what it is, and however it manifests for you or for your listeners, I think at the heart of it, anxiety is the fear of the unknown. And so for me, I think that if we want to take the fear out of the unknown then we have to take our attention to the known, of what we know about God and His character. And so practically, I'm a sorter by nature in everything that I do. So I think about it, like, okay I'm gonna approach this from a physical standpoint, the body is kind of dense, so physically I'll take a warm bath, or I'll go outside and take a walk, or I'll ask my husband can you scratch my back? You know anything that can trick our physical senses from going into that stress response that physiological stress response I think is healthy from a physical standpoint. Take your shoes off and plant your feet in the earth. Feel something tangible. I kind of have built my toolbox around the physical response. And then I add the mental response, and for me, that is reading God's Word. Beth Moore has a saying, "Re-wallpaper your mind with God's truth." And so we just kind of tear down the things that are lies and then start to re-wallpaper our minds with God's truth. And so, I'll just, okay, I have verses that I turn to often that I have a little journal and there are verses that I read that are really comforting for anxiety and when things start to feel like they're spinning out of control. On my blog, I have 10 verses to pray when you're world is spinning out of control, and so I just turn to those verses to kind of start planting them and meditating in them in my mind, and then add prayer on top of that. I just go to the Lord in prayer. So those three things hit it head on with the physical, and then add the mental, the truth of God's word, and then pack on the spiritual, and just go to your knees in prayer. And you know, I mean, I'm also not afraid to admit that I have a baby anxiety pill that my doctor gives me that I take maybe a couple times out of the year, but just knowing that I have that extra piece, that extra tool. You build a giant toolbox that you may not always be pulling from the same resource. As anxiety manifests in different ways you may need to pull from different things and so you learn to build your toolbox that you can just go to in those moments when anxiety hits to hit it head on that way, and I usually find that that will settle it for me. And I think also remembering that I think for those of us who deal with anxiety that it's not a one and done. It's embracing the

awareness, that okay; this is something that if I conquer it today, I may have to conquer it again in the future, and that's okay. But because I have this toolbox, and I have a God who stands with me in that, I can conquer that again. I'll be ready to face that again.

**Cheri**

I love your intentionality. That's so helpful.

**Heather**

Oh, good!

**Amy**

So practical to think of it in those categories. So, Heather, what is your closing comment for our listeners? How would you like to encourage them?

**Heather**

I would like to encourage them by taking them straight to the pages of Joshua, the first five chapters of Joshua, and remembering that the blessing always follows the battle. I think so much of my study, of my bible study, is about being ready to face to the unknown, and it can be easy to think of it as a defensive thing. Like, we are just ready for all these hardships and suffering, and hard times, and anxiety, and yes, that is a piece of it. And it's easy to see just that flooding Jordan River when it's right in front of us, and it's easy to forget what lies beyond the Jordan River is the Promised Land, and that's our blessing. And so, just the reminder that whatever you're going through today, there is a blessing behind that battle, and God is faithful to see you through the other side.

**Cheri**

Head on over to [gritngracegirls.com/episode85](http://gritngracegirls.com/episode85).

**Amy**

There you'll find this week's transcript, our digging deeper download, the bible verse art, which will be so fun to color girls, and you'll get a chance to sign up for our giveaway.

**Cheri**

If you enjoyed this episode of Grit 'n Grace, would you leave a review on iTunes? If you go to our webpage, you'll find a really easy link that'll lead you there.

**Amy**

Next week Cheri and I will be processing what we've learned from Heather in this very moving episode.

**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



**Cheri & Amy**

BREAK IT!

**Outtakes**

**Cheri**

Which of the intros did you like?

**Amy**

I think, 'Cause I don't think fast on my feet. I think the top ten reasons why everything is better when I'm in charge, maybe I can do a little better.

**Cheri**

Yeah, you can't think of any euphemisms for control, right?

**Amy**

If you got me started I probably could, but...