

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode #86: Creating More Joy by Embracing Your Death Sentence

Cheri

I think what we need to do today is brainstorm everything we can think of that's positive about *control*.

Amy

Okay. Okay. My first one is that it makes me feel so much better. I mean, well, until it makes me feel worse.

Cheri

And everybody needs me to be in control. You know, actually, actually it tends to really make people mad ...

Amy

Hmm. Well....

Cheri

Good things. Good things. Positive things about *control*. We can do this.

Amy

It makes everything turn out right...sorta...

Cheri

Mhm. Except when it doesn't...um, let's see.
It's biblical! I'm sure it's biblical that we....

Amy

Uh, no. That's God. He's supposed to be in control. Shoot!

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*.

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 processing what we learned from our interview with Heather Dixon, author of *Ready: Finding The Courage To Face The Unknown*.

Cheri

Alright, and I'm turning my cell phone off. Alright, let's dive in!

Amy

Well, let's just start with what you said to me at the very end, after we had hung up with Heather, and I totally burst into tears. And Cheri says to me, "Uh, Amy you are definitely an HSP!"

<Laughter>

Ah, but who could not cry after listening to that interview? Was that amazing or what?

Cheri

It made me think once again how many people we've talked to who are facing things that... I've never come anywhere near anything like a life-threatening illness, and yet the amount of joy and gratitude, and the way she's living through her bucket list with no certainty. I mean her gratitude for waking up each morning was beautiful and convicting.

Amy

Yes. And well you said, "no certainty," and in my head I thought, "but with complete confidence." You know, when we record these, our listeners may not know, but we do it on Skype. So we can see each other, even though you guys just get the audio, and I want to describe, Heather is...she looks so young. She is very beautiful. And she has this radiance about her that is so compelling. So even though...that's why I had to hold myself together during the interview, I actually, several times wanted to put my head down on my desk and sob, and I'll tell you why in just a minute, but I couldn't because she has this compelling joy and this confidence about who she is and the fact that she belongs to God and every minute of hers belongs to Him, and so it was sad and it wasn't sad. It was so inspiring. The reason I wanted to put my head down, oh gosh, I'm gonna get all choked up, is that she reminded me so much of my friend Linda, who died of cancer 18 years ago now. And you know, 18 years, you'd think, well, gosh, surely Amy isn't still weepy over that, but I am because she was a friend who let me into her life even though she had a rare and aggressive form of cancer. She had already been diagnosed, she's just one of those friends that has impacted my life forever. Forever. And one of the things that she used to say is that *everyone should be given 6 months to live*. And it was very similar to what Heather was saying about this bucket-list life. I remember. This was one of my most vivid memories of Linda. Linda was so fun, and she loved to give parties. And they had this humongous backyard. They had a little house, but this huge backyard so they had

barbecues and things, and Linda had been, Linda was actually diagnosed with her cancer during her first trimester of her second pregnancy.

Cheri

Oh wow.

Amy

And so, this was about 3 years in, and Linda was not doing well. She had undergone tons of treatments; I think she had already had her bone marrow transplant at this point. She was not doing well. But it was her oldest son's birthday and Justin; I think was turning 6, 5 or 6. Our boys were the same age. And so she was having this party in her backyard and tons of people were there, and she had made this caterpillar cake out of cupcakes, and it was the cutest thing. And she had worked so hard to make this the most wonderful, fun day. But I followed her into the kitchen, because I could see that she was fading, really fading. And I said, "Linda, you know, why don't you sit down and rest for a while because I can see you're really, really tired." And she said, "Amy, this might be the last birthday party I give for Justin." She didn't cry. I cried. She goes, "I'm not sitting down." And she was just this picture, and she died less than 6 months after that.

Cheri

So, it was in fact the last birthday party.

Amy

It was. It was. She made the right choice. Did she need the rest? Yes? Was she gonna live life to the fullest? I always said she was this supreme theologian, that she would say, "Amy, God is good no matter what happens to me," which rings in my head, and it did for a long time after she died, when I was wrestling with God, 'Cause that did not feel good. And then she said, "And I am going to live every minute of my life that He gives me for His glory." And I saw both of those things so strongly in Heather, too.

Cheri

Oh absolutely. Absolutely. And I just felt so convicted, because I was in a snit over something that didn't matter, and I realized that the snits that I allow to perpetuate over days and weeks and months. I'm basically telling myself I have all the time in the world, that I can always catch up, I can make up for it. It's worse than wasting it. It's time that is truly lost. It's time that I could be building relations. It's time that I could be making those positive connections and those positive memories. And I think what I end up doing is I tell myself it's just neutral. It's just neutral. And there is no neutral in this life. She also talked about having an incurable disease. You know, my dad is an epidemiologist. When I was growing up he would say, "but we all have a terminal illness, called life on this planet."

Amy

Yes!

Cheri

Or we all have a terminal illness; it's called sin. And so, basically, for Heather, she has been given this official diagnosis that keeps it in the forefront of her mind, whereas those of us who are still wrestling with being recovering control freaks, we've convinced ourselves that, no, we... I tell myself; I have 20 or 30 more years. But we don't know. We have no idea.

Amy

Two of the phrases that she said that just took my breath away, and it really ties into what you're saying. She said, "Because I know that spontaneous disaster is always a possibility, I embrace spontaneous joy." Oh my heavens, I was like...but, I had that thought, all of us face spontaneous disaster at any moment. And you know it makes me think, and this is such a sober conversation, but years ago when I was teaching, there was a woman that I taught with that was probably, I doubt she was 50 yet, and in the middle of the school day she got a call that her husband had died in a car accident. Well, that, that has stuck with me when I'm in a fight with Barry, for example. Like, I wondered, you know I didn't know her enough to hear all the details...like, did they kiss each other goodbye when they left in the morning or were they in the middle of a fight? Think how that would affect how you felt about that spontaneous disaster, and I thought: we just need to be aware that our time is limited.

Cheri

So what's the difference between living that way and living out of fear? Because I did not get the sense that Heather was afraid. So there's something about grabbing each and every moment with joy, but it's not the same as hyper-vigilance, panic, worry. There was nothing frantic about her. So, can we tease this apart? Because those of us who are control freaks, we have time. I mean, I'm speaking to myself again, me *Control-Freak, Cheri*. I don't have an official diagnosis. I pretend I have all this time, and yet the way I live is out of fear. She officially has less time, and yet, she seems so relaxed about it. What makes the difference there?

Amy

That is a really, really interesting question. And I think it goes back to Linda saying everyone should be given 6 months to live. I think when you have the diagnosis, when you've been told your timeline, somehow that brings what's important to the forefront and what's not important recedes, and I just sense that in Heather. I thought, because we had a whole section of our conversation about anxiety. I'm sure she has moments of fear, and she has moments where she wrestles with this. And if she's like Linda, and I'm sure she is, Linda's biggest concern is what's gonna happen with my kids, you know, these are serious concerns. But I agree with you, she does not come across as fearful in any way and neither did Linda. It built in them this determination, it seems, to leverage, to maximize every part of the good parts of life. And you know, as Christians, it's just this tension. Because we do, we live in this broken and fallen world, and it's hard to live here. But you know God ultimately did create this world, and there's a lot of good stuff here, too. And so, I don't want to be one of those people who just sinks into, "It's all terrible, and I can't wait to go to heaven, and that kind of stuff." And it seems like Heather has really embraced, like, I'm gonna live my time here in the best way possible with the most joy possible. What are your thoughts?

Cheri

She is so focused. My fear exhibits in that I'm constantly renegotiating. I'm trying to get more than what God has given me, and so I'm constantly hustling. And I'm like, I'm gonna do this and this and this and this, and I'm gonna add this and add this and add this. And I wanna trust God, but then I got back to playing the hustle game. And okay, I'm gonna focus, and I'm gonna live like there's no tomorrow. And then give me a week, and I'm back to living as if I have another 50 years on this planet. And so, her life is streamlined. And you used the word *determined*, which I think is a great word. You also used the word *confidence*. And she said, "She's just *stubborn enough*." And I think you put all these words together, and you get "intentional." She has made some permanent decisions that she's not wavering from, and I think it comes down to perhaps the word *surrender*. She, to me, looks like a living sacrifice that's not crawling off the altar. Which is what I do, is I surrender, and then a few days later, I'm hopping off and doing my own thing. This sense of once and for all, and I loved how she shared that she had gone through this kind of dark time where she tried to live life on her own without God, and boy, she just seemed to have squeezed the lessons out of that experience and recognized, "I'm not doing that this time; I'm doing it *this way, this time*." And boy, that's just such an inspiration for me. I wrestled with that whole word *stubborn*, and so, I like now that I've got other words like *determined* and *confident* to put around with it; because I wasn't sure what to do with it, because I can be stubborn about the wrong things. Like, I can get into an argument over stupid stuff, but then when it comes to, for example, not overloading my plate. I should hold the line. I should have boundaries about that, that's when I forget to be stubborn. And I end up all over the place and with a life that brings on more anxiety, which makes no sense.

Amy

Well, you know, I refer to myself sometimes as a rebel rule follower. What I have come to see it as, is that's my backbone, and I think that's what she's talking about. Her stubbornness is her backbone. You know, in a different context I talk about creating things that are laser-like and that picture, though, applies here that Heather seems like she has this laser-like focus on her life. And when you think about a laser, they're really deceptive, because they're so tiny. They're just very small. But that's where the power of laser is: is in its smallness, because it's focused, and it's hitting one point. I see Heather's life that way. And what about our lives? When you talk about, you keep adding and adding and adding; I tend to do that same thing ...that would only weaken a laser.

Cheri

That makes so much sense.

Amy

And so, that's something to think about, Cheri. Whoa.

Cheri

Yeah. And let me go back to what you said about backbone... because I think what I do, 'cause we're always talking, you're the one who always brings it up: external verses internal. A

backbone is internal - like it's inside your body. I tend to go for scaffolding. I grab on all these external things and use them to prop me up, but when they fall away, as external things always do, I'm like a jellyfish, because I don't have that internal backbone that is holding me upright. So maybe that stubbornness, that determination, that confidence, that resolve... and it's so, it's so contrary to think that surrendering produces backbone. Because it feels like surrender, I mean from the way the world thinks, and the way my logical dictionary definition brain might think of it, would be that surrender is giving up, which is weakness. And yet, what we saw in her and what you shared about Linda, is that it's that surrender and the acceptance of God's goodness is what's going to create that strong backbone. When everything external falls away, we're still going to be standing strong.

Amy

Oh Cheri, that's perfect! And that really is, and by the way, I think you have more backbone than you give yourself credit for, but I think that... I had to insert that for our listeners who are all saying, "Somebody say something to make Cheri feel better!" That is it! We all know this is true about you. You know, I think about what I got fascinated with in our interview is that she kind of skimmed over between when her dad died and she fell apart; and when she got this diagnosis, and she didn't. And I'm like wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. We cannot miss that! Because something happened internally that produced a different result the second time. I mean listen, we all know tons of people who get stuck in that first way of doing things, and they live the rest of their lives that way, and Heather didn't, so what was the change? It was surrender to Jesus. I just love, I had to write this down, where she said, "Jesus is kind of stubborn himself" And I loved that! And she talked about His unrelenting, stubborn pursuit of her. And how, even though, oh gosh, just the grace in this, even though, she had that first time tried to create the scaffolding around her with things like a glass of wine, (and she didn't go into all kinds of details) but he didn't just go, "Well, that's it. She built a scaffolding; we're done." He continued to pursue her, and it sounds like take down the scaffolding until she surrendered. And then, just the way she described how she had this insatiable hunger for Him after that, it was really a complete surrender. It was a waving of the white flag. And then, He began to build internally in her...tears again...what he knew she was going to need that day she got the diagnosis.

And I, when she said, you know she asked the doctor what's the treatment and he said, "Make your bucket list, and live your life well." I mean that moment took my breath away. Because again, it's a releasing of control, because even in our medical world, we wanna control. And we know lots of doctors who think they can control. You know, so it was just, uhh, a beautiful interview on every level.

Cheri

Absolutely. So what's the scripture that you paired with these episodes?

Amy

Psalm 91:2. Oh, and this goes perfectly with your picture, Cheri! "I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.'" And you know, I think about your picture that you just built. Instead of building this false scaffolding around us, what do we do? We run in to

God who is our protection, our backbone. He is the fortress instead of the things we prop ourselves up with. So beautiful!

Cheri

And what about the bad rule and the truth for this episode? What bad rule did you come up with?

Amy

So the bad rule is what we've been discussing, which is this idea that life is limitless, that our time is limitless, that we've got time is the lie. And the truth is, life's limits compel us to truly live.

Cheri

I love that. And that is a daily challenge, and I think part of what you describe earlier is that it's easy to live in denial. Or we could keep this in the forefront every day and realize that each day that we wake up, we hopefully have 24 hours. What would it be like to live that way? Not with panic, but just with the confidence that these 24 hours are a gift and how are we gonna use that gift. All right, what are you see being the *grit* out of all this and how about the *grace* out of all of this?

Amy

Well, I think the *grit* is looking death in the face. You know, this has been a hard episode to do, even as we sit here and talk because usually we joke and laugh, and there hasn't been a lot of joking and laughter in this one. And that's because as human beings we don't like to contemplate our limits. But *grit* is looking death in the face and saying, "Life eternal is what's next. But while I live here, I'm gonna leverage every minute."

Cheri

Well, and I think the *grace* in that is getting to a place where death isn't the thing that we fear, more than anything else. I mean so much of the hustle is to prevent death, whether it's a physical death, or the death of a dream, or the death of an idealized child, or an idealized fantastical marriage, and I'm speaking of myself. I don't know anyone else who does this, but wow, to say, "No. Death is part of life on this planet" and to not be constantly trying to fear it, prevent it, numb out of it, escape it, frees us to truly live the time that we do have with the kind of joy that we saw in Heather and the kind of joy that you saw in Linda; the fact that she has this kind of impact on you 18 years later, what a testimony. What a beautiful gift, and what an invested life she lived.

Amy

It was life-changing for me, because my life pattern in the past was to do what Heather did when her father died, which was to retreat and hide from God and not draw close to Him. And after I watched Linda, was like, "I never want to react that way again." I want to be the kind of example for others that Linda was for me, and I want to live the kind of life like Heather said, "Let's not believe what the world tells us, life with God is truly better. It's so much better."

Cheri

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode86

Amy

There you'll find the transcript for this episode, this week's digging deeper download, Bible verse art, and a chance to sign up for a giveaway of Heather's book.

Cheri

Have you received your free permission slips that remind you to break bad rules? If not, they're our special gift to all of our subscribers. You can sign up for our email list at our website.

Amy

Be sure to join us next week when we'll be interviewing Tricia Goyer, author of *Walk it Out*.

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!