

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #92: How to Walk Through Pain Instead of Escaping It

Cheri

So have you ever had anybody fangirl over you? Like a sighting in the wild where they were like, “Are you Amy Carroll?”

Amy

I have, I have. But it always just makes me laugh. And this lady at an event this last weekend, she said, I was asking her about past events and she said, “Well, we’ve never had someone famous like you.”

Cheri

<Squeal>

Amy

And listen, it just made me giggle, but I felt bad ‘cause it kind of tickled me. And I said, “I’m sorry that I’m giggling. That is so nice for you to say that.” But all I’m doing is imagining my two 20-something sons standing here busting a gut laughing, hearing their mother described that way. Like, what I do most often is wash other people’s underwear. So, you know, let’s just keep it all in perspective. Just saying. How about you?

Cheri

Kathi and I were traveling to a place called Grizzly Flatts, and we stopped by a Target nearby and she goes one direction, and I go another direction, and I hear somebody say, “Cheri?” And I turn around and she goes, “Are you Cheri Gregory?” And literally, what I’m thinking is she must not think I’m a speaker or a writer because if she had seen Kathi, she would know Kathi, because Kathi’s written 17 books. And I’ve written two. So this can’t be a sighting in the wild or a fangirl moment, but it was! For some reason she knew me. Now, she said she knew it was me because she saw Kathi. She’s like, “Okay, the two of them together, it must be Cheri and Kathi,” and she knew us from a writer’s conference, the West Coast Christian Writer’s Conference. It was just the funniest thing! She was so sweet and talked to us, and the person — we were trying to do a selfie, you know how fun and awkward that is, so somebody came by and took a picture of us. It was way too much fun for me. Nothing like that had ever happened. But I thought, there is this real mixture of how fun that is but then how sobering that is to realize really just how much we mean to each other, because I was thrilled to meet her. I was probably more thrilled to meet her than she was to meet me. It was just cool to realize that there’s real flesh and blood people who read our stuff or listen to our stuff and that it makes a difference for them. It was really fun.

Amy

Yeah. It always amazes me. But mostly we're just a legend in our own mind.

<Laughter>

But Ginny Yttrup on the other hand. We were both like nutty fangirls about her.

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 processing what we learned from our interview with Ginny Yttrup, author of *Home*.

Cheri

Alright. And you're going to start because you did, you went all fangirl on her, and I'm putting that whole thing into the podcast. I'm cutting nothing out of that.

<Laughter>

Amy

I think what I do is easy, this nonfiction thing. It's just me talking. I mean for a girl who has the gift of gab a captive audience is a dream come true. So nonfiction seems so easy, but fiction takes somebody special to write that. I don't know why I feel that way, but I do, 'cause I guess 'cause I'm just such a big fan of fiction. And I know you've known Ginny for a long time so, anyway. But she was just — she, I thought, I told Cheri after the interview, listeners, "Wow, she's as cool and as smart as any novelist should be."

Cheri

Yeah, you went into that interview with expectations. You did. You had yourself some expectations.

Amy

I did. She met them all. She met them all.

Cheri

I wonder if she'll write you into her next novel. That would be fun!

Amy

That could be cool, depending on what she writes.

Cheri

Or horrifying.

<Laughter>

Oh my word. Yeah, I've had the privilege of working with Ginny for several years now. She's my writing coach. And I chose her, because I wanted to learn to tell my true stories as well as a fiction writer tells, quotes, "made up" stories. And so she's taught me how to, in my writing at least, how to include more details, how to show not tell, and how to know which details to leave out. That is so hard for me, 'cause I am one of those who, when I was little, I'm sure when I told stories they went on for hours, and all I ever said, "and then this, and then this, and then this, and then this and then this" and you can't do that when you're writing or speaking if you want people listen.

Amy

Exactly.

Cheri

So, I think she's actually helped me to condense my stories even when I tell them to Daniel, which he would greatly appreciate. Like, just get to the bottom line.

Amy

That's hilarious. Well one of the things that I loved about her book was that one of her main characters was a novelist. And it was so fascinating, because I learned some things about writing, reading about Melanie, the character. And one of the things, and I'd love to hear you talk about this, she talked about is 2 kinds of writers. But I think, for those of you who are listeners who aren't writers, I think this extends to everyday life. But either you're a *pantser*, in other words you write by the seat of your pants, or you're a *plotter*, which means you do outlines and you think about what's coming. And so Melanie, the main character, was a *pantser*, and I think that's the main reason I loved Melanie is 'cause that's what I am, too. So how...are you *pantser*, I know you're a *plotter*.

Cheri

I was gonna say, Amy, what would you think I am? I mean, come on now!

<Laughter>

I will show you the spreadsheet for Grit-n-Grace. It takes 12 pages, and then I have to use a paper cutter so I can tape it together. But you know, for some things in life, you need to be a *plotter*, if they're going to actually happen on time. The problem with being a *plotter*, is when I

plot, when *pantsing* would be just fine. And that's one of the things that I'm learning to do with you, 'cause I'm...yeah...we've been more spontaneous with this podcast, and it's good.

Amy

Yeah. How can I be a *pantser* AND a perfectionist? I don't know, I'm a *plotter* about some things, and then a *pantser* about others. So it's just weird, a strange combination.

Cheri

I think most recovering perfectionists and people-pleasers; I think we all have our own constellation of the areas in which we really care, because you can't be a perfectionist about everything. There's just too much in the world. You can't please everybody, so there's going to be those areas that we do "specialize in"...mmm...with quotations around specializing.

Amy

Okay, well one thing that I thought was so fascinating about the interview was right at the beginning when you asked her about her theme of truth and she was like, "Oh, I didn't realize until just now that that is a theme." Okay, I always wondered about that, like, in high school and college when we're writing these long essays about somebody else's work. I'm like, "Are we totally making this up? Did authors even mean to write all these illusions and things like that I'm writing about or am I just making it up?" Well, evidently, we're just making it up!

Cheri

Oh, and worse than that though, I thought that I was going to get an A plus for it! I thought I was going to get bonus points for noticing and that she was going to say, "Cheri, how astute of you to notice my major theme" and instead she goes, "I had no idea," and I'm like, well, there go my bonus points out the window.

Amy

So funny! That was the thing that really hit me about the book and the thing that I really love about fiction is — in non-fiction you can't get into people's heads, but in fiction you get a glimpse in people's heads, and I think that's what gets to our hearts, too. And so, you know, it was just how the different characters in the book dealt with pain and grief that just really captivated me. 'Cause there's Melanie, the main character, who she just runs away from it. And then there's a mother in it who, like, denies it ever happened. And she thinks she's protecting her daughter, but she's really just jacked her daughter up, and she's creating more pain from her. And there's Jill that we talked about in the interview, that uses control of her surroundings to try to control her memories. It was just really rich and deep. And you know, I think, I kind of raved about it at the beginning, but I think the thing I loved about it... sometimes Christian Fiction is just not. It's just a little too fluffy, it's not close enough to real life. And Ginny delved into real life.

Cheri

You know I think some people read fiction to escape. And maybe that's why I like Ginny's work, because it is an escape for me, but it's not — it's recreation. It's recreation, not escape,

because the word recreation means re-creation. And so it is something I do to take a break from my life and to just have some fun and enjoy, but when I'm done with one of her books, I don't regret that I have to come back to real life. I feel like I'm coming back to real life richer and fuller, and actually better equipped to deal with it. So I think that makes a big difference.

I found the character Melanie so fascinating, because I'm not able to shelve my thoughts the way she is able to. I'm not able to tell myself, "I'm not gonna think about that." I mean, like, never in my entire life have I been able to not think about something unless I'm really praying and being very intentional about surrendering it to God. But just the ability to go "nope, I'm not thinking about it. Nope." That's foreign to me. So she was a character that I was kind of in awe of, and it taught me a little bit about some of the people I've known who are able to do that. And I just didn't, I didn't know it was something that people really can do, because it just doesn't happen for me. And I think we both really responded to Jill, the character with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. And I picked up on it the second time she wiped her counter, and by the third time there was something inside of me that went, "Oh no, honey, don't do it." And so, it was so fascinating to hear Ginny say that she had the same response as she was writing it.

Amy

Absolutely fascinating to me! And yeah, Jill's journey in the book was, even though she was a secondary character, was really super powerful. Well and it was helpful to talk that through with you guys about Melanie, because as you know I've had an experience recently where I was processing with you about just a situation I was really just despairing over, despairing and I had taken some time before I talked to you to really seek the Lord and say, "How did I get here? What's sin? What's not sin?" What I felt like God spoke to me is He said, "You thought you had dealt with the feelings you had going up to this event. But you didn't. You just stuffed them."

Cheri

Oh. Oh.

Amy:

"If you had just brought them to me and just surrendered them, I could have helped you." So it was just going up to this speaking event, I felt this anxiety, I was struggling with some comparison, and I had some difficult people situations that I was dealing with. And so I did what you said you can't do – I thought, well, I subconsciously thought, "Well, I'm just not gonna think about that then, and it's all gonna be okay." And it seemed like it was! I thought, "Oh, I'm good, until I started walking up on the stage, and I completely felt all of it in that moment and fell apart. God said, "If you would have, instead of deciding not to think about it and stuffing it, if you would have just surrendered it to me, we could've taken care of all that." And so I think, it was the same story as Melanie's story, that she has a significant event in her life, that she stuffs instead of surrendering and it affected her in very negative ways. And mine was short term; hers was long term.

Cheri

Okay, so, I do want to point out that for you completely falling apart was that you mispronounced 6 words during your message, so could we just...

Amy

Okay, well it was a little bigger than that but...

Cheri

be clear about that for our listeners about what it looks like for Amy Carroll to completely fall apart at an event? Oh my word, I love it.

Amy

Yeah, now I'm gonna scare people from ever asking me to speak.

<Laughter>

Cheri

But, you know you make such a good point, because really what that comes down to, and I resonate with it too, is somehow you decided that this issue was something that you needed to take care of yourself.

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

Maybe you were ashamed that it was coming back up again, or you were like, "We dealt with that 5 years ago. We dealt with that last year. I'm not dealing with it this year anymore. I'm done with that." And somehow God didn't need to be involved with it. Either you didn't need to bother Him with it, or the two of you had already cared for it, and so Amy Carroll made a decision about that without involving God in it. I listened to Brennan Manning's book, *Abba's Child*, on the way to my retreat last weekend, and he talked about the imposter that lives within all of us, and that instead of pretending this dark side to us doesn't exist we need to constantly, whatever, whether it's the reforming perfectionist part of us, the people pleaser, whatever it might be. We have to constantly take this into the presence of Jesus. Whatever it is, we don't deny it, we don't pretend that it doesn't exist; we say, "There you are, here you are, let's go to Jesus." And you know, where do we get the idea that it's ever going to stop? That it's once and for all, that God's up there going, "Okay, is today the day you finally aren't going to need me? Can I finally turn my attention elsewhere? Amy, can you handle this speaking engagement, finally, at long last without needing something from me?" I just don't imagine Him ever doing that.

Amy

It's so good. It's so good. And that really leads to what was my big "aha" moment, when we talked to Ginny, is that we cannot dodge the truth AND be close to Jesus. It's impossible. And I saw it in the book, I mean I saw it in the story, as Melanie, the further she ran away from her

pain, the further the distance there was between her and Jesus, but I didn't think about the scripture that Ginny shared with us, "And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." And so if we're running from the truth, the truth in that scripture is Jesus, it's Truth with a capital T, so if you're running from Truth and Jesus is the Truth, then by definition we're running from Him.

Cheri

Yeah. And we live in a culture where we're all running from Truth, because on this planet, Truth generally comes with pain.

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

And that's no fun. And most of us, I'll speak for myself; I wasn't raised or trained to deal with pain or normalize the kind of pain that's just part of living on this planet. I'm not talking about abuse or areas in which we need boundaries, but this is going to be a painful life, and trying to run from it or escape, she did say that the book was meant to be about escape, which it definitely, there were various characters who escaped in various ways, and we've talked before about Brené Brown and how she talks about how we numb ourselves. And the truth is that we live lives of pain. That's not the only thing they are, but I think we miss out on so much of what we could have, the joy and the peace and the hope, because we're...if we're going to avoid the Truth by numbing the pain, we numb everything. We avoid everything. We know we can't selectively suppress or feel emotions. You suppress one, you suppress them all and so we live these numbed out lives rather than the abundant life that God promises us. And then, at least in my case, I blame Him and wonder where He is. And He's like, "I'm here."

Amy

Exactly. Well, I was talking to one of my friends, she heard a parenting conference this weekend, and she said she got this great question to ask her child in the midst of discipline situations. And the question is, "Will this decision bring me closer to Jesus or create distance from Him?" And I thought, "Oh, that's not just a good parenting question. That's a good question for all of us. *Will this decision bring me closer to Jesus or create distance from Him?*" And I thought, "You know what the truth is, every single decision we make pretty much, I mean except for maybe what color we put on in the morning, that kind of thing, it does one of the two. It brings us closer to Jesus or creates distance from Jesus."

And the truth is, any time we decide to stuff pain or to escape from pain, it takes us on a path away from Jesus. That's a hard thing. That's a hard truth, but hopefully that'll help us, like, you know, "Hey, I'd rather walk through this with Jesus than without Him."

Cheri

Absolutely. To tie it in with our least favorite word, control, she had the nerve to say I prolong pain when I try to control. I'm like, "Really, Ginny, did you have to say that?" And what's control

about? Control is about either trying to prevent pain, or get out of pain, or control the amount of pain, or the kind of pain. And so all of this stuff that we recovering people-pleasers and perfectionists are trying to deal with, I like that question: *Will it bring me closer to Jesus or create distance from Him?*

Amy

Yeah, 'cause whenever we take control, Jesus takes a step back.

Cheri

Yeah, He doesn't force.

Amy

It's like, "Well, go ahead girl, let's just see how this goes."

<Laughter>

He's just shaking his head. But when we allow Jesus to be in control, that's when He's close.

Cheri

Alright, now talk about why you're such a fiction fan, because really fiction is a big lie. Here we are talking about the truth and fiction isn't really true. So Amy, how can you be a Christian and read fiction?

Amy

Well I have several close friends, and I cannot believe we can even be friends, but they are my close friends, that think fiction is a waste of time. Like, literally, they have told me that. If you're not learning something, but see here is what I have to say to that: Jesus loves stories, so there. Jesus loves stories. And I'm pretty sure He would love southern girls, 'cause man, sweet tea and stories, that's what the South is about. That really is what the South is about. So I'm pretty sure Jesus and southern girls are tight. But I love fiction, because I really think that fiction teaches lessons to our heart more than it teaches lesson to our head. And I just love a story that's a vehicle for a great lesson. It's just one of my favorite things in the whole, wide world.

Cheri

I teach AP English Literature. So I teach fiction in the classroom to seniors. And I tell them that what I love is that it's an opportunity for vicarious learning. I'm going to read about things that I would never do and many of them are things I'm glad I don't have to do. But I can live through experiences with these characters and learn lessons that there's actually some really good research data that's coming out that says those who read fiction are actually more empathetic. I'll put the link to that research in the show notes.

Amy

I like that. I need some research to throw at my friends. See, I'm not shallow reading fiction!

Cheri

That will deepen those friendships right there. Here's some truth!

<Laughter>

Amy

Truth bomb! You know, I'm known for these.

Cheri

Alright, so what is the scripture that you've connected to these episodes with Ginny?

Amy

John 8:31A-32

"Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

Cheri

And the bad rule?

Amy

If I hide and run, I can avoid pain. Have you found that to be true, Cheri?

Cheri

Um, I have found that for 50 years I have tried it. I keep trying to make it true.

<Laughter>

Okay, so what is the truth, instead of the bad rule?

Amy

Walking with Jesus through pain brings me close to Him.

Oh it's such a better way to do things, and I think back to our interview with Heather, and what she said, is, you know, she'd rather walk with Jesus through this painful season than do it without Him.

Cheri

So what about the *grit* aspect of all of this?

Amy

Well, my natural tendency, and my habit that I'm really working to break from just a lifetime of doing it is to hide from Jesus when I'm in pain, 'cause I like to bring cheerful to Him, and I have a hard time bringing painful to Him. So for me, just the drawing close to Jesus in that painful

time requires *grit*. It requires intentionality; it requires pushing past what feels uncomfortable for me.

Cheri

Absolutely! And, for me, the *grace* aspect is recognizing that a lot of this learning how to stop hiding, to stop running, to start actually normalizing pain and grief and loss, all of which are these truths...for most of my life that's not something that I've known how to do... and so giving myself *grace*, as a recovering perfectionist, who wants to do it all right. "Okay, if I have to learn to grieve, then give me those *5 Steps of Grief*, and I will march through them like you've never seen before, and I'll get a gold star for each one," you know? And it doesn't work that way at all. I'm kind of reeling from this contrast that we can either have a life of just struggling unsuccessfully to numb our pain or we can have Jesus. Struggle to avoid pain or Jesus. I mean it's a choice between those two. And our life with Jesus will still include pain. So either way there's pain. The struggle to avoid pain, there's still going to be pain, because that's a hard struggle. And we lose, and it's miserable.

And so, I guess for me, part of the *grace* is also realizing that figuring out that I need to chose Jesus. It seems like such a no duh; I feel dumb for not always doing it instinctively and intuitively. And I'm like...when you spell it out, "Oh, I can have truth or not have Jesus." Oh, well, why would that ever be a choice? And yet, this afternoon I'll be facing it again. And so I guess, part of the *grace* is this is part of the human condition, this is part of the culture that we live in. Let's focus on the what now, which is Jesus is always here. He's not going, "Are you stuck in the corner with your pain again? GIRL, how many thousands of times have we been through this?" 'Cause that's how I would be if it was me and my students, I'd be like, "We've been through this 10 times. You have syllabus. Read your syllabus!" You know, but Jesus never says, "You have a syllabus, read your bible, and come back when you have it memorized." You know, it's Him, He's always there. And that is unfathomable grace, that we can keep messing it up; we can keep thinking; we can run from our pain, and so we keep running form him, and then we pause and recognize we've done it again, we turn around and He is always there. That is *grace*.

Amy

Good gracious, that made me tear up. Yes.

Cheri

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode92.

Amy

There you'll find this week's transcript, a digging deeper download, and Bible verse art.

Cheri

If you've enjoyed this episode of Grit-n-Grace, we would just love it if you would give us a review on iTunes. You'll find a link on the webpage for this episode.

Amy

Join us next week when we'll be interviewing Shannon Popkin, author of *Control Girl*.

Cheri

Are we sure we want to interview her?

Amy

I'm so glad you said something because I was like, "Wow, did we sign up for that?"

Cheri

I don't know... maybe we can still change.

<Laughter>

Amy

Welcome, Shannon!

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 and Cheri

Break it!

Outtake

Cheri

Amy, if I put orange on, it creates distance from Jesus, I'm sure. He takes a step back. He really does.

Amy

I apologize to all the Clemson fans that are listening.

<Laughter>

Okay, what was that powerful point I was making, Cheri? Oh yeah, will this...

<Laughter>

Cheri

So my last little comment about orange was an attention seeking attempt to not go that deep, because I don't want to deal with my pain. I confess it!