

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

Episode #95: The Best Ways to Reconnect with Your Family

**Cheri**

Okay Amy, before you became a mom, how would you have filled in the blanks to, “The perfect mother always BLANK and the perfect mother never, ever BLANK?”

**Amy**

Well I’m really glad you asked the question that way, because I was an incredible parent before I had any children.

**Cheri**

Hehe, don’t I know it...

**Amy**

So I would’ve said, the perfect mother always makes the holidays special, and the perfect mother never loses her cool. How about you?

**Cheri**

I would’ve said that the perfect mother loves to cook delicious meals for her family, and the perfect mother never, ever yells at her kids.

**Amy**

Mhm. So before we had children we aimed for this, right? To be the perfect mother. One of our listeners said, “I feel so strongly that I must be the perfect wife and mom that I won’t let anyone help me with anything. My irrational fear is that accepting any type of help will mean that I’m not being the wife and mother that my family needs and deserves. I have got to let some things go and let my family help because in all reality, I’m driving myself nuts trying to do everything alone. Ugh!”

**Cheri**

I so, so sympathize with her.

**Amy**

Yes. I was thinking: Anyone? Anyone out there? And for me the holidays still kind of stick in there as my perfect example that I want to do everything for everyone instead of letting it go.

**Cheri**

And that fear of not being who your family needs you to be...I just think that’s so universal to moms.

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 Kathi Lipp, author of *The Mom Project: 21 Ways To a More Connected Family*. Kathi is the author of 18 books and a beloved conference and retreat speaker known for her humor, hope, and practical how-to's. Kathi co-hosts the *Clutter Free Academy* Podcast and the *Communicator Academy* Podcast and she's the founder of the *Leverage Speaker Conference*. Kathi has been married to Roger for twelve years and has four adult children.

**Cheri**

And I just want to say that I have hung out with Kathi and her family many, many times, and I can tell you, she is a woman who continues to walk her talk.

**Amy**

Okay, so I'm going to lead with my question that I always lead with, Kathi, which is, how did you come to write a parenting book? And I want to clarify; I don't mean how did YOU come to write a parenting book...

Kathi

What on earth, Kathi?! You know what, I would love to give you some deep spiritual reason, but lets just be honest, it was a contract. We had *The Husband Project*, which did really, really well, and then we had *The Marriage Project*, which didn't do so well but came out in another iteration as *Happy Habits For Couples*, and so with that twist on it it's done very well. Then we didn't want to do "The Kid Project" so we ended up calling it *21 Ways To Connect With Your Kids*. And Cheri was a big part of that book, and so was Erin McPherson. I'll be honest with you, right before I went to write that book, everything with my kids fell apart, just like it all went crashing to the ground. I literally contacted Harvest House to get me out of the contract, because there was no way I could write a book. And the book they wanted me to write, I think at first, was how to raise happy, awesome kids. And I already knew I couldn't do that. Not that my kids aren't awesome and aren't happy some of the time, but I just knew we don't have a lot of control often times how our kids turn out. We only have control over our own behavior so that's the angle I took on the book. What can I do with the resources God has already given me, with the child that God has already given me to be the – not even the best mom I can be, but to honor who God created this child to be? What can I do in that? And let me just be super clear...I have a twenty-five year old and a twenty-seven year old, and I still wake up in a cold sweat thinking what can I do? Not what could I have done, but what can I do. Like I said, my kids are

great adults, but this is the most tender part of my heart that can get me to a place of, “God I don’t feel equipped” so, so quickly. So there’s the 20-minute answer to that 20-second question.

### **Cheri**

No, but it’s a perfect lead in to my question. The second chapter you open up by saying, “You’re a better parent than you think you are.” And I got all teary reading that last night and my kids are twenty-five and twenty-seven, and I do still think about what I wish I had done differently. You know I tend to live in the past. So how did you know I needed this kind of affirmation? How did you know that moms need this affirmation that we are probably doing a better job than we think we are?

### **Kathi**

Because just when you said that, you wrote, you’re a better mom than you think you are, and it sounded like I was saying I’m a better mom than I think I am. And I just wanted to say, no Cheri, no, no, no. Let’s be clear. I’m telling everybody else they’re a better mom. That’s not me! That’s why we so desperately need it. Because we all can point to how everybody else is doing it better than we are. How everybody else had the flashcards when their kids were little. How everybody else had the connection with their kids that we didn’t have. And I know that if you are picking up a book about parenting then you’re a better parent than you probably think you are. That you’re admitting, “Hey, I have some deficits. Hey, I have some gaps in my learning.” Nobody taught us how to be good parents. Nobody taught us that if we can raise our kids with love and resiliency and to honor God, that’s 80% of the battle. How come I learned that in my 40s and not when I was 14 when I needed those seeds planted for my parenting. I think a lot of us, and I look at the people who are sitting here on this podcast, we’re doing a lot of parenting of adults. I know I’m going back and filling in gaps that I wish I would’ve done when they were younger. But you know what? I still care and I still invest. I’m a good parent. I’m not a good parent maybe according to the world’s standards, but God knows my heart. And God knows my deep care for my kids and wanting them not to succeed but to be who God has created them to be.

### **Cheri**

All right, well, if *The Mom Project* isn’t, as I suspect, and as I know, a handbook for how to become the perfect mom, then what is it about?

### **Kathi**

What that book was was an exercise for me and for the friends who did it and for the readers who did it because I’ve heard this....it’s breaking down the idea of what a good mom looks like. Because if we’re just trying to prove to everybody else that we are a good mom, our kids are missing things in the middle. So it’s saying let’s take who you are, who God has created you to be, let’s talk about who God has created your kids uniquely to be...because all of us here have more than one kid, everybody on this podcast. And what worked with Justin was – I’ve heard you say this exactly Cheri! You have two different roles, because mom of Anne Marie is a wildly different role for mom of Jonathan. And the same for Justin and Kimberli, as well. And I think

there's a third role in parenting them together. My kids are just 19 months apart; there's a lot of stuff we did together as a family. And then I have some extra bonus roles because I am a stepmom and that doesn't look like regularly mom-ing, and so there's a different type of rope that you need to walk. And so it can feel very overwhelming, but when we get down to simply...how do you stay connected to your kids...and if there is anything I have done successfully as a parent – I am connected with my adult kids: all four of them including my stepkids. Last night, Roger and I were lying in bed talking to Amanda on the phone. She's our 30 year old. You know, we have dinner dates with two of our kids this week. None of them live near us, but we are connected. And so, yes, there are things I wish I would've done differently, and this is not a point of bragging. This is a point of having – I was broken before God, because I felt like the worst mom in the world and if I had known that this would be the result then I think I would've trusted God a little sooner and a little faster.

**Cheri**

Alright, well, there's a whole chapter in the book about connecting with your child's personality. Why...

**Kathi**

Really. Is there Cheri?

**Cheri**

I might know a thing or two about that chapter...

**Kathi**

She wrote it! She wrote it!

**Cheri**

Alright, alright but why are you such a big believer in moms knowing about the personalities? What difference does that make?

**Kathi**

Because it is the secret code that gets you to the next level. You know, can you tell I had sons who like video games? We have such a special blessing in our house, because we have 4 kids. There are 4 personalities. Each of my kids has one of those personalities and it's not -

**Amy**

Oh!

**Kathi**

Yeah, oh Amy, you didn't know that? And it's not like, oh Jeremy could be this or – no they are like classic textbook cases. Let me just go over them very, very quickly. Amanda is the expressive so my favorite way to describe Amanda, our oldest, is her favorite color isn't purple, it's purple sparkle. She's thirty years old. She teaches in schools and so her theme for her classroom is under the sea and she has a bunny and so she says she's making him into a mer-

bunny. I mean this is just who she is, she is expressive, she's filled with joy, everything is an adventure for her. And then you have the exact opposite, my son Justin, who is an analytic. When you think about an analytic, let me just say, I am almost always wrong. Let's just be super-clear. And I've come to understand that it's nothing personal. That's just – he's exacting, and he likes facts. And that's okay. And then I have Jeremy who is my laid-back, kick-back, everything's cool dude, can't we all just get along, never met anybody he didn't get along with, if you couldn't find Jeremy it's because he was off hanging out with people he'd never met before and that's fine. And he's as loyal as the day is long. He's the most loyal, hardworking person that I've ever met, which hardworking doesn't always go with this kick-back, but he's just faithful and steady. And then Kimberli, whose spiritual gift is bossiness, you know if you would just listen to her, the world would just be a much better place. So I have these 4 different personalities, and when I understood what works for Jeremy does not work for Kimberli...in fact, it's completely the opposite. And when I started to understand I could do little tiny things for each of them to connect with them that would be leveraged in a huge way. And when I started to understand that I could tell Jeremy, "Hey, I picked up this candy for you, it was just on the way somewhere"...what he doesn't know is I probably went 10 miles out of my way to pick up that candy because I know it's his favorite, but because he's an amiable, he doesn't want to put anybody out. He'd feel terribly guilty. Now, my daughter Amanda, would want to know that I went 30 miles out of my way to get that candy because to her that's true love. To understand those little nuances, it doesn't change who I am, but it changes how I connect with my kids. And I can understand more deeply when I buy them a gift, when I take them out for coffee, whatever we're doing, these little connection points can make all the difference in how we connect to each other and how I connect with their different personalities.

### **Cheri**

What kind of gifts do you get for Kimber?

### **Kathi**

Oh I don't. I buy her gift cards with her loyalty number. So if it's a *Sephora* gift card, I find out her *Sephora* number so that she gets the bonus points and the free gifts, because she's a control freak, and I love her for it, but anytime I try to buy something for her, it's not 100% right, and she's so gracious about it, but she's a terrible liar and cannot fake joy. She just can't. And so what I've come to learn is a gift card – she will hold that like a precious jewel, because what I've done is I've given her control over her gift, and it makes her so happy.

### **Amy**

Well, I love that and these connections that you're talking about, you are talking about how to think about the other person to make the connection and not yourself to make the connection. And so, in thinking about the other person you make them happy, but have you ever gone about making a connection and investing the time and effort but nobody ended up happy?

### **Kathi**

I think that is called being a teenager.

<LAUGHTER>

And for boys, maybe the teenage spread lasts a little bit longer. I think there were times when I felt like I was getting nothing back. But here's where I think the investment pays off is because my boys will bring up stuff now that I did 8-10 years ago, and I'm like, I thought you hated me. I thought you didn't even notice. It's interesting for them to look back at that and say what were those connection points? One of things, Jeremy and I, when we get together we quote lines to each other from some of our favorite comedians. Now why is that significant? Because as his step-mom he wanted nothing to do with me. He just thought I was evil on a cracker for a long time, and so but I was charged with picking him up from a college night that he was attending in high school. And when I'd pick him up, I would be listening to comedians in my car. I would turn it off as soon as he got in my car because I know he likes silence. Well, one time I forgot to turn it off and I go, oh sorry, and I went to turn it off. And he goes nope that's okay you can keep listening, and I'm like, "Oh, okay." And so we were listening to a comedian named John Pinette, he's just hilarious, and so –

**Amy**

That's my husband's favorite.

**Kathi**

Really?

**Amy**

Yes!

**Kathi**

Oh my goodness!

**Amy**

"Get out of the line!"

**Kathi**

Oh my goodness, Jeremy, like, I would say two years after we were doing this daily drop off and pick up where I would put on different comedians each time. He yelled, "Get out of the line" to me and nobody else in the entire room knew what we were talking about except for him and me. He and I have this secret language now, and we still do this. Having those shared experiences – at the time I just thought it was a good way to pass time in the car. It's that investment that sometimes that doesn't pay off for years and years and years to come. And so as the parent of a teenager, you just can't take anything personally. You just can't. You cannot. Because their brains are still developing. Their brains are still mush. And when you're trying to get adult answers – they have adult bodies, but kid brains, and they don't know how to relate. I would not go back to being a teenager for all the money. I just wouldn't. And so, yes, you can invest, and I think the pay off sometimes comes later. And we have to be okay with that.

**Cheri**

One of the things I like about the way the book is structured is that for each connection there is something predictable in each chapter, and one of them is you have a special section for single moms. So what would you say is the most important thing you did as a single mom to intentionally connect with your kids.

**Kathi**

Can I give you a couple? Is that okay?

**Cheri**

Yes, of course.

**Kathi**

One, as a single mom from divorce, I think one of the most important things was not bashing my ex because as much as we would love to have the kids on our sides and as much as we want to prove we are doing everything for them, nothing will cause a wedge between you and your child more than you complaining about their dad. To me that is just key. The other thing that was really important is to not parent alone. My ex was not the most cooperative at times, but I had my parents who could step in and help. I had my church family that could step in and help. I was only single for a few years. I was very, very fortunate. But when we got to that place of being what felt very much like by ourselves it was to reach out to other parents and to build a team. And there was a single group at church. And when you think singles group at church, you think, meat market. But that was not at all how ours was structured. We were all single parents just trying to survive. And so I was really grateful for the other single parents who could give me advice, and it wasn't just other single parents, it was also other married parents as well. So building your team is so critical, especially when you're feeling – that was a time of depression for me, it was very, very tough, and I needed strong people around me.

**Cheri**

Okay there's 21 connections in the book; out of all those which one is your favorite?

**Kathi**

It's gonna sound doofy. I should say something really spiritual, but I'm not going to. Family fun night. Family fun night! And it's just an opportunity for you or your kids to plan a fun night for your entire family. We used to do five dollar family fun night and with inflation it was 15 dollars. And this was an opportunity for me or one of my kids, or when Roger and I got married, Roger or one of his kids to plan an evening for our whole family. And so we would do something like rent a movie and do pizza fondue on the carpet. Not recommended by the way, let's just be super-clear. There was going to the duck park. Our kids would sometimes save up their money so that we could do a big family fun night. We'd go to the dollar movie theatre and share one bucket of popcorn, the kind that could be refilled a thousand times. Now, we were doing this 12 years ago, so there still were dollar movies back then. And so, but now with digital and all the different thing you can do. We can do so many things. I've heard of people who do scavenger hunts for their family fun nights. One family, what they do, they do a dive in movie, so they

have a projector on the back of their house and they sit in the pool in floaties and things like that and they watch a movie in their backyard.

**Amy**

Love it!

**Kathi**

Yeah, and Jeremy and I, one of the things that we did, is we bought ingredients to cook together as a family. So I don't know. I think that one has given me the best memories and the best connections with my kids. So that's the one I would say.

**Amy**

Hey, since Cheri lives by the Pacific Ocean, Cheri, you could project a movie on the beach or something and float in the ocean.

<LAUGHTER>

**Kathi**

Hey, that would be awesome!

**Amy**

We don't have pools, but hey, the ocean is even better.

**Kathi**

We had another family who took that idea and they had toddlers and their best friends had toddlers and so they did a drive-in movie on their driveway so they all brought their scooters and their little push cars. How cute is that right? That's the cutest thing in the world. The parents were on blankets and comfy chairs. It's just about getting your family invested in adventure. My kids are grown, but Roger and I still do this with our adult kids, and we still do this with our family of two. Like, one of the things that we are planning right now, we're doing a cheese tour of Northern California. Most people want to go to all the wineries, but we aren't big drinkers, so we are doing a cheese tour. Can I just tell you what the level of excitement in the Lipp house is over the cheese tour. I can't even tell you; I'm so excited.

**Amy**

Oh, my gosh, the Carrolls could get on board with the Lipp's on that tour, let me just say.

**Kathi**

Come to Northern California; we will drive you around. If you get drunk on cheese, we can be the designated driver.

**Amy**

I don't think drunk is the problem with cheese, but that's a whole different episode.



<LAUGHTER>

**Kathi**

You know what? Let me just say this. Just as we were talking about cheese, because that's really the important thing about this whole podcast. You know, I think about this Christmas where all of our kids got together. And, because they know Roger and I well, we have connected deeply with them on certain levels, our kids, for Christmas, got us a Cheese of the Month Club.

<LAUGHTER>

Let me tell you how incredibly selfish my kids are. They said, you know, we got you this Cheese of the Month Club, and then we can come over and try it with you?

**Cheri**

Of course!

**Amy**

You provide the dinner and crackers, right?

**Kathi**

Exactly! But, you know what, here's the thing. Our kids still want to be connected with us as adults.

**Cheri**

Yes.

**Kathi**

I'll take it. You know what? (It's) the most selfish gift on the planet. I'll take it, because I get to be with my kids.

**Amy**

So what closing words of encouragement would you like to leave with our listeners, Kathi?

**Kathi**

Okay, I think the most important thing is, it's never too late. It's never too late. And I'll just be honest with you after my time of being a single mom, I went through a bout of depression where my kids' physical needs were met, but their emotional and spiritual and relational needs were in some ways neglected. And I used to feel incredibly guilty for that. I couldn't be the mom that I needed to be, because I was going through such a dark place myself. But you know, God can fill in the gaps. God knows who you are and who your kids are, and I would also say this. As we look at our own kids we also need to look at the kids around us. And to step in and be – when somebody took an interest in my kids, it was Christmas to me. When people valued my kids and saw who my kids were, because they were not the traditional go to church on Sunday, participate in youth group, and when people saw my kids and called out good things in

them, especially in the church, it made all the difference to my mom heart. And then, I think the final thing I would say is look for the good. Sometimes it feels like, this kid with me? God, what were you thinking? There was no mistake. You have things that you need to learn from that child and there are things that child needs from you. Just remember, we think that mom-ing is the hardest thing that anybody has ever done. I think being a kid can be incredibly tough, too. And so, to go in with grace and say, you know what? We're just all trying to figure this out together, and that's why we need to lean deeply on and into God. And to be honest with your kids when you're struggling, and say I'm trying to figure this out, too. So you need to give me a little bandwidth as we all figure this out together. I think it's okay to be vulnerable in front of your kids. To never lose the control and say I've got this under control, kids, you do not need to be the adult here. That's not what I'm saying at all. But to say, you know what? This stuff is hard for me, too, and we're figuring it out together and that's why we need to lean deeply into God.

**Cheri**

Head on over to [gritngracegirls.com/episode95](http://gritngracegirls.com/episode95)

**Amy**

There you'll find our transcript, this week's digging deeper download, the Bible verse art, and you can enter to win this week's giveaway of *The Mom Project*.

**Cheri**

We'd love to invite you to be a supporter of the Grit-n-Grace Podcast. You can find full details at our patreon page, that's [patreon.com/gritngracegirls](http://patreon.com/gritngracegirls).

**Amy**

Join us next week when we'll be processing together what we learned today from Kathi.

**Cheri**

For today grow you *grit*, embrace God's *grace*, and when you run across a bad rule, you know what to do, go right on ahead and...

**Amy & Cheri**

BREAK IT!

**Outtake**

**Cheri**

It occurred to me this morning that we have treated you worst of any guest we've ever had.

<LAUGHTER>

You're our mentor and best friend, and we have not sent you reminders, invitations, nothing. We changed the time on you. I'm, like, I am so sorry and so appreciate your flexibility.

**Kathi**

Hey, if that means I can come here with my hair undyed and wet and not even worry about it, I feel like we are all good.

**Amy**

Three friends!

**Cheri**

I appreciate that, but I just want to admit and acknowledge, as there is such a thing as getting too comfortable with imperfection, and I believe this is it. So this is not a standard for the future.