

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #97: How to Cut the Crazy and Balance Your Digital Life

Arlene Pellicane Interview

Cheri

So what would you say is your favorite thing about your smart phone and your least favorite thing about your smart phone?

Amy

Well, it's funny, again, that this is the topic today, because I talked with my family just this past week about the Internet and cell phones and how much it's changed our lives and would we go back without it? And I had mixed feelings about that because, on one hand, we have this joke in our family that came from one of my friends that somebody will pose this question and we'll go, "Hmm, if only I had a source of information...at my finger tips," so, of course, we all love that, but man, I just feel so enslaved by it sometimes.

Cheri

Mmm. It is the strangest thing to me that I rely on it for so many things other than a phone.

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

It's probably the last thing I use it for is to actually make phone calls. The number one thing I reach for it is to take photographs. And I grew up with a darkroom – well, two things: I grew up with a dark room and an actual twin lens reflex, and old Yashica camera, so I actually remember those days, and so to be able to whip out this camera that takes better pictures than probably most, quotes, "real cameras" I've ever owned is just so bizarre to me. And then I rely on it for a GPS in the car.

Amy

Oh, me too.

Cheri

And the number of times that I've forgotten to print an actual map with actual directions and then the GPS doesn't work, and I feel completely betrayed!

Amy

Exactly, exactly. Oh no, I have no sense of direction so I will say that it is a total wonder for me. I have to rethink this going back thing, 'cause I would just be lost all the time like I used to be.

But you know the biggest thing I think that we find to be a mixed blessing is, of course, social media, because it's everybody's highlight reels coming onto our phones that just moves us into that comparison place that is so tough. And one of our listeners said, "My biggest struggle is comparing myself to others and finding myself wanting." I mean haven't you felt that way?

Cheri

Just every major holiday, every time someone has a birthday...

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

It's so hard not to compare...what do you say...their highlight reels with...

Amy

I've always heard the comparison thing...I compare my insides to everybody else's outsides. You know, the external to the internal which, you know, is our ongoing conversation and, so yeah, I especially, the ones that these women wax eloquent about their children on their birthdays. I don't wax eloquent, so I always feel like I'm letting my kids down.

<Laughter>

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 love who you're not, love who you are, and live your one life well.

Amy

Today, we're talking to Arlene Pellicane, author of *Calm, Cool, and Connected: 5 Digital Habits for a More Balanced Life*. Arlene is a speaker, author, and stay-at-home-mom. In addition to *Calm, Cool, and Connected*, she's also co-authored *Growing Up Social: Raising Relational Kids in a Screen-driven World with Doctor Gary Chapman*. Arlene and her husband James have three children.

Cheri

Now, to our listeners who remember us joking about our cellphone issues, <cough, cough> addictions maybe, a few months back. I'm just going to confess right now that I'm not sure if I'm more excited or terrified to hear what Arlene has to say.

Amy

Yeah, me too. Arlene, we are so excited to have you with us today. What a relevant topic.

Arlene

Yeah, hold on a minute I'm on my cellphone. No, I'm kidding; I'm here!

<Laughter>

Cheri

Oh, that was mean.

Arlene

I'm checking my texts while we're talking. Yes, this is something everybody has dealt with whether – you know, it was so funny! I was on a radio show and someone called in and the question was what was your aha moment of when you knew you were addicted to technology. And I asked the woman, this woman was an online shopper, and I asked her, how old are you, if I may be so bold to ask, and she said I am 70 years old. So this touches everybody.

Amy

Everybody. Well, and I think, probably our listeners and even Cheri and I, have confessed we're a little nervous like are you going to tell us to put our cellphones away? And it gives us a hint in the foreword, because Gary Chapman said in your foreword that this isn't about getting rid of your devices...it's about gaining control over them and putting them into the proper place in your life. So that is good news for all of us. Why did you write *Calm, Cool, and Connected*? Which I love your title by the way...

Arlene

Yeah it is, well look at us. We're not necessarily calm, we're nervous, we're quick to be angry, quick to be like what do they mean by that? And even though technology is supposed to connect us, I love to ask people, technology keeps going forward, advancing with all of these different versions, but are your relationships, are they really, truly better? Like, now do you say I am closer to my spouse, 'cause I've got my phone, and we've got Netflix and we have this... oh, I'm closer to my kids because of this, to my sister, whatever. And in some ways, yes, maybe you can Skype your sister that lives in another state and technology can be awesome for that, to connect you in your relationships, but I wrote the book because for most people technology has become interference. Many times we don't even realize it because we're so used to a screen in the car, a screen in the restaurant, a screen around the dinner table, you know, everyone goes home. Okay, put your ear buds in and everyone goes to do your own thing, and we're used to that. So that is the question of how can we live a more healthy life to unplug more often and a lot of people don't know how to do that or are aware of that, so that's one reason for the book. And then, also, as I look at families and write for families, I see that the kids will emulate what the parents do. right? And if the parent looks at their phone 60 times a day then that child is gonna grow up thinking well that phone really amazing and really the

center of the universe, and I better get myself plugged into one of those, too. So it's also an idea of what are we passing on to the generations that follow us?

Cheri

I'm already feeling convicted. Amy and I are gonna have so much to talk about after this episode.

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

One of the lines from your book that really stood out, you said, "We must measure our dependence on our devices from time to time to make sure we aren't making idols out of them." What do you mean by making idols out of electronic devices?

Arlene

Yeah, how interesting, in the Old Testament you see that they made idols, right? Okay, they made the golden calf and different things and then what do we do? Did we sculpt the smart phone? But let me ask you, when something happens in your life, what do we, myself included, tend to do...we go to Google! We're sick, we're gonna move, we need to know where our kid should go to school, what do we do? We Google best school in such and such neighborhood?" We Google what does 3-day mucus mean? We Google all of these things until we no longer go to God first. We go to Google first, because Google has all these answers for us. So the way that I think that idolatry works out is instead of this dependence on God, this worship of God, this centering around God. We have this centering around technology, like, okay Google is gonna tell me where I'm gonna eat, what school I should send my kids to, what is the best church in my area...we Google the answers for these things and we tend to think, "Oh, I've got this covered 'cause I can just find the answer on the Internet instead of that dependence of God, I need you. I don't know where to go to church. I don't know where to go to school." You know, maybe we don't have to be in solemn prayer about where we're going to eat for dinner, but we have centered our lives around these devices and what they tell us, verses centering our life around the worship of God and that communion with Him. So I think anything that stands in your way, that you're not putting God first, that you're putting something else first, becomes like this idol in your life and for many of us it is technology. Just think of the sheer time we spend with the device. What if we spent like 1/10, 1/50 of that time in prayer or silence? I'm guilty of all of this, as well, so it is this idea that my phone will not become my idol that I am more addicted to it than I am to needing God's Word in my life.

Cheri

Okay, I think you made Amy tear up earlier.

Amy

Oh wow. There are always tears, but so good.

Cheri

Alright, well, you used the word habit to provide your readers, and now our listeners, with 5 ways that we can put devices in their proper place. Can you walk us through those 5?

Arlene

Yeah, because this is very hopeful. I'm not going to make you throw away your phone. It's just the idea, what are new habits that I can do that will make this better? So I take the word HABIT, the H stands for, "hold down the off button" and this is about have times in your day where there is no technology. Mealtime is a great time to hold down the off button. Nighttime is a great time to hold down the off button so you can sleep and not be interrupted by these little texts all night long.

The A in habit stands for, "always put people first" and this is about living your life in a pivot. And by that I mean, when you're sitting at your computer, when someone comes in the room, you don't just go "eh" you know, you actually pivot away from your computer, greet the person coming in, you know, if you're standing there in a crowd and you're staring at your phone and a friend walks up to you. You don't just go "mm" and just keep looking at your phone, you pivot away from your phone, look up at your friend and say, "Hey, how's it going? Let me finish up this text, I'll be right with you." So it's this idea that people always come first when it's a decision of like do I keep staring at my technology, or do I look at the incoming human being coming into my airspace, I will choose the human being. So it's always put people first.

B is, "Brush daily. Live with a clean conscious." In the same way that, hopefully, we brush our teeth twice a day, the same way, you can ask yourself, at the end of the day, "Did I post anything that was really rude and snarky? Did I hide behind the Internet, because I didn't want to talk to someone today? Did I watch something that really I'd be really embarrassed if everybody knew I watched that? So brush daily, live with a clean conscious with the things that you're doing, how you engage with your online world.

And then the 'I' is "I will go online with purpose." And it's this idea of I went to check one email, but then one hour later I was looking at shoes or something. It's like how did I get here? So keep that, you know, even if you want to write a Post-it that says what am I here to do? And you stick that on your computer, and you realize I come in with a task. I get in with my task, and then I get out. I'm not going to cyber loaf here for hours and hours. I will go online with purpose.

And then the 'T' of habit is "take a hike" and that means get outside. You know it used to be that a punishment for a child would be go to your room. And now the punishment is go outside. "Oh, I can't go outside, I can't breathe, I don't have Wi-Fi outside..." so the idea of God's nature is so restorative, so peaceful, so calming, such a change of pace for us. So get just outside, even if it's just a short 5-minute walk, and then you return to your desk, that's fine. Get outside in God's nature. So those are your new habits.

Cheri

Those all sound doable. And again, Amy and I will unpack some of those, 'cause I've been jotting down ideas as I'm listening. One of the other things you say in the book, "Try not to focus on the negative habit you're trying to shake instead focus on the positive habit you're trying to embrace." This sounds like it could be the different between success or failure so can you unpack that for us?

Arlene

Sure, you know, when you're like okay, I have to lose 20 pounds so I'm not going to eat chocolate. I'm not going to eat chocolate. I'm not going to eat chocolate. And then what do you want to do all day?

Cheri

Eat chocolate!

Arlene

Yeah, so you're focusing on what you're not going to do, and by day two you're like I am so tired of not eating chocolate, I'm going to eat the whole bag. So this is the idea of not saying to yourself, "I'm not going to do this." No, but what are you going to do? So these habits, these are these cues that let us know, "Oh, my phone is charged right next to my head in my bed, so my cue when I wake up is I pick up the phone, and I check the weather and I check my email and I start in this really frazzled way. Okay, I want to change that. So my new habit is I am going to put my phone in a different room, and I'm going to put my bible next to my bed. And then now, when I wake up, I see the bible and I'm reminded, oh yeah, I'm doing this new thing, and I'm going to read a few verse before I start my day, and then you do that. And so, it's simply, putting what ARE you going to do in front of you. And then, it's like, oh, okay, now I know what to do. And so instead of this negative, I'm not, it's the positive this is what I'm going to do. And a lot of times when we think of freedom, we think of negative freedom, such as freedom from smoking, freedom from drinking, free from in a negative. But there's also this freedom FOR. Like now that I'm not entangled by my technology, I have freedom for better listening to God. I have freedom FOR being able to have time to talk to my family whereas before we're like how do we have the time to do this? We're on screens for ten hours a day, how are we supposed to talk to each other?" So you're looking for this freedom for. So put that in that positive light. What are doing this for and what are you gaining and what are you going to do instead of your old habits?

Cheri

You've just given me an idea...Daniel and I, right before we fall asleep, we're both on our devices playing solitaire, which I have trained my brain to make me sleepy, and I think we need to develop a new habit. So, all right.

Amy

Well, and just like you were saying Cheri, I think so much of the problem with our cell phone use is relational. And Arlene you say, "When human relationships get difficult, as they often do,

it may just feel easier to default to devices,” which are so much easier to manage, And so why is it easier to default to our devices, but also, what do we miss when we do that?

Arlene

Yeah. So if there's conflict in the home, right? Somebody's upset at somebody else, someone's not so happy. It's so easy to just blame, well, we're busy instead of thinking what is the real problem here. If you've got a teenager in the house, and they're not talking very much, and you just figure, well, they're teenagers. And there's obviously some of that going on. I don't have a teen yet, well, I guess I do officially, I've got a thirteen year old, you know, but he talks to us. So there's this idea that, well, it's just the way it is. People just watch TV now, people are on their phones all the time, that's just the way it is. And it's an easy way to acquiesce that you have to work at your relationships that there is work involved in staying close as a husband and wife. There is work involved in staying close to your mother, to your father. There is work involved. And so a lot of times we'll just say we're too busy because it is easy just to sit with the device. The device doesn't talk back to you. The device doesn't roll its eyes at you. The device does exactly what you want it to do. It goes exactly where you tell it to. It's much easier than a human being who might say, well, that's a dumb idea, or I would never do that. So it's so much easier to hang out with your game, where you feel like you have accomplishment, than maybe with your spouse where you feel like you're failing. But at the end of the day, at the end of your life, nobody is going to say, "Oh, I wish I would have played more solitaire. I wish I would have done more candy crush." Nobody is going to say that. They're going to say why did I drift so far away from the people in my life. We've got to not use the devices as an excuse. And then, also realize that, hey, when we do have it as a rhythm as our life that we're not always plugged into our devices. Wow, you can have a close relationship. So I'm not saying that everyone has to do this, my son is 13 and he doesn't have a phone and he doesn't play video games. And what it results in is that...now he uses the computer a lot for homework; so don't get me wrong that he's not on the computer. He's on it, and he's got a school-issued iPad and all those things. But he does not use it for video games and instead you know he plays the piano, he reads, he plays with the dog, he talks to us, like, there are other things there that layer his life. Because to be frank with you, most students they're already on their computers so much for school that it's like, my word, during your free time you're going to do that, too? Like when are you ever going to stand up and move your body? So all these things are very important for us to have the devices but put them in place so we can have relationships with our loved ones.

Amy

We've seen how things, especially in the political arena last year during the election, just really go downhill so fast. Years ago it wasn't even possible to break up with someone via text, which my son's best friend just had that happen to him, and it was so painful, you know? Or you couldn't have this big nasty debate on social media, but now it's almost normalized. So what kinds of communication is actually effective via our devices and what conversations would you say need to be had face-to-face?

Arlene

And you've got kind of two levels. You have your friend level, like, my 300 friends and then you also have your 5 closest people. There are 2 different way of how you do that I think, but obviously, things like, "Could you please let the dog out?" or "When you're at Costco could you grab us some milk?" Things like that are totally good, awesome, and wonderful to use your device. Text the person, "I'm at the corner of such and such and such and such," but if you have to apologize for something besides like if it's an apology, like I forgot to pick up the oranges. Okay, fine, you may text I forgot to pick up the oranges, but if you're texting I was a real jerk yesterday, and I'm sorry that I was so snippy and please forgive me, go ahead and say that in person. So those list thing you can text those, and that's very effective. But any kind of apology can be made in person. Now, praise, things like good job, I really appreciated that. I think things like that can be done via text, like, I love – your book report came out so great and you text that to your teenager. That's fine. But then also don't let that be the only way that you're communicating with your loved one or your friend and stuff. Make sure that you're saying it, too, so that they're also hearing you say, "Wow, I saw your book report, it was so detailed and organized, and I'm so proud of you. That is excellent!" So let it be a 'both and' when it comes to the praise and those compliments. You can text that, but also let that be – it's the same thing if you go on Facebook and see a lot of things like Happy birthday! Happy birthday! Happy birthday. Like, that's really nice, but if someone actually called you and said happy birthday or sent a real old-fashioned card that said happy birthday or took you out to coffee for your birthday, that is much different, right? The quality of that interaction is much richer. So, yes, devices can be used for communication, but that rich stuff that happens face to face and conflict, much better face-to-face. Like, I'm looking at peoples' family arguments, and I'm thinking, you're my roommate in college, you're not even like my closest best friend, and I know that so and so disagrees with so and so and so and so is mad at so and so. I shouldn't know that. So make sure that the things that are private stay private.

Cheri

Absolutely. In your book you say, "To enjoy more of the blessings we must schedule in times of rest from the noise. We must be capable of setting limits and sticking with them." Now, one of the things I've learned as an HSP is I absolutely have to have quiet time. I'm a rare bird. I'm an extravert so I love being with people and I love noise, but then sometimes, I become completely overwhelmed, overstimulated by the noise, and I have to immediately get myself to a place where there's quiet. I literally carry earplugs in my purse. So in terms of what you wrote here about having time away from the noise, why is it that important and then how do we schedule that time?

Arlene

We're not meant to be on 24/7 so when the phone dings or a notification comes in or you look at it, and there's so many times we're just looking at it. I've turned my notifications off so that they're not dinging all the time, and I know a lot of people that do that, but we're still looking at it. We still checking it and look at it. Did anyone text me? And we push the button. So we're not really wired to be all the time on, on, on, on, on, on, and so, it's wonderful to be able to rest and not feel like I have to keep checking it. Now, in the workday, it used to be you'd leave all your work in the office, but now you don't do that. You bring the work home with you, because

you can check your email at home. You can have your phone at home. There's not the delineation that used to exist of being at work, getting in your car and leaving, and all of a sudden, now you're like totally on leisure time. You're on rest time. Now, you have the temptation to work and be productive all day long to get more done and what ends up happening is you burn out, because you're like I'm exhausted. So it's this idea of set for yourself, you know, don't do this like, oh, this is this bar I got to attain another bar. Just set for yourself what are the times in the day that would really work well for you to rest. We alluded to it before, I think, not charging your phone next to your bed in a great idea, if you can, if you're not an emergency worker because that way you can end and start the day without your technology. And that just has a more peaceful end and a more peaceful beginning. So that might be an area where you say I'm gonna rest more in those ending and beginning moments. Another time is mealtime, to have all those gadgets go in the center of the table if you're out, nobody touches them, you know, that kind of thing, or everything away in their purses, whatever it may be, but that's a great time to rest. And then, maybe a digital Sabbath whether it's, "Hey, we're going to do Sundays phone-free or Sundays videogame-free or Sundays TV-free, or another day of the week, or maybe Thursday night is gonna be family night where nobody uses their devices after 6, you know, whatever the case may be. For my husband and I, we were finding that when our kids went to bed then we went to our computers to get caught up. And I'd look and think, oh, he's on his computer, so I'll get on my computer, and then he'd look, and say, "Oh, well, she's working, I'll get some work done, too. So everybody's doing this, and then we realized I guess we could be kissing during this time.

<Laughter>

Amy

Such a better use of time!

Arlene

So we set that limit of, okay let's not do that afterwards, let's finish up and be done with it. And we do pretty good with that. There are a lot of times where it's like; here we go again, you know, it's still on. So we're not great at that, so just realize that. But that's where we're trying to get to, then it's like, okay, turn off your computer. Sometimes he'll walk over to my desk and say, okay, turn off your computer. Oh yeah, okay, okay. And I kind of feel already as I'm getting close to that point, oh, what am I doing I'm still in my email. So just have those limits so that you do have rest during your day, because it really does help.

Amy

So as you consider, you've just covered so many helpful things for us today, Arlene, as you consider our conversation, what's the parting encouragement that you'd like to leave with our listeners?

Arlene

I think it would be to re-claim your red light. And by that I mean, I have started checking my phone at red lights. I don't know why I think I'm so important that someone might text me

during my drive, but I keep my phone in the little cup holder, and I'm driving and then I get to the red light and I touch it. And then I'm thinking why are you doing that? Why are you touching your phone at the red light? Do you really think someone's going to text you in the next five minutes? And then if they do...what's the big deal? You'll just text them when you get home. It's not a big deal. So I have reclaimed that red light to not touch my phone on purpose, to say I will not touch it at the red light. Instead I will be still, I will pray, I will listen to the radio, whatever I was doing, I will keep doing that, uninterrupted, without constantly checking my phone. So re-claim the red light moments of your life, which are all those little moments throughout your day when you have a spare time and we check our device. Little spare time let me check. Don't do that. Instead of that little spare time, okay Lord, I give you this day. God I'm so worried about this meeting. Will you give me peace about it? Because whatever you're checking on your phone, you can batch that, you can check it every hour, and you're gonna be just fine. You don't have to check it every 8.5 minutes to see if something's happened, so reclaim those small moments, give those back to God.

Amy

Wonderful.

Cheri

And not only is that a wrap, but had I heard that advice a year and a half ago, Arlene, I would not have totaled my husband's car at a red light. Amy and I will talk about that when we do our processing episode. And I had forgotten that it was a red light situation. I think I'm the only person I know who I think has managed to do that. Total a car at a red light.

Amy

Um, no....

Cheri

Are you serious?

Amy

We'll both confess!

Arlene

Oh my goodness, look at this! We could save a lot of cars in the process, ladies.

Amy

And hard conversations with husbands.

Cheri

Head on over to gritnegracegirls.com/episode97.

Amy

There you'll find the transcript for this week's episode, the digging deeper download, bible verse art, and you'll also be able to enter to win a copy of *Calm, Cool, and Connected*.

Cheri

If you've enjoyed this episode of *Grit 'n' Grace*, we would love it if you would share a review on iTunes. If you go to website for this episode, you'll find instructions for how to do that.

Amy

Don't miss joining us next week when Cheri and I will process what we learned together from Arlene and reveal our red light fails.

Cheri

Do we have to? 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

Okay, I'm dying to know, but we'll wait; we'll wait. I really thought I was the only person who'd done that. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

<Laughter>