

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode #104: How to Use a Change of Focus to Get Unstuck

Cheri

Which would your friends say you do more often, Amy? Do you focus on problems or do you find solutions?

<Laughter>

Amy

Do we really have to go there? I definitely...well, my friends might say that I find solutions, but I'll tell you what's going on in my head. What's going on in my head is that I'm focusing on problems. And probably the biggest example right now is, listen, I have this HGTV corner of my heart that should be so happy right now because we are planning some house renovations, and we couldn't get a general contractor to even return our phone calls, so I decided I can do this!

Cheri

Action Amy!

Amy

I sprang into action! I began spreadsheets and all kinds of wonderful things.

Listen. But you know what I'm doing? Lying awake in the middle of the night going, "Did I choose the right countertop?" So this should be so exciting, but it is — I tend towards focusing on the problems, not the solutions. And you?

Cheri

Oh, well, like you even have to ask. I was just...

Amy

Well, that's part of the podcast so...

Cheri

I was just thinking this morning, I remembered this phrase I heard years ago, and I try to remember it. The whole concept is basically you can only solve a problem you can't solve facts. I'm dedicated to focusing on problems, and I want to be more solution focused so...

Amy

Me, too.

Cheri

Well, this is 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 Debbie Wilson, author of *Little Women, Big God*.

Cheri

One of the moments in the interview that just hit me the hardest was right towards the end when she was kind of recounting the story of David and Goliath and how David said to Goliath, "You may be coming against me with all of these weapons, but I come at you with the name of the Lord." And she had this recognition that she had been focusing on the wrong name, that while they were waiting to see if she had a cancer diagnosis, and they all wanted a name to know what to do next. They wanted to name the problem, so they could move on to solving it; that she needed to switch her focus to the name of the Lord. And it just hit me, I was wrestling with a couple of different things that particular day so it really ministered to me in the midst of what I was dealing with, because I know I have been focused on the wrong name. I am so problem-focused. And part of it's a blessing. I do like unpacking problems, and I do believe the Holy Spirit guides me in the process of unpacking problems and speaks to me and moves me towards solutions. But I just — a couple weeks ago I wrote this blog post about a superintendent I had early, early on in my teaching career. I went to this teacher in service, and we had a speaker for the first hour, and then we were going to be given a break. And at all the other meetings I had ever been at that's when they nag you, "Be back at 10 o'clock, and if you're not back on time then blah, blah, blah, blah" and basically they sit and scold you like a bunch of children. They've got 250 teachers in this room who don't want to be there, they've been forced to sit for a long time listening to somebody who is not that interesting, and so then they scold you, and then they send you off. And really what most teachers want to do at something like that is they want to talk to each other, like what's happening on stage generally isn't as good as what happens in the hallways and over the lunch tables, but this particular superintendent, her name was Joyce, she got up front and she said, "Please be back at 10 o'clock." And I'm just waiting. Other people are starting to leave already, those are the rule breakers, and, of course, I stayed in my seat because you know a person with authority was still talking, so I'm still sitting there. That's the problem with being a rule follower is you listen to stuff that doesn't apply to you, I'm like no this is for them not me. I'll be on time. You know? But she didn't say what I expected her to say, she says, "Please be back by 10 o'clock." And then she said, "And if you're back in your seat by 9:55, I'm going to share something with you that isn't essential but it's awfully nice to know."

Amy

Ah! The carrot instead of the stick.

Cheri

Amy that room was packed at 9:53. At 9:54, there's teachers who are rushing and dashing for their seats and at 9:55 she was at that microphone, and she shared a story with us that was a marvelous, illustrative teaching story. It had one great lesson to it, she was done by 9:59, and at 10 'o'clock we started; totally, the carrot instead of the stick. As I was reflecting on it I thought, she did focus on the problem, she knew what the prob- — it was going to be a big problem to start late. But instead of stopping there, she moved beyond the problem to seeking a solution. And that's what she executed was seeking the solution. And I thought, when I focus on the name of my problem I'm stopping too short. I'm stopping way too short. I need to seek the solution, which of course, always begins with God.

Amy

And so when we stop short what happens is when we focus on the name of the problem, we get stuck.

Cheri

Yes.

Amy

Now, here's the beauty of Debbie's book, the names of the problem in the book that she addresses or the names of the problem of women in scripture, let's be honest, they're hard. They are hard! Tamar, she had the problem of sexual abuse. I mean, Debbie made the point that one of her, I think it was the second one, he used her for sex but he wouldn't give her a child, I mean that's sexual abuse, right? So, she had that. Dinah, we think about her, if we name her problem, it was rape. I mean these are big problems. They cause pain and grief, and just like we watch with our sisters in the #metoo movement, but if we stay focused on the problem, we stay stuck in the consequences of that problem. I have a friend, a dear friend, that this last Sunday in our class she said, "I'm stuck. I'm stuck." And she is. And it's painful to watch, and it's painful for her to bear. But what you just expressed is that when we focus on our problem, that's when we stay stuck in the pain. And when we focus on our God and the name of the Lord, that's how we get unstuck.

Cheri

So the way Debbie put it was what am I focused on the size of my problem or the size of my God? And she even said it doesn't have to be in a big thing, her illustration was the cancer, potential cancer diagnosis, but then she even talked about one day when she had a really bad night's sleep and she was already starting to predict how badly the day was going to go and then she stopped and thought, "What am I believing here?" And she realized that she was believing that the quality of her day was pre-determined by the quality of the sleep she had gotten and no, not by might or power, but by my spirit says the Lord. And recognizing that she

could recognize the problem. And I think that's key here. That naming – we're not saying we shouldn't name the problem. We're recognizing the problem, naming the problem is a definite part of the process. I think both of us would agree that moving on is on a different timetable for every person and the last thing that any of us need is somebody saying well just move on. You're just stuck! But I think when we can look back at our lives, and we can see those places where we have been stuck and when we analyze how we got unstuck, it was never by continuing to focus on the problem. It was always because we got that larger view and put our eyes back on Christ. Her sleep illustration reminds me of my trip to England a number of years ago. And I had my whole team praying that I would get good sleep. I was hoping for six to eight hours a night. What actually happened over the four days I was gone, I got six to eight hours of sleep total. Like, I could not sleep no matter how hard I tried. But what did happen is God gave me supernatural power, and focus, and attentiveness, and presence. And as soon as I got off the plane and got home, I slept like a baby. So I didn't get quite what I asked for, which was sleep, but I got something else instead that was such an obvious sign of his presence and power, because I've never in my life have had that happen before. Like if I don't get enough sleep, I become weepy. Like, you wouldn't want to be around me. You would not want me in front of a microphone.

Amy

I like the acknowledgement that you just gave, that it is important to name the problem. 'Cause without naming the problem, it's just denial, right? So we name the problem, and we probably, there's probably some grief sometimes that comes with that, and there's some — and we know there are stages of grief, we've talked about that on the podcast and all of that... but when we sense that we're starting to end grieving and be stuck, which is a whole different thing, what are some of the practical things that we can do to focus on the size of our God?

Cheri

One of the first things that Debbie illustrated so beautifully is reading scripture, and really marinating in the stories of how our perfect God handles us faulty humans. You know I'm thinking back several years ago when I spent probably 3 months studying the whole story of Rebecca. Because I was so excited that I was nothing like her, that she and I had nothing in common, she's so dysfunctional and so controlling and so meddling...yeah, I spent a long time with her family and realized she and I, we could have been twin sisters. But I mean really, really immersing and just pray-cessing and journaling, and realizing, you know, if God could still work with a woman with those kinds of issues, certainly there's hope for me. That gives a lot of hope.

Amy

It does. It really does. Well, I started realizing that my practical steps are all things that I've learned along the way and one of them was something that I learned a long time ago when I did experiencing God. I was pregnant with Anson, so gosh, 23 years ago. Henry Blackaby talks about, and I can't remember his term, but he talks about making a list of *touchstones*. And he talked about how the Israelites took the stones out of the Jordan River and they made an alter, so where are those *touchstones*, where are those places in our lives that God has shown up in

the past and that we make a list of those so that we can remind ourselves of ways that God has been faithful, tangibly, in our past. So that's one thing.

Cheri

I think that's so important, because when I take the time to do that, I can remember the doubts and uncertainties that I had in the past and in the middle of those circumstances. And if that's how I'm feeling about my current circumstance then I can say, wait. I felt the same way then when I didn't know the rest of the story, but now I do. So there will come a time when I know the rest of this story. So I'm going to borrow the confidence and faith that came from that *touchstone* and trust that God is going to do the same thing again even though I can't see what it is, and I don't know what it is. He's probably not cooperating with my plan right now.

Cheri

Absolutely. And I have needed the tangible list to pull it out of the cover of my bible on a day when doubt is plaguing me, and I feel stuck and say, God showed up here, and he showed up here, and he showed up here, and he'll do it again. I know He will.

Cheri

You know, I've done some goal setting exercises through the years where they have you make a timeline of the key events in your life, and I'm almost ashamed to say this, it's never occurred to me to go through and really pray-cess and add in, "Okay, so this is what happened, but then here's how God came through. This is the thing that happened, but here's how God..." I need to go back and do an overlay of the spiritual timeline, because it's so, again, it's so easy. One of the exercises was to do a timeline of all the positive and then all the negative. Well, you wanna guess which timeline had more on it?

<Laughter>

All the bad things!

Amy

That's our natural default, it is.

Cheri

Well, that takes me to the next thing, which I love doing. I did it again this morning, which is my gratitude journal. And that is so, so simple. Now you know, I have to admit I love a good journal. It gives me an excuse to keep buying beautiful bound books with empty pages inside and having a nice pen and I always have them waiting there for me in the morning during my quiet time, just sitting and thinking about what I'm grateful for. Generally, it's from the previous day, often it's in the moment. You know, I can look outside, and maybe the hummingbirds, which you know I'm crazy about hummingbirds and have extra feeders near me now, near my windows. And sometimes, if it's something that I'm apprehensive about coming up in the day...it doesn't have to be things that are going well or perfectly because scripture doesn't tell us to give thanks FOR everything, we are to give thanks IN everything. And to me that's an

important distinction. And I just love being able to go back and see all of these things that I am able to praise God for.

Amy

Well, and my next thing is related to that, and it came from my First 5 study, and Lisa Terkeurst just did a teaching on this, but in 2 Kings 6, where Elijah prayed for his servant's eyes to be opened. And really our eyes need to be opened to be able to see that's going on around us that we need to be grateful for, but really actively praying that our eyes would be opened to God's presence in our problems. And he's always there. He is always there. One example that I thought of in our lives, this was a big deal several years ago, Nolan had just graduated from high school and on a trip with our youth group he had an accident where his eardrum burst, and it was a huge hole. And this is a major problem for anyone, but Nolan is a musician and so his hearing is really paramount and it was a hard struggle for him and as his parents it was a hard struggle for us. But I had to ask God, would you open my eyes to your presence? And I thought, wow, part of his presence is that I live in a day in age where there's grafting surgery. I mean it can be as simple as that. Pray that God would open our spiritual eyes to see His presence in our problems.

Cheri

Well, and this is real important, back to you talking about how easy it is to get stuck, there's some great research on confirmation bias. That when we get stuck in a negative place in a relationship, and we have gotten so that we are griping and complaining and we have allowed a negative aspect of a relationship to kind of take over everything, we miss up to 80% of the positive things that are actually happening in that relationship.

Amy

Wow, that's a lot. 80%?

Cheri

Yeah. I know this is true in my human relationships. I'm willing to bet this extends to our relationship with God. That when we are really stuck and all we can see is our problem, we are probably missing a lot of things. And I'm not saying, "Oh, just look on the bright side." I'm not trying to be Pollyanna. But that prayer that our eyes would be open so that we can, even while we are legitimately in the midst of grief and processing of a problem, that we can also see what God is doing in the midst of that circumstance. And again, recovering perfectionists who are all or nothing, it's either terrible or it's fabulous. No, things are good and bad at the same time. They coexist.

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

But that's hard. I think it's also important to tell the stories of what God has done in our lives. When we can tell people, whether it's in a one on one or in writing or however we might do it,

it is an incredible faith builder that he is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. There's something about verbalizing and sharing with somebody else, especially if it's a circumstance where our story ends up being an encouragement to them. Their encouragement ends up coming back to us so it ends up being a reciprocal blessing.

Amy

Mm. I love that. And my next one is related to that very much. This is a lesson I learned from doing *The Kindness Project*, Shaunti Feldhahn's book this year. One of the steps of changing your attitude towards another person, and in this case it's God, is to say something good about that person every single day to someone else. So this is a practical step is to tell somebody every single day what God is doing in your life. Weave it into conversation. I mean it's a way to share our faith, but it's also a way to shape our view of God. And when I think about it in terms of kindness, we show kindness towards God, which is sort of a strange idea, kindness towards God by bragging on His kindness so a little twist on the same thing that you were just talking about.

Cheri

I love that. It had never occurred to me to take a principle that I would use in a human relationship, that would strengthen that, and, of course, it's going to strengthen it because it's helping me see what I need to see and reinforce what I need to reinforce and to do that with God. That makes total sense.

Amy

Its neat how all of these are interwoven really, and they all have to do with perspective. What we focus on grows.

Cheri

Absolutely. Absolutely. So what's the verse that you've selected to go with these two episodes?

Amy

"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you." And that's Deuteronomy 31, the first part of verse 8. And you know that's the part I think we have to focus on is that when we have a problem God is there, always, always there.

Cheri

So what's the bad rule and what's the truth, the fact that we can focus on instead?

Amy

"If you want it done right, you have to do it yourself." I mean good gracious haven't we all said that at some point? So if we want to solve a problem, we just gotta pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. Which, who was telling me...I had a friend the other day who said, "I grew up in the west." Suzy Eller! She said, "I grew up in the west. If you pull yourself up by your bootstraps you will tip yourself over." And I had never thought about that and she goes, "It's the dumbest

thing!" And yet we try all the time to solve our problems ourselves. When instead, the truth is, that trusting God instead of ourselves leads to better solutions.

Cheri

Hmm. I love it. I love it. So the grit in all of this for me, and maybe a few of our listeners, is going to be changing that compass needle, 'cause I hate to say it but in the flesh my true north is problem. It is problem! And part of it is just that in my brain my neuropathways are laid down that way and so the grit is going to be recognizing that I can do something about this and the best time to do something about it is when I'm not in crisis. It's in the ordinary, every days of life when I feel that needle, that dial moving over to say no, I'm not going to live there. I'm not going to camp out there. Just 'cause I feel like such an expert here doesn't mean it's the healthy place to be. And it takes a fair amount of effort to move away from focusing on those problems to seeking solutions. That is hard work for me. I know for some people that comes real naturally but that is work but it's worth it.

Amy

It is absolutely worth it. And in the midst of that shift, just really, the grace is realizing that God is there. That we hold onto the scripture that I just read. There's trust in that and there's rest in that and there's so much grace in realizing in the midst of all of these problems that we have and experience in a broken world, God is there. And ultimately resting in Him is the solution, all the rest of it kind of flows out of that.

Cheri

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode104.

Amy

There you'll find our transcript, this week's digging deeper download, the bible verse art, and a chance to win a giveaway of *Little Women, Big God* by Debbie Wilson.

Cheri

If you haven't already connected with us on Facebook, do a quick search for *Grit-n-Grace Girls*. You'll find our Facebook page and our private Facebook group. We would love to have you join us.

Amy

Make sure to join us next week when we'll be talking with Lynn Cowell, author of *Make Your Move*.

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!