

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode #111: Finding Peace that Calms your Fear-Filled Heart

Cheri

Amy, let's talk about what used to cause us anxiety when we were kids or teenagers. Things that we could laugh about now but maybe then they felt really, really real.

Amy

Well, I know one of the things that used to cause me anxiety when I was a junior and senior in high school was, "Would anybody ask me to the prom?" You know I look at kids now, and they go in groups, like, with their friends and stuff. But that wasn't really done and where I was and when I was growing up. But do you know I ended up asking one of my good friends to the prom, and he went with me. And the funny thing was the two of us had so much more fun than most of my friends who were on you know, quote-unquote real dates, 'cause there was just no pressure. We had a great time. How about you?

Cheri

I was just so anxiety-ridden as a child. Trying to just narrow it down to one was hard. But I remember, and this is when I was younger when I was probably 8 or 9, I was convinced that during the night snakes show up under my bed. And so I would just curl up into this little ball, and then pull my feet up because I was convinced that there were snakes under my covers at the foot of my bed. I think this came because I snuck out one night to watch a TV program I wasn't supposed to watch, and there was an anaconda squeezing somebody to death or something like that. It scarred me and stayed with me for years.

Amy

Oh my gosh. Snakes. Okay. Note to self: this is how I pull a gag on Cheri. Just kidding.

Cheri

No no, that's a very bad idea. But I suppose on a more serious note, I spent most of my teenage years with a fear of being fat. As our listeners may well know, I actually ended up having a serious eating disorder that I was hospitalized for. I still remember how real it felt at the time. Something more serious for you, maybe?

Amy

You know, one of the things that always causes anxiety in my everyday life is I'm the one that watches the bottom line in our bank account.

Cheri

Oh, ouch.

Amy

And you know, Barry and I have always had, God just is so faithful. He has always met our needs, but we have always been in professions, like you and Daniel, that are like teaching...we're just martyrs by nature. So disposable income is like I don't even know what that is. And so, you know, it's just one of those things that, because I'm the one that watches those numbers that I can get caught up in that too easily.

Well, one of our listeners, she deals with anxiety and fear, too. She says, "My biggest problem with people pleasing and perfectionism is the anxiety these issues cause for me." And I can so relate and our listeners can, too. So I don't know anyone who doesn't have at least one trigger for fear.

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

Amy

Today we're talking to Maria Furlough, author of *Breaking The Fear Cycle: How To Find Peace For Your Anxious Heart*. Maria is a proud momma of five kiddos on earth and one living in the arms of Jesus. Her greatest joy is loving on women with the comfort and power God has given to her. Maria has been writing bible studies for over 10 years and now enjoys shepherding women in her home church in Huntersville, North Carolina.

Cheri

So if you struggle with anxiety, Maria has wisdom and practical encouragement for you today.

Amy

Well, Maria we are so glad that you are with us here with us today. Tell us why did you write *Breaking The Fear Cycle*.

Maria

I couldn't not write *Breaking The Fear Cycle* really is what happened. I had lived through this season where God taught me things that I couldn't keep my mouth shut about basically. And it really didn't start as a book; it started as a class that I taught at my church with women. After the class was over, after I had ran a few sessions of it, the women came back to me and said were still reading through the notes of this, we really think you should consider pursuing publication. And the funny thing about it is God and I had already had previous discussions about this, and I was not going to write another book. See that was not something that I really enjoyed doing. I loved the writing part of it. I could do that every

day, but the putting a book baby into the world was just not something I wanted to do again. I didn't want to have any more book babies.

Amy

You and I might be sisters, Maria.

Maria

You understand what I mean then? It's like standing naked in a square when you do that!

Amy

It's crazy. It is.

Maria

But you know when the Lord uses the people in your life to speak to you I think that it's wise not to ignore that. And so God bolstered me. That's where the book proposal came from and ultimately writing the book. So it was really just out of a place of wanting so badly for other people to experience what I had experienced through digging through with God about this whole fear thing. And really bringing them to the wrestling mat and saying, "Okay, Lord, you ask us over and over in your word not to fear - what's that all about? Let's figure this thing out."

Cheri

That's a fabulous story. I love the fact that you tested the material with real people before it going into a book. I think that's so important.

In chapter two of *Breaking the Fear Cycle*, chapter two is called, "You do have a choice." And I'll admit I started bristling right away, because I can personally feel so easily that, "Oh, my fear just happens to me, that I'm just a victim of my fear." And you say, I'm quoting you right now, you say, "I never realized how reactive I had become to my fears. I felt that I needed to wriggle out from underneath my painful circumstance as soon as possible and run away from the fears." I mean that could have been me. I totally can identify with that. Can you share with our listeners about what was the pain that you were trying to avoid in your life?

Maria

At that time I was carrying my son Gideon that I knew I was carrying a child that was not going to survive once he was born. And so, the pain during that time was so huge that I couldn't ignore it, right? But what it revealed to me in that is that's always what I did is trying to run away from pain. Anytime. Whether it's an arguing child in front of you or a friend that wasn't responding to email. Whatever the painful situation was that was causing the fear it was, "Flee! Run away. Run away." Instead of really addressing the internal struggle of why is this causing me pain right now? What is really going on? And then to realize that I was missing out on some of what God wanted to do in me through the pain. And it was especially obvious to me when I was pregnant with Gideon, 'cause I felt like I was in an unquenchable fire. That's what it felt like. That's what the pain was. Standing in

the middle of this unquenchable fire and trying to run out of it but hitting a wall and getting bounced right back in. And I'm like, "Lord what is this? You love me, right? I know this." But I just want to run away from this hurt, and I don't understand why you won't let me. And He's like, "You don't understand Maria, I have something that I'm working on in you, you gotta stay in the fire a little bit longer." And so, I just realized that that's always what I did. I just tried to run away from the fire and run away from the pain and never allow God to do that longer, deeper long-lasting work in me.

Cheri

And so what did you learn as you did in fact face the pain?

Maria

The very first thing that I learned is that God sits in there with you. He doesn't shove you in the fire and leave you in there. He is closer to you in the fire than he is probably at any other time in your life. And it's a sweet closeness, and one that even now, as I'm in a season of not sitting in the fire, that I kind of long for. And you remember and you tap into that closeness that you experienced during that time. And then I also realized that it brought out a piece of me that had never been unearthed before. Kind of like the layer of Maria that's way down underneath the dirt that I never wanted to dig up, because I knew it would be painful to get to. That's a really sweet version of me, and I like way better the post-fire Maria than I did the Maria that went into it. So I'm just really grateful for the depth of the power of the Holy Spirit that he can do stuff like that. And that he is powerful enough, and those are all the characteristics of his goodness that he wants to do that stuff with the fire. He doesn't just want us to hurt for the sake of hurt. He wants to do something with it.

Cheri

Okay, so what you're saying just sounds so countercultural, because, of course, we have a pill for everything or an entertainment for everything. And chapter six, you titled believing in the bible's view of suffering. So in a nutshell what is the bible's view of suffering if it's not the American pop a pill or go out and have fun kind of idea.

Maria

Yes. Well, actually, if I can share this real quickly, because I was just reading this week and it really illuminated that question that you asked. And it's in the book of Acts, and it's talking about when the church was first beginning Peter had just gotten out of prison, and they were flogged. It said the apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing, because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name. And I just can't imagine that rejoicing. You know, I spend so much time, like, comfort Lord, nice and safe, please keep all the things nice in a row" and this boldness of praising God for allowing me to suffer for you. That's weird. That's how the bible talks about suffering. Suffering produces perseverance and perseverance character. There is a work that God uses in suffering that he cannot use in other things. And the bible talks about this. We see from Genesis to Revelation that there is no sparing of pain. There is no sparing of suffering. And so, it feels, especially in America, we really are safe. There's been lots of times in history, lots of places even today, that are not feeling safe. But we're so safe that we like we want to stay safe, all the time, no matter

what. Safe, safe, safe. And so, really, just digging into the word and seeing that's not what's in there. What do I think about that? And talking to God about it. And wrestling with it and not avoiding it, 'cause I avoided it for a lot of years. I'd like to read those verses quickly and then move along.

Amy

Well, Maria, pray is my word for 2018, and you have some wonderful thoughts about addressing our fears with prayer. So first, you talk about faith-filled prayers, not fear-filled pleas. What's the difference between those two things?

Maria

Yeah, I just really realized that I was begging God a lot for the same things over and over again. Please don't let this happen. Please can I have this? What about this? Please, please, please. And it was all about me all the time in those prayers, and I think that we do still need to pray those. I mean God wants all of our places; he wants all of our prayers. But they have to not be all the time. At some point in my prayer life I had to say, "Oh, what do you have going on, God?" What else is there? I've got all these things that I like to tell you about and ask you to give me all the time. What do you got going on? What's happening in that woman's life that is experiencing grief? How can I love on her? What do you got going on in your kingdom work that I'm involved in? What can I do with you, Lord? And spending those prayer times a little bit more his way instead of all of time protect my kids, keep my husband's job safe. I'd like it if we could go do this. What about this? Me, me, me, me, me. And it was feeding my fears, right? Because the prayers were no sooner on my lips than my mind goes, well, that's not how life goes all the time. Then what happens when my life doesn't go that way? My fears are entering into my prayer time. And that's not what I wanted, and even taking Jesus as an example in his prayer time. What did he pray about? We don't know. We don't read about it often. His prayers are not dictated all the time, but John 17 is a whole entire chapter of what Jesus prayed about. And so the first time I had this pleading versus praying revelation, I sat down with John 17. And I prayed through Jesus' prayer, and I kind of translated it over into my life, and when I'm struggling with those pleading fears, I just go back to those verses and restart my prayers that way.

Amy

Oh, I love that example and that practical application of praying Jesus' prayers. That's fantastic! Well, in the book you call March 31 a magical day. So what was so magical about that day for you?

Maria

Yeah, that was the most magical day of my life. That was the day my little boy Gideon came into the world, and there's many reasons why it was magical. I'll try to sum it up in not 15 hours for you. I could probably talk about it for a year. But the very first thing that was illuminated to me was this was the day that I feared most. When I received Gideon's diagnosis, that day stood on me like the whole weight of the world on my shoulders, because I feared the way that it was going to go. And on March 31 God showed me just how much our fears lie to us, how much they take him totally out of the picture, and how wrong

Google was, the experts were, the doctors were, you know, all of the ways that I had convinced myself it was gonna go, none of it happened that way. And that day God showed me how powerful the presence of his Holy Spirit is. And I don't think that every day is meant to be like that, but I think that we are meant to have those days so that we can rely back on. And we can remember if God is big enough to feel this heavy on a day like this, there's nothing that he can't do. There's no place that he can't reach me. If he turns a day that I had to face death for the very first day of my life, and it had to be in the form of holding and ushering my sweet baby boy into heaven. If he can meet me on that day, if he can turn those circumstances into peace, then all of those other little things, all those other fears, they just got so tightly shoved into place. And so, it was a magical day because if there is going to be a form of magic, it's going to be how real the Holy Spirit is that God has given to us and what miracles He's capable of even when the miracle isn't healing. People prayed for Gideon to be healed, and I prayed for Gideon to be healed. But that wasn't the miracle God had for us that day, but there were still plenty of miracles.

It was just so beautiful. And I have a picture. There were a lot of people in the room with us that day. Doctors, nurses, cousins that flew in from New Jersey, friends from Connecticut: we allowed people to be in that place with us and to hold Gideon and to meet him. Every single one of those people, there was maybe about 20 people there, they all said the same thing, and the peace was so heavy. And so, you see this picture, we're all praying together, anointing Gideon after he had passed away, and it's just so tangible what God had done. And so my biggest prayer when I was writing this book is that people could learn to trust in that peace without having to necessarily go through the fire that I had to go through. That maybe the "fruit work" from my fire could save somebody else. Because I'm stubborn, I think that God knew it was going to have to be that way for me so that other people could tap into that power and that peace. It was pretty amazing. I called it heaven come to earth. And that morning, the sunrise that day...I prayed for angels. I prayed all the time for God to surround us with his angels on that day that God would be with Gideon as he passed. And the sunrise that day, the whole entire sky, the whole sky was filled with pinks, oranges, yellows. And it almost, if you could see a legion of angels, I was convinced that that's what they would look like. So somebody took a picture of the sky that day and that picture is on my wall as a constant reminder of that day. So thank you for asking. It's a very sweet question for me to answer.

Amy

Wow. I gotta take a deep breath. Thank you for sharing and trusting us and our listeners with such a personal moment in your life.

Maria

It is my joy, thank you.

Cheri

Well, I'm going to insert a moment of flippancy here. And so, after that, you lived happily ever after, right? Nothing else went wrong.

Maria

Actually, April 1st was the hardest day of my life. I woke up that day and that was the hardest day of my life, and I've lived days like that since then. But you know what it showed me, Cheri? Is that there is a difference between fear and pain, and I don't want to cause my own pain through fear. Because life is gonna throw pain at you that you cannot avoid. And I don't want to waste my joy filled days making my own pain with my own fear in my own mind, because when the April firsts of life come, it's no longer fear, it's just life. It's happening, and you gotta live through it. And so, yes! No, not happily ever after. The fears keep coming. So I take out my... I'm like pew, pew, pew. I'm not letting you get in here any more. I'm not giving those fearful moments any more jurisdiction over my joy.

Amy

Okay, you had about 5 sentences in there that we will have to dissect in our convo afterwards, because that was awesome.

Maria

Okay. I'll look forward to listening to that. I love listening to your dissecting episodes. They're so fun.

Cheri

Awh. A listener. Okay, so this leads beautifully into my next question. As a highly sensitive person, I just like glommed onto your idea of a peace jar, because I need all the help I can get. So tell us, tell me, how I could construct a peace jar. I know there are lots of listeners who are taking notes right now. Listeners, take notes.

Maria

Yes, it's a really great thing. So I have emergency bible verses, and so those all go in my peace jar. One or two sentence verses through the bible that hit home for you. I have my own list of 20. They are sectioned in the back on my book if you don't have your own emergency bible verses, but your favorites, put those in there. And then maybe a couple of moments in your life that have brought you peace in the past: proof of God's past provisions, right? Throw those in there. Do you have any peaceful places? Do you like the beach? The mountains? Write down on a slip of paper what you feel like in those places. Or just even say, "Envision yourself in the mountains right now." Anything that you can do that when you're in an anxious moment or when you're in a fearful moment, you've got to snap your brain back into the reality of the truths that we have in God's word. We need kind of like a restart mind, because we get on this crazy train, we get in this snowball effect, and we just have a really hard time reigning ourselves back in, right? So the purpose of the peace jar is a tangible way: It's physical, right? I have to walk myself over to it. I have to use my hand, and I have to grab it out, and I have to read it. And hopefully, through all those steps your brain has readjusted just a little bit to reframe in the moment, and then also blessings. What are the blessings that you have in your life? What are the things that you have to be joyful for? Write those things down on a piece of paper and shove them in there. And then, also, any of the things that, I put, each chapter in my book has an actionable item, a tool to work on, and I write those down and put those in there, too. Fill it up with all the things!

Shuffle 'em around and then say, "Jesus give me a good one!" And reach your hand in there and grab them out, or if you're like my kids, because I got the idea from the bored jar. I give my kids a bored jar in the summer time, but they just flick through until they find one that they want.

Cheri

Hey, whatever works. I love how tactile and practical that is. I thank you for equipping me and our listeners. Alright, well, in the last chapter you asked two questions that absolutely jumped off the page at me. You asked, "How would life look different if we no longer held onto fears about failure?" and "How would life look different if we no longer held onto fears about relationships?" And I was just hoping you could read some of your answers straight from your book, because they just spoke so powerfully to me.

Maria

Yes, Absolutely. I would love to. How would life look different if we no longer held onto fears about failure? Knowing full well that, in fact, God shows off through our weakness, we can embrace who we are. We no longer try to change or improve or impress. We simply just be who we are. When say no to actively fearing our lack of successes or our overabundance of failures, we find contentment and confidence in being right where we are. It is so freeing to live this way. Our worth is no longer tied up in what we do. It is firmly tied up in Christ alone. That's it. Everything else falls off our radar as we focus intently on following him in all we do. No worry. No fear. Just confidence.

How would life look different if we no longer held onto fears about relationships? It looks like peace rather than being tempted to overthink every conversation that we have or every word that comes out of our mouths. Instead of analyzing every relationship or taking offense in every encounter, we ask ourselves, did I have a good heart? Did I intend to speak in love? Yes. And yes. So we move on in confidence knowing that it is God who searches our hearts, knows our minds, and defends us. When we do not allow relationships to define us, they become sweet and wonderful additions to our lives. Not necessities but blessings. Not defining us, but opportunities to shine God's light and love as he loves. When we let go of relationship-based fear, we fight less, listen more, and we don't email a friend a million times just in case they might be angry about that one thing that came out of our mouth wrong. We know we love well. We claim that truth over our relationships. And we live free. No worry. No fear. Just confidence in the spouse, parent, sibling and friend God created us to be.

Amy

I need just a moment to rub that into my heart. That last part, oh my goodness, I have to get your book and highlight that for sure.

Maria

Especially the email part, right? Or a text message you sent out and you're like, they hate me. I know. Truly they hate me.

Cheri

We may spend large portions of this podcast processing such angst.

<Laughter>

Amy

Oh my goodness. Yes, fantastic.

Maria

Or the dreaded Facebook direct message where you know that they read it. And you're like, they read it. They read it. I saw that they read it.

Amy

Oh yeah, that "marked as read."

<Laughter>

Maria

But they're not responding because, clearly, I'm a terrible friend? No, none of those things. No more.

Cheri

I love your picture of freedom.

Amy

Really, really beautiful. So what closing words would you like to tell our listeners, Maria, just a word of encouragement for them?

Maria

I get the honor of talking about what God has done in my life over the last 4 years, but it's not often that I get to say how much of a wreck I was beforehand. And I was the one that every single night on my pillow I had fears and so much worry. And I just want to say that there is hope for me to be redeemed from that then there really is hope for anyone. And when I was praying for just before this podcast is for the woman out there with just her head downcast just in despair, because she feels like there's no hope for her fear and her anxiety. And I am just praying for her to know that there is hope. And that God is big enough and powerful enough to heal us from our fear and from our anxiety, not to say that it will entirely go away, but there is hope and there is freedom in there. And so I'm praying for her and just the encouragement that it is possible. And I wish sometimes that I could paint the better picture of the mess that I was before as kind of the proof in the pudding. But I really was, I was a fear-filled all over person. So if there's hope for me, there's hope for anybody.

Cheri

Head on over to gritnegracegirls.com/episode111.

Amy

There you'll find the transcript, this week's digging deeper download, our bible verse art, and directions for how to enter this week's giveaway of *Breaking The Fear Cycle*.

Cheri

We are having a blast sharing behind the scenes fun stuff with our Grit-n-Grace Growth Partners. You can learn more at www.patreon.com/gritngracegirls. We would love to have you join our team.

Amy

Make sure that you join us next week when Cheri and I will be processing together what we learned from Maria.

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 & Cheri

Break it!