

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #113: Bringing Grace Solutions to the Problems of Race

Amy

Cheri, what issues have kept you from participating in things that you know you should participate in?

Cheri

Okay, how much time do you have, Amy? The two that come to mind actually tend to go together. One of them is my fear of having to make small talk. Like, I can talk forever – as you know that – talking is not my issue. But I don't have social graces. And so when I'm in a situation where I'm supposed to happily talk about the weather, it just makes me so...anxious is probably the best word. I just feel so inept. And then you put me in a situation where I might compensate for that by...oh look, there's a buffet. There's food. I'll just put food in my mouth to myself feel less socially awkward. Well that's just not a good combination for someone with a history of an eating disorder. So it is the easiest choice for me when I'm invited to something where I don't know people, and there's going to be a ton of food, the easiest thing for me to do is just say no. And it's the comfortable choice, but it's not the best choice. So how about you? What are your issues that keep you from participating in things that you know you really ought to?

Amy

Well, I'd say that are two things. One is I don't like to do anything in front of people that I'm not already good at. I'm battling that. I'm battling that. Um, and then the other one that I have lived in a Christian bubble, just to be real honest, and I'm often uncomfortable around people who aren't Christians. And that's just the saddest admission ever, and again, I'm battling that as well. But it's just true that I'm more comfortable around, I guess most of us are, but people who think like us that I know that there's not going to be any confrontation. But I have two big regrets from my college years, because I really hid in that Christian bubble in a church that I was in. And there were two things that I really wanted to do that I didn't do, because I wasn't good at them and I was afraid to try.

Cheri

Do tell.

Amy

Or I wasn't necessarily good at them, and I knew there were going to be people that weren't Christians and didn't think like me there. And it was the fencing team! Yes. I chose fencing as one of my PEs, and I loved it. I don't know that I would have even made it if I had tried out, but I never even tried out because of those two things. And then, the choir. I love to sing. I'm not a

soloist, but I love to sing in a choir, and I wish I had done those two things in college! But I didn't. I let those issues of mine hold me back.

Cheri

Mm. I've heard psychologists say that regret is one of the most powerful emotions that we have. We don't regret what we did do, so much as we regret what we didn't do, and issues, we all have issues that hold us back.

Amy

Yes. One of our listeners said almost exactly that. She said, "I want to do so many things for my Lord and our church, but I'm dealing with a lot of emotional issues from a difficult childhood. I don't want anyone to know about that so I often don't participate in things, because I'm struggling with these issues. And when I do something I want it to be perfect, at home, at work, or everywhere, I never feel like I can relax or let my guard down. I know these things, and yet I can't seem to change them. It makes me feel awful.

Cheri

I get that. I get what it's like to have this inner struggle with a challenging issue that keeps us from taking outer action. Even when we know that obedience to God's call is part of what's gonna heal those issues for us.

Amy

Absolutely. And I don't know that there's any bigger issue in our country today than race. And so, in our interview today, Lucretia, is gonna help us learn how to deal with the issues around race so that we can move forward.

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 talking to Lucretia Berry. Lucretia is an anti-racist consultant and educator. The author and facilitator of *What Lies Between Us, Journal and Guide*, and loves to create offerings and content to help folks, especially parents and teachers overcome race with grace. She received her PhD in education curriculum and instruction from Iowa State University. Nathan and Lucretia have three little girls who are the inspiration for their work through Granite City.

Cheri

I love that – overcome race with grace. It fits right on in.

Amy

Lucretia, what led you to write *What Lies Between Us*?

Lucretia

First, I'll say that my background is in curriculum and instruction, so I have to put that over to the side, 'cause that'll make sense soon here. And essentially, I'm fortunate to be in a community and in a church that is very multi ethnic. My friends would say okay so we're living our lives together, but there's still so many issues that are happening around race and racism and we don't have the tools and the language to be able to explain some things, or even I think, some of the things that stood out were, "Okay, I love my mom, and she's wonderful, but she has some things all wrong. And I don't know how to help her, but I can't articulate why her thinking is not helpful." Or, "How should I talk to my children about this?" And so, those are the kind of questions my husband and I would get all the time. And so we were in spaces, we were in safe spaces, where people had beautiful hearts and great intentions but just had no framework or language or education about race and the history. So I, again, with the background in curriculum and instruction, I kind of for years had carried around a curriculum in my back pocket. So yeah, I just, kind of, pulled together a class with 4 of my friends, kind of, driven by their questions and, of course, informed by my knowledge, because I do have quite a bit of knowledge and work in like multi-cultural education and anti-racism education and diversity in K-12 schools and too many things. That I've just kind of been exposed to this for years and years, kind of consciously, doing the work but not really intentionally the way that I am now, just kind of casually, so I just pulled together a curriculum that I thought would be helpful. And I wanted to deliver it in a way I would like to go to that class. Because I had been to many, many, many workshops and seminar sessions, and I thought why would you do it this way? It's already a tough topic. It's already challenging for people. Why is this your method? You know? So I wanted to design a class that I would approve of.

Amy

I love that. And I just want to affirm that and tell our listeners how I came across you. Because there's a team at Proverbs 31 that's going through *What Lies Between Us*, and it is an amazing curriculum. And so, we are using it in conjunction with your website, which is called Brownicity, and before I dive into the rest of it. I love the way your name came about for Brownicity, and so tell us what that means.

Lucretia

So Brownicity is the name, it of course is made-up; it's two words brown (I'll get to in a minute) and then ethnicity, which means that which we have in common. So my husband is white. I am black. We knew that having children there would be conversations that we'd have to have, because we want them to know who they are, like to know who they really are, and how society would see them as an multi-ethnic person and also how God created them. And we knew we need that in order to do that we'd have to have these very intentional conversations with them from a really early age. And so we look for...we knew we weren't going to teach

them color blindness or kind of the black-white binary as if it were a true thing, as if they were this mixed thing that came out. No, we aren't teaching them that. So we just kind of looked for language and verbiage and a framework that spoke towards the oneness of humanity. And my four year old, at that time, came home from preschool, and she had done a portrait of herself. I think they had just done the activity, *The Colors of Us* by Karen Katz, and so you know, that character learns that she and all of her friends in her community are shades of brown. And she goes into her community, and her mom teaches her how to mix all the hues of brown and make all different skin tones. And so, my daughter came home and she said, "Mommy, we are all shades of brown." She said, "You are dark brown, and daddy is light brown, and I am medium brown." And I was like, "Yes, exactly!" And we had been searching for kid words to describe the concept of many hues. As humanity we are many hues but one humanity. And so, even in our family we would use the term – we would describe people very specifically, like, brown like daddy; brown like mommy; brown like you when we were describing people. You know, straight hair, curly hair, wavy hair? Not just in these racial categories, because racial categories don't really make sense to children, so that's where the brown comes from in Brownicity. Because we would say, brown like you, brown like me, brown like so-and-so, and so Brownicity. So we are all hues of brown. We are many hues but one humanity. So that's where Brownicity came from.

Amy

So beautiful! I love it. I love it. I was confused by the title at first, and then when I heard your TedTalk, which was fantastic, I was like, "Oh, that's it! I love that." So one of the resources that you have on brownicity.com is that you have this chart that shows the difference between debate, discussion, and dialogue. And our group started with this, and it has rocked my world. So first, before I dive into my issue here, I would love for you to just define in a nutshell. What's debate? What's discussion? And what's dialogue? And what's the difference between them, because this is so key to discussions about race.

Lucretia

And I do want to say that I didn't come up with that. That is through the inter-group relations conflict in community from the University of Michigan. So, shout out! But I loved it, because a huge problem with race conversations is we don't know how to have them. We haven't been taught how to have them, and we think that it is a conversation that we want to debate about or you know we want to have these discussions. And I like what I heard John Powell use this analogy. He said, "Everyone, let's just say everyone in the room, everyone listening, has heard or knows something about gravity." And we're like, "Yes, yes." But how many people can actually explain how gravity works? Okay, so this is like race, everyone has heard something about it. Maybe you've talked about it. Maybe you've thought about it. Maybe you've been told not to talk about it. But how many? Not many people I should say in the popular population can explain how grace has worked and how race works. And many times people don't know what it is. So then even as people are debating you're going back and forth about what gravity actually is, but you don't know actually how gravity works. And many times, we've done so many classes, and honestly, I think; only a couple times in one class, a huge class, one person raised his hand to explain how gravity works. But it was because he was some kind of physicist,

scientist person. I was in a college town of an engineering college, and so, of course, a few people raised their hands. But debating comes with this approach that there is a wrong, there is a right, and so the people involved are out to win like it is some kind of completion and people are out to win. I like in quotation marks “might is right,” because debating is about fighting and winning. That is not how you’re going to have any kind of fruitful or life-giving conversation around race. And then there’s discussion. And I like the quotation it says, “The noisier the smarter.”

<Laughter>

Lucretia

And so, in many discussions, they assume that there’s an equal playing field even. So let’s have this discussion...well...and again I’ve been to a lot of discussions around race, and yet they don’t go well because not everyone has an understanding. Some people were coming from, actually I point this out in the *What Lies Between Us* curriculum, that typically the conversation goes south because people are coming from either of these four perspectives: the color blind approach. So you’ve been taught your whole life to be color blind so you have no language or framework to talk about race, but you want to have a discussion. That’s just not healthy or from a selectively skewed history. So maybe you’ve only been taught a European centered education about the history of our country. So you only know conquest, colonization, and contributions of Europeans. So you don’t know, there’s so many things that have been left out of your understanding of how we got where we are. So you kind of have this single story. Again, you want to have a discussion, but there’s not an equal playing field. Okay, number three is human-interest stories. Racially insightful, personal experiences, and catastrophic events headlining the news often shared with no racial or historical context. So you see something on the news or maybe something happened to this one person you know, and then you want to base your whole ideology around race on one story, again, not an equal playing field for having a discussion. And then number four, is the worst of all, and this approach to bring to the table is political platforms. And so many people, their only reference for having a conversation about race is kind of spawned from a political platform, but they don’t know that. And I’ve had people even tell me, “I’m not political!” And then everything they tell me sounds like you just read that from the, whatever, conservative liberal or whatever. Like, you just read that from the manual or whatever. Like they didn’t really, but they don’t know that. No, you really don’t understand how race works. And so, then the conversation goes south, so discussion, the noisier the smarter. And often times, people are having a discussion. And then there’s dialogue and connectivity for community. So you are working towards a goal. You’re working towards a common goal. So even with the curriculum I’ve created, it is very dialogue focused, because the common goal is to be educated about race, the history and context, and racism. So we can all agree that we need education in that area, so you come to our classes and that is the goal. The goal is not to express that you aren’t a racist. Like, okay, good for you. But we still have work to do. And sometimes people come with that goal. People say they wanna have racial dialogue. Well, I want to become friends with a person of color. That’s not why we’re here. And you don’t have to have a friend that is a person of color to actually get this and want to get this and understand this. Like understanding how race and racism works will help you as an individual be

a better person, you know? That's our common goal, and that's what we're all working towards is to get this education. And so, the way that the whole course is set up, you don't even talk to each other until you've had at least 3 or 4 weeks of education. And so, that's where a lot of the things come in: where you're watching the documentary or you're reading certain articles, because we need to make sure that everybody kind of have a common understanding before we actually engage in talking to each other, and it makes all the difference in the world.

Amy

Well, and for me, one of the things, the whole dialogue thing. Has really rocked me...because I really started to realize when you get these vocabulary words, because language is so powerful, you start to realize the gaps in yourself. And for me, the gap for me in dialogue was I'm a terrible listener, because I'm a reforming perfectionist and perfectionists have these really strong ideas of "what's right," and I put those in quotation marks. And so, we have this idea about what's right, and so as reforming perfectionists, we almost always default to debate, because we're trying to convince someone else that we are right. So, Lucretia, tell us what are some steps that we can take to change from debaters to dialoguers. Because I love the idea of dialogue, because the whole goal of dialogue is that we walk together out of this into community. And neither debate nor discussion leads us into community, which I think is what we all long for. So how do we change? How do we go from debaters to dialoguers?

Lucretia

Okay, so the first thing is to take on the posture of a student. Like to say I am a student. I am learning, to humble yourself. And then continue...in a sense repeat. Keep doing that over and over and over. So even though I am a facilitator, or I teach this, I continue to learn from the people on my team even as I go into the sessions, and people want to share. I continue to learn. So, always just take a posture of a student, and then you have to ask yourself if you're a perfectionist, you know, you feel like you have to win. You have to ask yourself, "Okay, what is more important? My pride, my ego, or the goal of walking together into community." So you'll just have to maybe over and over again make that sacrifice. But that's okay, because we've been empowered through sacrifice.

Amy

Lucretia, one of my biggest fears in this group is that my heart is to do it right, but so often, I do it wrong. I say the wrong thing...I just did this in the last meeting. I said the wrong thing, and it was uncomfortable and painful. And it made my heart hurt afterwards. So how can we get over the fear of doing it wrong so that we can move forward?

Lucretia

Yeah, I think you just have to...that is so common, and that's another reason why I kind of set up the curriculum this way because you have more time to just be quiet. You know? And become comfortable with the...

<Laughter>

Amy

Okay, that was the whole thing, that's my takeaway, I was talking when I should have kept my mouth shut and been listening. Thank you, Lucretia. It hurts so good.

Cheri

Thank you for calling Amy out on the carpet and telling her she needs to be quiet more and I was here to wit- I just want to notice that I was quietly listening.

<Laughter>

Lucretia

Yes, we need to be quiet more. And to just, of course, accept that. Like, okay, you've got to think about. I often use the analogy that this conversation we're at different grade levels. And often times if you are white and you were taught to be color blind, you are in preschool, okay. And then most of the time, not all the time, but most of the time people of color, because they've had to have the conversation could be more like in high school or college, right? And I say that for everyone as a lens for us to view each other. So, for example, if I am the teacher, or I'm in college, I am going to look at a person in preschool with that lens, with a lens of grace. Like, she is in preschool, and she is trying. She is learning her ABCs.

Amy

Bless her heart.

Lucretia

Bless her heart! Bless it good. Bless it good! And then a person who is in preschool has to look...you can be in preschool about race, but you can be in college in other topics. But you have to say, look, I'm in preschool. I'm gonna make mistakes. I'm gonna accidentally say the wrong things. I'm gonna hurt people. But I'm in preschool, and that's what we do in preschool. Right? It's okay. It's okay, and that why it's also very important to establish a safe space or a grace-filled space, and again, I have that as a part of the book, too. Because you want to know that you can just say whatever. I mean, not whatever, but responsibly. And it can be an accident, and you are in a space, lovingly, can help you out. So I think that's just a part of it, and we just have to accept that there's gonna be mistakes, there's gonna be...and I'm a person that I will help someone out.

Amy

Well, our listeners can't see us, but when Lucretia gave her answer just then it was hard for me...like I got teary...I'm getting teary again...and wanted to put my head down and cry, because there's so much grace in that Lucertia. Thank you so much. I keep talking about God sending me back to kindergarten. He has been. And I am a preschooler, even below that in this conversation, and so I just appreciate, and it happened in our group this way too that there was so much grace for, which I am very thankful for. But you know you just hate to be the one saying the stupid thing, so anyway there you go.

Cheri

Well, I think one of the hardest things about this is that...well, in every area of life, in order to learn and grow we have to fail, but the price when we fail with people is so high, and sometimes its unconscionably high and doing huge damage out of ignorance is just ugh. That's why I've excused doing nothing. And yet now I've come to understand that doing nothing is a thing, and I'm causing damage by doing nothing.

Lucretia

Yeah, we just have to take the risk, and that's why like safe spaces where you can practice, you can practice, you can talk, and then, when you're out in maybe not so safe spaces, you've practiced and when you say something, it'll be less damaging. And then, even for those of us who, okay, if you're listening and you're a person who is in college or high school with this conversation, we know that we want people to continue to come to the table to learn, to be equipped, to be informed, to be engaged, and so we come alongside people. We show grace, we come alongside people, and lovingly either correct or encourage whatever needs to be done, 'cause it could also happen the other way. I used to do this where I'm like, "Oh, I know what you meant." You know if someone says something that isn't helpful or hurtful...I know your heart. And that's true, but we also want to help the person not be in a predicament where they're talking to someone or in front of people who don't know their her heart and doesn't know where she's coming from and could potentially do some damage.

Cheri

And that might keep that person in perpetually in preschool.

Lucretia

Yes, exactly.

Cheri

Thank you so much for agreeing to come back to this table. We're going to go ahead and wrap up for today, but we've got a whole list of questions to continue working with, and we will come back to this in part two. Thank you so much, Lucretia.

Lucretia

You're welcome. My pleasure. And thank you for having me. I'm so honored.

Amy

This is so great!

Cheri

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode113.

Amy

There you'll find this week's transcript, the digging deeper download, bible verse art, and directions about how to enter this week's giveaway for *What Lies Between Us*.

Cheri

If you've enjoyed this week's episode of Grit-n-Grace, won't you share it with your friends? You'll find easy share buttons on the webpage for this episode.

Amy

Make sure to join us again next week for part two of our interview with Lucretia Berry.

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!

Outtakes

Cheri

...Who's made a very intentional choice to do a hard thing and make that her ministry, but I also loved her...

I feel like I have elephants in my house. I have a sixteen-pound cat and a nine-pound cat.

Amy

Is it your cats?

Cheri

Yeah. It sounds like elephants up above my head.

Amy

It did.

Cheri

Yeah. I swear Dusty is only nine pounds, but she wears four-inch stilettos. That is all I have to say about that cat.