

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #115: Creating Powerful Proximity for Greater Grace in Race

Amy

So, Cheri have you ever experienced a time when you realized that you and another person were, quote, "Speaking a different language?"

Cheri

You know the first thing that comes to mind is when Daniel and I were starting to date seriously and the time came for us to meet each other's families. I thought things went so well. He came over, and we had a big family dinner and sat around the table for like three whole hours and everybody was asking him the best questions. They were treating him like royalty. And then when I went to his home, I sat and everybody talked around me and nobody asked me any questions, and I was so confused. Actually at the time, I was hurt. And, later when we were telling stories about meeting each other's parents and families we had vastly different versions of what happened. Because his version of my family was that he felt interrogated like we had drilled him with questions rather than leaving him alone and letting him decide when he was ready to speak. And my version of his family was that I had been ignored, and they weren't interested in me. So, the different language here was the role of questions, realizing there was no right or wrong, it was just we came at it from such completely different perspectives. How about you? When is a time that you had to realize you and someone else were speaking different languages.

Amy

Well, mine is a family one, too. And, it's sort of hilarious and also sort of really sad. So, my family always did bedtime prayers together, and we did the traditional, now I lay me down to sleep. And so, one night, we were in my brother's room, and he was probably I would say seven. All of a sudden before we started praying, he said can we use my name tonight. And my mom said, "What?" And he goes, "Can we use my name tonight?" And she said, "Well, what do you mean?" He said, "Well, we always say now I Amy down to sleep, can we say now I Jason down to sleep?" So of course, seven years of my brother's life, he thought we were saying my name at bedtime prayers and totally leaving him out. Can you imagine? Okay, I think this is wonderful, but it's kind of painful for my brother. You know.

Cheri

Well this is Cheri Gregory.

Amy

And, I'm Amy Carroll.

Cheri

And you are 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 processing what we learned from our conversation with Lucretia Berry, author of *What Lies Between Us*.

Cheri

Alright, Amy, so you're the one who connected us with Lucretia in the first place. And so, you've already been on a journey working your way through her book, so fill us in on how that's going.

Amy

Well, I would say it's going really great except for how painful it is.

Cheri

Uh-oh.

Amy

Is that good? I think it's good. It's a hurts so good situation. So, I've had these two big events in the last year where I've been going through the book with a group. And that's been amazing, and it's a very diverse group, and so it's been just incredible to hear different perspectives and learn from people that I love. I got to go to the MLK 50 conference in Memphis that was put on by the Gospel Coalition around, well, at the date of Martin Luther King's assassination, which is a very somber event, but it was kind of a rally cry event, too. So, it has been on my mind, on my heart, messing with my life for about a year now.

Cheri

Okay. So, what would you say is one of the biggest things you have learned or are learning?

Amy

Well, the biggest thing for me is that I'm learning finally, at the age of fifty, to listen. I'm a girl who loves words, obviously. I have the gift, that's always one of those dubious gifts, the gift of gab, and I'm learning to really listen, and to leave the echo-chamber. There's a lot of talk in our culture right now about what's an echo-chamber. It's our tendency through social media, through our choices of television stations, through our choice of friends, our church to surround ourselves with voices that sound just like ours. Voices of people who think just like us; who have the same experience as us. And listen, I've done it, too. It is our natural tendency, because that is the definition of a comfort zone. But what God has been doing for the last year is pushing me out of my echo-chamber, and saying, Amy for heaven's sake, your experiences are not the only experiences. Your thoughts are not the only thoughts. Your way of perceiving the world is not the only way of perceiving the world. I want you to listen to your brothers and sisters in Christ who have different experiences, perceptions, thoughts about the world.

Cheri

So, what is it like for you as a reforming perfectionist; this isn't in our notes, don't look for it.

Amy

Shoot!

Cheri

What is it like for you as a reforming perfectionist and people-pleaser to put yourself in a situation where you've chosen to listen and you hear things that are hard to hear.

Amy

The hardest things for me. I mean I love it on one hand. On one hand it feels like growth, and it is growth. And I think the best of what a perfectionist is and a people-pleaser is, is that we want to be better. That's the upside. And I do, I so want to do better. I want to do it better. I want to think about race in different ways. I just want to do it better. The downside of it is this idea that I talked about with Lucretia I have such a strong sense of right and wrong about every little thing, because that's what perfectionists do, we figure out what's right and then we pursue it, whether it's right or not is a whole different question. And it's really hard to let go of some of that. And let me be clear, I wrote a blog post today that's just making me shake in my shoes, because I just know some of my people are going to misunderstand, and I know our listeners could misunderstand, too. I have a clear understanding that God's truth, as revealed in scripture, is always right. Okay. So, listeners, don't get nervous, Cheri and I are not taking any wild left turns about the scripture. But what I'm also realizing is that my perception of the world has not always been right. Sometimes I've bent scripture to fit my perception of the world. And God's straightening some of that out.

Cheri

In talking with Lucretia, I think one of the things we enjoyed so much is that first of all, she's an educator, so she speaks our language. And then speaking of speaking our language, she was focused on language. So, what struck you about the importance and the power of language in this whole conversation? Is there a word or phrase that you learned or that really stuck out to you?

Amy

Well, I think the thing that has just blown my doors off is the definition of racism, and how the white community and the black community often define that differently. I've been listening to a lot from Matt Chandler recently. He was at the MLK 50 conference, and he is the pastor of a multi-cultural church, an intentional, multi-cultural church in Texas called, "The Village Church." So, I've been listening to him a lot. And just yesterday he said this, he said, "I have been taught my entire life that racism is wicked acts carried out by wicked people." And when he said that I was like, oh yeah, that's how I've been taught, too, by very well-meaning people around me. And that was the definition I really personalized racism, and I thought, but I don't have to deal with racism cause I'm not a racist, right? I personally am not a racist.

Cheri

And, you are definitely not a wicked person, 'cause you are a perfectionist and so and perfectionists and wicked people are two very different groups.

Amy

Oh, yes, exactly.

<Laughter>

We won't unpack all the problems with that theology. But there you go.

But I realized that was the definition I had of racism, too. But when the black community is talking about racism as Lucretia said, she pointed out systematic racism is different than personal racism. And most of the time, what the black community is talking about is the systematic racism that they face on a daily culture: in the systems we have in America, in the structures we have in America, in the laws we have in America. And just in the culture that they face in America. It doesn't have to do anything to do with Amy Carroll. I mean I am part of all of that. And so, listen, the biggest thing for me, that understanding, that change in language, those definitions have made is it's made me more open-hearted, because I don't have to be defensive, and I think what I recognize in myself and so many of my white friends is this defensiveness. I'm not privileged. I'm not racist. And it's that defensive mechanism cause we take it so personally when that's not the definition that most people are talking about race are using at all.

How about you? Any big ah-ha?

Cheri

Well, those were huge for me, as well. I mean I think my jaw dropped when she started talking about systemic racism. I realize that I have just been like this deer in the headlights whenever the word race or racism comes up, because I've always thought it was all about me, you know kind of the typical people-pleaser, perfectionist kind of perspective, and so if it's all about me then I'm going to feel attacked, like you said, I'm going to be defensive. And so the phrase I love that she brought into the conversation was to disrupt the status quo. The status quo of complacency. Then she asked the question later, and it's a great question for starting to disrupt the status quo, and that is who is missing from the table. And I realized when I go, especially into a new situation, but really any situation. I am looking for the table where I'm going to get immediate acceptance, and I am hoping that somebody just like me is going to save a seat for me, because that's my comfort zone. That's going to make me feel like I'm at a very familiar, safe place. I am not used to being the one to invite people who I don't know and making space at the table for people who maybe even intimidate me. And yet that's not the right way to say it. They don't intimidate me. I happen to be easily intimidated. I don't want to put the blame on somebody else. But just disrupting the status quo for me starts as something as simple as looking at the table I choose to sit at. Am I looking for familiarity and comfort each time or am I looking to see, hang on there are people missing from this table. And I hate to

admit it, but it's true I've not looked at it from that perspective. I've always looked around and gone, oh good, these people make me feel good.

Amy

Yes. So recently, I was at a meeting of local woman leaders here in the area, in the Raleigh area, and my friend Carrie who I just have so much respect for that runs a nonprofit for women coming out of poverty. She said, I'm looking around this table, and we are all the same color. She said that needs to change. She said so I want you to be thinking about who can we invite. So, I was driving home, and I started weeping, 'cause this is after all this has started for me, because I realized I have no one in my life right now to invite. Now I'm not avoiding people, just to be clear. I work from home. I go to a predominately white church, although that is changing, but what Lucretia pointed out and what I keep hearing in all the podcasts and videos and conferences and meetings that I'm going to is that proximity is key. Proximity is key. Like we don't care about an issue, until we care about people that are impacted by that issue. Empathy is impossible until we care about people, that we have connections with people. So, I think that is a great question, Cheri, "Who is missing from the table?" And it's a great question for our listeners, too.

Cheri

Lucretia's curriculum focuses on learning first. And learning history is a big part of that. So, you had a flash of insight as you watched the documentaries. You are ahead of me on that. So, tell us what that flash of insight was all about.

Amy

Okay, so just to be clear when Lucretia called me a preschooler and she was in college, and Cheri and I were kind of giggling about that in the opening. I actually took that, just so you all know, and we've talked about it a little bit, I got it teary, because I felt such grace in that. So, ya'll, extend me some grace while I fumble around in this a little bit, because I haven't taken history is a long, long time. So some of this I'm having to review. So, there were almost 400 years of slavery; there's some debate about exactly when it started, but around 400 years of slavery. Then following slavery there were about 100 years of the whole separate, but equal idea, which we know meant not equal at all. And so, we are dealing with 500 years of history, and it's only been about 60 years since the real push of the civil rights movement began. So, when we think of that that is a lot of untangling to do. And there's grace in understanding that, but it can't be an excuse. So that's why an understanding of the history and just that timeline is so important for me. I think about Cheri, we've talked about grief a lot on the podcast, and you know, I've talked to friends who it never fails to astound me, that I've had friends who are going through this deep grief and somebody will say it's time for you to move on. Isn't it time for you to be over that. You know, you've heard these stories, too. And it's so painful for them. And here's the thing is that for someone who is grieving a terrible loss. It is outside of what we should be allowed to do to tell them when it's time to be over. And yet, as a white community I have felt it, I just have to confess, and I've heard it over and over, "Isn't it time for them to be over that." No, it's not. We don't get to say. We didn't experience it. And, this is like such a long

generational wound. It's going to take a long time to heal, and we just have to decide to be a part of the healing.

Cheri

So true. So true.

Amy

So her other emphasis is scripture, as well as history, Cheri. So, what are your thoughts when she shared Romans 12:2?

Cheri

I'll tell you what hit me is that this verse, if you take the flip side of it, it really is very sobering, because it tells me that if I do conform to the pattern of this world, then I will not know God's will. And if I don't know God's will, the only alternative is I'm going to get stuck in my own will. And that's going to take me right back to perfectionism and people-pleasing in which I have to be right, and I can't handle any conflict. So, when reading it from that perspective conforming to the world sounds really, really dangerous. And painful for people like us who are intentionally reforming from perfectionism and people-pleasing. I don't want to go back to where I was six year ago, so the only possibility is moving forward, which we know there is hope for.

Amy

Wow. That's beautiful. That's an amazing realization that when we do conform that we can't be in God's will. And you know this whole conforming idea is really interesting, because one of the things Lucretia brought up, it was kind of imbedded in the conversation, when we were talking about if somebody says something kind of implicitly racist in front of us, and we don't respond and our children are there. And one of the things she said, is she said your children notice. They're like these little radars. They pick up on the atmosphere of the room and that the fact that there is the discomfort and that you didn't say anything and all these things. And so, I think again, my defensive posture has been, well, my parents weren't racist and they brought me up in home that wasn't racist and they love people so well. And you know, well I had a public school education and so we did black history month. I'm not conformed to the world, right? But then you start thinking about a million little things that have come at you your whole life just like the scene that you and Lucretia were dissecting, where attitudes and things that were said, as well as things that weren't said, all these things. We are conformed to the world whether we like it or not. Whether we realize it or not in a million different ways. But the hope in that is, our girl Lucretia used one of our favorite words neuroplasticity. WooHoo. You knew I was about to jump out of my chair when she said that.

Cheri

Absolutely!

Amy

And so, you know, brain science geeks, Cheri and I. But God created us that way. He created us not to be stuck, but to be able to change that when we realize where we are conforming, that we can look at God's Word and listen to people with more experience than us, and we can change, and we can learn. So much hope in that.

Cheri

I love that. Neuroplasticity is our friend.

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

You brought up an interesting term that you picked up at the MLK 50 event: trendy compassion. Which is just a great oxymoron, so I'm going to put both of us on the hot-seat starting with you.

How are you going to, how are we going to resist the perfectionistic habit? 'Cause we are going to be tempted now, we've done a couple of episodes with Lucretia, and we've had this conversation, and it's going to be so tempting to go, check, and move on to another perhaps easier cause.

Amy

Oh yeah.

Cheri

How are we going to avoid trendy compassion?

Amy

Well, give credit where credit is due. That came from Trip Lee, who's a Christian rapper. He was my favorite speaker. and maybe we can put the link to his message. He's an incredible communicator, but anyway, so the way that I'm going to avoid trendy compassion and listen. I have felt the pull of that so hard, so hard to just drift back, check it off, is I have taken steps to connect with black women that I love and respect and admire in my life and scheduling time to talk to them to invite them. One of the things we have in our church is called D-Groups, they are discipleship groups. So, there is a group of us, we're forming a discipleship group, and we want to purposefully make it diverse so that we can have these conversations. I realize working from home. Having very little exposure. Living in a predominately white neighborhood all that. I have no exposure right now. I have to make it happen. And I want to make it happen. AND Lucretia gave me really grace-filled advice about that. She said, just be honest with these women. I wanted to make sure I didn't offend them.

Cheri

So, you are going to be really purposeful about proximity.

Amy

Yes, I have to admit it does feel a little weird. Like I don't want anybody to feel like a token anything in my life. And Matt Chandler had the funniest thing, he was doing this panel at his church, and he confessed that his church, although it's diverse and growing in diversity, it's still predominately white. So, he said every year he encourages his people to increase their proximity. To invite people to their homes. He said so every black person in the room text me that week and said I got 23 invitations to dinner. I thought that was so funny. And I love that their church laughs about it. You know, like they're trying, but gosh, it's imperfect progress you know.

Cheri

Well, you know, you are further along than I am. You're all the way in preschool and I'm still in the cradle here, so what I'm feeling convicted to do for now is just keep my mouth shut, because my urge is to talk through this. And a little less talk and a lot more action isn't just a country song it's a really good idea. I am going to aim to keep my mouth shut, and listen and learn. So, I've got a lot of homework to do. I've got a stack of books and audio books, and then I am going to be praying that the Holy Spirit will initiate or at least make me aware of safe conversations in which I can listen, not talk, but in which I can listen, so lots of listening, lots of listening.

Amy

I'm praying for that, too.

<Laughter>

Cheri

For who? Me or you.

Amy

For me. For lots of mouth closing.

Cheri

What tattoo do you kept threatening to get?

<Laughter>

Amy

It's a proverb, and I always forget the reference, but it says where there is abundance of words, sin abounds. I'm pretty sure I need that tattooed either on my forehead or maybe on my hand so I can look at it while I'm in a meeting.

Cheri

And gesturing, "Oh, wait. I'll be quiet now." All right, what's the scripture we are focusing on with this episode?

Amy

The one that Lucretia gave us, which is Romans 12:2. “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, His good, pleasing, and perfect will.”

Cheri

What is the bad rule that we are breaking in these episodes with Lucretia?

Amy

As an adult my world-view is set.

I mean I think that’s the resistance I always feel is like I already know what I think. I’m 50 for heaven’s sake.

Cheri

I am who I am. This is just me.

Amy

Yes. Yes. But the truth is, that as a Jesus-follower I have to be open to changing my mind, because my world-view must always align with God’s Word, not my culture systems. That’s long.

Cheri

But it’s important. So important.

Amy

What grit are you putting into place, Cheri, as you work through these?

Cheri

You know when Lucretia said, you asked her about practical things that we can do in order to have the growth we want to move out of the cradle and into preschool and eventually up to college, and she said we needed a community, and for some reason that stunned me. It had never occurred to me that I needed community around this. So I’ve been thinking about why, and I realize that this comes down to admitting that I need help. And what I think I have some pretty deeply held beliefs are is that I should be able to do this, I should be able to overcome racism or figure this all out. Whatever this is, I should be able to do it on my own. And really, if I’m a good person shouldn’t this come naturally. Shouldn’t I just be able to love everybody the way God wants us to on my own. And so, if I can’t do it alone, if I do need help, which I do, this forces me to realize this is way bigger than I realized. And so, the grit for me is accepting the conviction and accepting the reality that I’ve had my head buried in the sand. I didn’t know what I didn’t know and now that I’m starting to see it, I’m stunned. And it almost felt better to be ignorant, except I know that’s not right. And so, swallowing my pride, I think is the right word here, swallowing my pride and saying I’m in the cradle. I need to move forward, and I need help, all of that is going to take a lot of grit.

Amy

Yes, to all the things you just said. I have to give myself grace in order to overcome the fear of failure in these conversations that I'm having. It's one of my greatest fears, you know, in general is ruining relationship by the things that I say. And so often this past year, I've got to tell you my passion has run way in front of my wisdom. It grieves me. Grief should lead to repentance, but in my case, grief has led to increased fear, and I've got to deal with that and give myself some grace. And Lucretia helped me with that so much. The whole kindergarten-college picture, yes, and I accept it. I receive it, and I totally see it as grace. I am so thankful that a woman in college, like Lucretia, would extend grace to me. So thankful.

Cheri

Head on over to www.gritngracegirls.com/episode115.

Amy

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

Cheri

We would love to have you join our Facebook group where we'll be continuing this conversation just go on Facebook and search for Grit N Grace Girls.

Amy

Make sure to join us next week when I hijack this whole thing and interview Kathi Lipp and Cheri Gregory, coauthors of *You Don't Have to Try So Hard*.

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!

Outtake

Cheri

What tattoo do you keep threatening to get?

Amy

It's a Proverb, and I always forget the reference, but it says where words of-. It says, "Where there are-." It says, "Where there's abundance of words..."