

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #119: Turning Over Control to the One Who Does it Best

Cheri

So Amy, I saw an interesting post on Facebook the other day. It said, “Advice is only guaranteed to be well-received when it’s asked for. The end.”

Amy

Really? Gosh. Who would post something as sassy as that?

Cheri

Well, it has your picture by it.

Amy

Oh yeah. I remember that day.

Cheri

What was going on girlfriend?

Amy

It was so funny, because you texted me, “Is there a story behind this?” Hmm, there might be. Okay so, I have publically spoken against *Vaguebooking*. I hate it, and I did it. I couldn’t take it though! I had to vent some place. I had had – I cannot tell you the amount of unsolicited advice from virtual strangers that I had had that morning. And I had had it up to here. And so, I just had to post and get a little love from my people.

Cheri

Well, I was right there with you. I totally agreed with you, and you did get me thinking about how much better I’ve gotten at asking for help and feedback and input, but then I realized I hate the uninvited input as much as you do. It just makes me see red. It feels intrusive. It even feels kind of controlling. Then I got to wondering does that make me a control freak that I want to control other people, and I only want their feedback if I’ve asked for it? What do you think? Is that controlling?

Amy

Uh. Well, no.

Cheri

Oh good. Thank you for agreeing with me. I feel so much better now.

Amy

However, maybe my reaction has something to do with a need for a sense of control myself. So one of our listeners had a similar reaction. She said, "I equate getting things done and making people happy with success and with my worth as a woman. It also gives me a sense of control, which tricks me into thinking I'm self-sufficient. Although that's the farthest from the truth."

Cheri

A sense of control...I so resonate with that.

Amy

Why, oh why, does this have to be a constant theme of this podcast and, well, my life?

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 Jennifer Dukes-Lee, author of *It's All Under Control*. Jennifer is a big fan of dark-chocolate, emojis, 80s music, bright lipstick, and Netflix binges. She and her husband are raising crops, pigs, a herd of cats, and two beautiful humans on the Lee Family farm in Iowa. Jennifer is also the author of two other books we love, *Love Idol* and *The Happiness Dare*.

Cheri

Welcome back to Grit-n-Grace, Jennifer. I like to tell people that you are the perfect combination of a friend who makes me feel normal, and a mentor who challenges me to change. And I just want to say I really, really appreciate you writing a whole book just for Amy.

Jennifer

Tyndale is going to be really disappointed in sales, because no one but Amy and I have control issues.

Amy

Well, I might buy 10. So it's okay. So Jennifer, tell us, besides me, what kind of woman did you write *It's All Under Control* for?

Jennifer

Well, I also write it for me, so we can be in the club together. I really happened upon this topic even though it's something I've struggled with my whole life, when I was working at a retreat

with...it was just a very intimate retreat and in talking with so many women I realized how many of them were dealing with and admitting that they dealt with issues of control. And I began to look at that woman and realize that the kind of woman that this book is for, and the kind of woman that I am, is a woman that others count on. I kind of subscribed to the idea of "I'm capable therefore I should"...and so I say yes to all kinds of things. And I think the kind of woman who picks up this book will resonate with the saying that I'm sure you both have heard: if you want something done, ask a busy woman to do it. I say that a lot of people who will pick up this book probably would describe themselves as achievers. In high school they were probably the group project leader. But then as I began to dig deeper, I realized it's not just for achievers. I realized it's for all women because I think this is a book for women who are trying. Women who are trying to hold it all together for the sake of our family, trying to give our best to our churches and our jobs. We're trying to be there emotionally and physically for the people that we love. We're trying to help our grown up kids make good choices, and then we're trying not to feel hurt when they tell us "You're not helping, mom. You're meddling." So really it's for women who are trying to stay on top of it all, but sometimes life feels really out of control. These women can't control the big things in life always so maybe they're trying to control the little things. Like what they put in their mouths, how many steps, which direction the vacuum lines go, whatever.

Cheri

Okay, this is getting way too personal, Jennifer.

Jennifer

It really is for everybody; it's not just for me and Amy. I think we all have this little bit of inner control freak even though we really back away from this description. But I think a lot of us, I mean it's just the way we've always been since the garden. This feeling that we want to control things that we want to be God, that we want to take things into our own hands, that we want to fix and manage outcomes. So that's who it's for.

Cheri

Well, early in the book you say that you had built your image as the helper not the helped. And you say that like it's a bad thing. So I want to know what's the problem with always being the helper, Jennifer?

Jennifer

Well, I'll give you two reasons or examples why. And one of them is about over helping and how it can hurt. And then, the second is what happens when we never allow ourselves to be helped, to allow this opportunity for others to help us, so, first, this idea of over helping. I know, or maybe you know, or maybe you are the mom who makes phone calls to the college professor on behalf of the child, a call that the child is perhaps capable of making, seeing as they are adults now. That's an example of over helping. Now my kids aren't at that age in life yet. I have a high school and a junior high school student, but there are still situations where I want to rescue and help my girls. Where I want to fix things for them, you know, something that is going on with friends or something that's going on with a difficult teacher or difficult situations. But

when I stop helping and stop treating my daughters like infants, I allow them to grow into the beautiful, responsible women that they were made by God to be. And if I'm always helping or over helping, they will never learn the important lessons from failing from time to time. And so that's what is over helping. And the second is this idea that we are the helpers and never the helped. And when we are doing that we are denying the opportunity for others to be Christ to us. Think about the time that you've helped others, and the way it strengthened your bond of friendship or love with the person that you helped. And in the same way other people want the experience and the blessing of helping you. And if we never ask for help, we are denying others that opportunity. Denying them that important part in our lives, denying them the opportunity to lighten a burden, to offer comfort when we're in need. And I think that we think it's the Christian thing to do and serve and be there for others, and it certainly is, but guess what? This is also the Christian thing to ask for help. Even Jesus asked for help, which I think is so remarkable. The Samaritan woman, the woman at the well, what did he do? What did he ask her for? Would you give me a drink of water? You know, he's got 5,000 people on a hillside, and what does he ask his disciples to do? Basically, help me prepare this meal for these people. He's basically taking his cross to Calvary, and he didn't ask for help. But he accepted the help of Simon, right? He accepted that help. He could've snapped his fingers and just drifted his cross up there. We know it. He's fully human, but he's also fully divine. And I look at that picture of Simon carrying the cross of Jesus, and I have to ask myself, why do I think I can carry my own crosses on my own? There is a great lesson for me in asking for help. I have a very difficult time with it. I twisted my ankle really badly several years ago. And a woman wanted to come here. She came with a wheelchair, because she wanted to take me to the doctor to make sure I hadn't broken my ankle. I didn't want to get in the wheelchair, and I didn't want her help. And it's just an example of how pride just gets in the way, and I really denied her the opportunity to be a blessing in my life. Over helping and not letting others help us are two big problems for those of us who want to have everything under control.

Cheri

Alright, so I took some notes for our conversation, Amy. I just had a huge aha. I will save it for a week from now.

Amy

You too Cheri?!

<Laughter>

Cheri

Maybe.

Amy

Just saying.

Cheri

I might have been feeling a little over defensive and in denial. Okay Jennifer, throughout the book, you share strategies for how to crack the control code. Is it controlling of me to want to know what the control code is? And why do we need to crack it?

Jennifer

I created the control code when I was writing this book, because I needed a way to understand why we do what we do. 'Cause that's what we do, right? We gotta understand it all as control freaks, but really I wanted to figure out how to stop it. In this control code, I identified what our core motivations are, and then in working to help women to replace those old systems with a healthier way of living so I've done all of these control code exercises. They're really just exercises and assessments. And I've done them all in my own journey of releasing control and giving it over to God. If you were to have a definition for control code, it's a system of ideas and rules and behaviors that we have set up for ourselves in order to keep our lives in order. And so to crack it, we take a brutally honest assessment of our lives, and I have this done chapter by chapter, step by step, and also just taking moments to reflect on where we fall in what I call the control code continuum. And it helps you look at your behaviors, and how you're feeling, and what's going on in your life and lets you know if you're in a place of healthy state of control or unhealthy or really need counseling or that kind of help. And so these kind of exercises crack the control code, and the goal here is to become more spiritually mature. We can't function as if our spiritual maturing is sort of programmed in. We wouldn't leave our jobs to chance, our finances unplanned, we wouldn't just let our kids just do whatever. That's not our style for the people picking up this book, but oftentimes we have no strategy for what it really looks like to follow hard after Jesus and to be a disciple of him. And what happens is we have all these plates spinning the air, and the one plate that keeps dropping is our relationship with Jesus. So I feel like in cracking the control code we can be more of the women that God created us to be.

Cheri

I love it. I love it. Well, you asked the question, "How did we get here?" And "here" is running on empty, feeling overcommitted, believing that it's all up to me...so how did those of us...hear that, Amy? Us. Who are control freaks, how did we get here? And my real question is, am I, just as I have secretly feared, just a self-centered, narcissist?

Jennifer

That's such a good question. And I think it's just the reason that a lot of us don't want to self-identify as a control freak or having control issues, because we all know those dominating personalities in our life, who have been a self-centered narcissist for real. The kind of controllers who try to dominate people and sort of pass it off as caring. So this book isn't really for them. They need a whole another kind of book, right? But who we are really is operating out of a place of either love or fear, crazy enough they're opposites, but they are both key motivators in what we're doing. We love our people so much, whether that's our customers or our kids or our spouses, so we want to do what we can to fix things, to make things right and to manage outcomes. And we do it out of love. We think this is helping. And then we are also operating at the same time out of fear because we're afraid of what will happen if we don't. In both cases, of course, we end up thinking it's all on us. And it's like saying, "I know more than

God what is good for my life, and what is good for the people I love. Besides, I'm doing this out of love, so its gotta be good, right?" I think it's important to take a minute to step back and look at our motives, and to not beat ourselves up. Because there's a lot of good that comes out of that same place, but we just gotta figure out where that line is that we cross over. We get into our shadow side. So we need achievers. Cheri and I have talked about this before. I even quote her in the bible study portion of my book about how we need people who are kind of control freaks in operating rooms. And Cheri, tell your listeners what you said. I don't know if you remember this. You said, "Records need to be coded correctly."

Cheri

I used to work in a clinical lab in a hospital and surgeons do need that checklist to make sure they don't leave something inside of a patient.

Jennifer

Right? And so what you had told me is the problem is when I apply that same level of control to getting the right notes at karaoke...and I thought that was so brilliant. And that's the line, right? Is figuring out what that is. When does it really matter? When does our controlling cross the line into unhealthy behaviors? But I really took a lot of the time in the book, and I take a lot of time when I'm talking to women for them to not be too hard on themselves about this. Underneath a lot of this is a lot of love.

Amy

And I love that you're saying don't be so hard on yourself. But in the book you dive head first into some hard questions that we have to ask ourselves. So unpack this one for us: Have I accidentally made myself into a little savior for those I love?

Jennifer

Right. So after we treat ourselves gently, we finally gotta get into the hard questions. I think what that means to me is that we often think we know more than God what is good for our lives. One of the most convicting verses to me that I underlined years ago in my bible comes from the first chapter of John. People are asking John the Baptist in that chapter who he is, and he continually tells them who he's not. That's the first thing he does. Here's who I'm not. They're, like, are you Elijah? He said, "No, I'm not." Are you a prophet? No I'm not. And the thing that really gets me is he says, "I am not the Christ." And for me it's become sort of a mantra. I want that to be true in my life that I would let Christ be Christ. I am not the Christ. I think we're all gonna get to heaven some day and find out that God actually knew what he was doing. And he didn't need our help or advice.

Cheri

When you put it that way.

Amy

That's awesome. A quote from the book you said, "Our robust inner control freaks will feel the internal pressure to say yes, because we don't want to disappoint anyone. We don't want to be

called lazy.” Oh my gracious! So what advice do you have for our listeners and me who are saying...she’s talking about me right now!?

Jennifer

Oh I’ve got so many great things to say. And I actually want to invite you and your listeners into something I call the *Busy to Best Challenge*. It’s a challenge that women nationwide are taking with me starting next week, September 24. And we will be dealing with that issue exactly. During that challenge we’re going to be spending a lot of time talking about why our plates are so full. And why when people ask us how are you? Our answer is habitually I’m crazy busy. And we’ll really dig at the motivations underneath that. But even if you never take the challenge I would offer you a bit of advice, and I have lots of steps in the book that deal with that. But the biggest piece of advice that I think I have for people in that situation is to face this fact: you will disappoint people. You will learn to say no. You will learn to get some things off your plate. And you will disappoint people, because people have counted on you again and again. And I think the great comfort I have, as I’ve begun to disappoint people more often, is to know that even Jesus disappointed people. There’s a story in Mark. He took off from Simon’s house, and he’s out praying, and Simon and some people come after him and they’re like, “Everybody’s looking for you.” And I feel that way a lot of times. Everybody’s looking for you. But Jesus doesn’t go back to that village and meet all of those peoples’ needs that day. He went somewhere else that God called him to. And there’s not doubt that he disappointed people that day. We know that Jesus disappointed religious leaders because of who he chose to spend time with. We know that he disappointed people when he was late for a funeral. Lazarus was sick. They called for him. He didn’t get there in time...but yet he did. Jesus being late is like right on time. We are going to be in this state of disappointing people when we start to make changes in our lives, but there’s a different kind of freedom that comes in knowing that we’re doing what God has called us to do. We are leaving the village where some people want us to be, because God is calling us to do work somewhere else. I think maybe a step that somebody could take if they’re looking for a practical way to do that is to make a list of what your core boundaries are. Where do you draw the line? Maybe an example of a core boundary is I will only serve on one committee a year. So that when somebody asks you, “Hey, you would be perfect for this committee.” You wouldn’t say, “Oh, I can’t this time.” You would say, “I don’t. I don’t this time.” It has a lot more authority and resolution. I don’t serve on more than one committee a year, end of story. And you may disappoint people, but you’ve set core boundaries to live a healthier life.

Amy

That is really powerful. So Jennifer you’ve identified 3 categories of people who want to keep things under control: the *drivers*, the *devoters*, and the *darlings*. So tell us about each one of those and make sure you tell us which one we should be.

Jennifer

Probably the truth is, at some time or another, we’ve been all three. So they’re all just wonderful types. Just like any personality type, they all have their benefits. And they also all have their drawbacks and sort of a shadow side. The *drivers* are very decisive people. They’re confident, efficient, maintained, external order, the things around them. And so, we love

drivers in our lives, because in the event of an apocalypse, they're the ones with stocked cellars and two years worth of bottled water down there. They have everything in their purse that you could say, "You got a Tide Stick?" Yeah, I've got one. But she's got a shadow side, too, and that shadow side is a workaholic with unrealistic goals, maybe high expectations on everyone else, the kind of high expectations that she has for herself. So that's the driver. Then there's the *devoter*. Devoters are really energized by a genuine concern and love for the people around her. You probably would describe her as caring and generous, and we love this woman because she is the one who will drive us to the airport at four or five a.m. They just want to be there for us. But she's got a shadow side, too, and she really struggles with constantly thinking that she has to be the helper and not the helped. And then we have the *darlings*, and the drivers and devoters, are more motivated by external control. I would say that the darlings are more motivated by internal control. If she wants to control anything, it's going to be herself. She wants to be the best version of herself. She's someone who is probably good at a lot of things. She pursues her goals, very involved in self-improvement, but her shadow side: perfectionist, people pleaser. If people say to you so often, you are so hard on yourself, there's a good chance that you're a darling. So those are the 3 types. And I do have a little quiz. It's a fun quiz. It's not like this big expensive, psychologically researched quiz. But it's a fun quiz on my website.

Cheri

Alright, we will take the quiz between this week and next week, because Amy Carroll and I know our Disney princesses. That's how much we love a good quiz.

<Laughter>

Jennifer

Excellent!

Cheri

Oh, this is so good Jennifer. In your final chapter you say I learned that I wasn't a woman to be fixed, and this is such good news for those of us who have ever felt like we we're just plain defective. So if we're not women who need to be fixed, then what are we?

Jennifer

I think we're women who need to see that the gifts that we have can be rechanneled. I think the worst thing that could happen is if someone read this book, and they just throw their hands in the air and say fine, "I'm done." I'm done doing all these things. That's just not fair to God's creative genius in you. We are not called to shrink. We are called to shine. So my goal with this was to help women to let go of the things that they were not supposed to hang on to and to hang on to the things that they are with great strength, with God's strength within them, and to have this ability, finally, once and for all to tell the difference. I don't want capable people to stop being capable. We need capable people to make sure that there aren't surgical instruments left inside human bodies. We need people in those operating rooms to control all the bleeding. We need achievers running podcasts like you're doing, to write books, to be teachers, to be CEOs and CFOs. We need strong women. But I think what I want to do with this

book, and what I want to do with this message is to help women figure out what happens where we're under stress and our shadow side emerges. How we can end up hurting ourselves and hurting the people around us and not letting them grow into the people God created them to be. And also just figuring out how to get reconnected to that source, and how to partner with God and not calling all the shots, but being a partner with what God is already doing. That's what I want, and that's what I hope my readers will encounter as well.

Amy

So as we wrap up, Jennifer, what closing words of encouragement do you have for us and for our listeners?

Jennifer

You know, I think that somebody might be tempted to say, "Well, Jennifer is really saying to just, "Let go and let God." But I really think that is bad advice. Because the truth is, and I hope this is an encouragement because, "Let go and let God" is actually unreasonable sometimes. We can't leave it all behind. We can't just say forget it, and throw our hands up in the air and spend the rest of our lives on a lake on a floaty. We actually have work to do. And I think sometimes, "Let go and let God" is this cop-out that just lets us off the hook so we don't have to deal with hard things. God is gonna ask you to let go of some things that are really hard to let go of, but you know what else He's gonna do? He's gonna ask you to hang on tighter than ever before, and I hope that He will show us the difference in our daily lives. And I would leave listeners with Hebrews 12:1, and I feel like it gives us a really clear picture of what that looks like. It says, "Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God set before us." Let us strip off every weight that slows us down whether that's our sin, our pride, our false sense of control, our need for approval, our badge of busyness, our belief that it's all in our hands. And THEN when we let go of all that stuff, then we can rise up with endurance to run the race God has set before us. It doesn't mean we run off the track. It doesn't mean we stop running. It means we run the race, with perseverance, that God has set before us.

Cheri

Head on over to gritnegracegirls.com/episode119.

Amy

There you'll find this week's transcript, the digging deeper download, our bible verse art, and directions on how to enter to win this week's giveaway of *It's All Under Control*.

Cheri

Come join our Facebook page and group, where we'll continue this discussion of *It's All Under Control*. Just go to Facebook and search for Grit-n-Grace Girls.

Amy

Join us next week when we'll be processing together what we learned from Jennifer.

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 and Cheri

Break it!

Outtakes

Amy

I think it must be your Internet though Cheri, because you still look pixilated.

Cheri

Really? That's so strange because I look all right to me, and you look pretty good but...that doesn't mean...I mean as far as pixilation. You look lovely!

<Laughter>

Amy

You look all right.