

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #124: Moving out of Your Comfort Zone (and Loving It!)

Cheri

Let's talk about our comfort zones, our equivalent of Susy's butt-shaped indentation on her couch.

Amy

Loved that. I thought about this. I thought, wow, I've been living a lot in my comfort zone this week. Here's the truth. If I could just do anything I wanted to, it would mostly involve spray paint. Spray paint is my jam. I have been spray-painting things all week. I would like to spray paint things and plant flowers. Oh, and Wal-Mart greeter seriously is my dream job. Check-in, checkout, and smile at people all day. I'm not even being facetious at all. That would be my comfort zone.

Cheri

What have you been spray painting? I'm picturing graffiti on walls, and I'm worrying about you.

Amy

Oh, no. I've been repurposing old white fixtures. I've been spray-painting everything that doesn't move in my house gold. I'm in this gold phase.

Cheri

You're being creative. Very cool!

Amy

Yeah.

Cheri

Creativity is your comfort zone.

Amy

Well, I don't know about that but yes, spray paint, for sure.

Cheri

I love it!

Amy

What's your comfort zone, Cheri?

Cheri

Well, I've come to a very disturbing realization. I'm keeping this time log of everything I'm doing, even the little nitty-gritty things and why. I've discovered that my comfort zone is distraction. Seriously, if people would pay me to go off on rabbit trails, I'd be like a zillionaire, because this is clearly what makes me feel good. Set myself a trajectory and then immediately get distracted. That makes me feel fabulous, and it's a very seriously problem.

Amy

What does that look like in everyday life? We want to know.

Cheri

What it means is I was supposed to get a certain amount of writing done this morning, and instead, I went into a Facebook group and I solved people's problems for them. I felt really successful and then when I went to have to log it, I'm like, "I just did 45 minutes doing something that is completely not on my list, that was completely a one-off." Really, it was just for the quick high of going, "Yes, I succeeded for somebody else today." Yeah, I still have my thousand words to write.

Amy

Oh, I totally get that especially when it comes to writing.

<Laughter>

Cheri

Well, this is Cheri Gregory.

Amy

And I'm Amy Carroll.

Cheri

And you're listening to Grit-n-Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules, the podcast that equips you to lose who you're not, love who you are, and live your one life well.

Amy

Today we're processing what we learned from our interview with Susy Flory author of *So Long, Status Quo*.

Cheri

One of the questions that we asked in our conversation with Susy ... didn't you just love Susy.

Amy

Oh, my goodness. I'm so jealous of you getting out to hang out with her in everyday life.

Cheri

It's so much fun to be able to introduce you to my favorite people and vice-versa. I've gotten to meet some of yours so that's very cool. I have a bone to pick with her because when we asked about the people she's worked with, and their relationship to perfectionism, there was just this part of me that really wanted her to say that all the people that she's worked with all these amazing celebrities and successful people, that they were ultimate perfectionists and that following the rules was the way to be successful, and she didn't. Now, I'm mad at her.

Amy

They probably shouldn't be surprised that wasn't the answer.

Cheri

Yeah, I guess not. I guess not. I'm just past my 6-year anniversary from when I started really consciously breaking up with perfect as you put it, making the break from perfectionism. One of the hardest things was realizing how very wrong I had been for so very long.

I think the technical term is sunk cost bias. I had poured so much time and energy into trying to be perfect, and I was like, "Isn't there a way to rescue some of it? Is there a refund policy? Can I get my energy back at least? Can I take some perfectionism and transfer it to grace?" It's like, "No, It doesn't work that way." I kept thinking that there would be some payoff, and there really wasn't. That part felt pretty lousy. I think I had just spent so many years feeling perfectionism was like this cute, quirky little pet, and then you find out actually it's a rabid dog that needs to be taken out and shot.

Amy

Wow, that is a vivid picture and so true. I have thought in my life about perfectionism like water torture that it was this slow drip that killed my soul, drip by drip by drip. I think the reason, we've talked about this, that we didn't recognize at the beginning is that it was actually profitable at the beginning. It's the kind of thing that gets you some pats on the back and wins some accolades at the beginning, and so that feels good and so you amp it up a little, and then you amp it up a little. After a while, you just realize you've totally lost yourself. I'm with you; rabid dog has to be put down.

Cheri

You bring up a good point, because what it is. It's those short-term external rewards that keep us from seeing the long-term internal damage.

Amy

Yes. I saw this progression. That it was these wrong beliefs that I had that were strengthened or reinforced by those external rewards. Then, that led to some mixed motives in all of it and that led to more damaging actions until the thing that just finally stopped me in my tracks was the damage to my relationships. Those were the things that I really did value. It was the damage to those relationships that started opening my eyes to the rabid dog.

Cheri

I don't think I've heard the last of the rabid dog analogy.

Amy

Oh, I love that. You have not.

Cheri

All right, well, she said something I just thought was fabulous. She said we need to start noticing a need around us, and it may even be something annoying. Talk about how you're experiencing this right now in your life.

Amy

Oh, my gracious. Well, you're speaking into this so powerfully in my life that I'm feeling a huge shift in what I'm supposed to be focusing on in ministry, which is completely terrifying, can I just say? Anyway, the thing that's annoying me that has brought this to my attention is Facebook, and the interactions on Facebook between my friends that are especially in the political realm, left-leaning and right-leaning to the extreme where they're both just spewing the language of whatever side they're on.

I loved it when [Lucretia] said, "I've been waiting to repeat this." She sees the left and the right politically as different wings on the same bird. It's true. That's the thing that's annoying me, and what it's moving me to want to do is not to tell people what to think about these issues, but I do feel God like has been teaching me. I want to help other people start to think how to think about issues, that we look at scripture, and we use that as the filter and the lens for the issues that we're looking at.

What's annoying you and getting under your skin, Cheri?

Cheri

Well, I just need to pause and say first of all, what you just said not only resonates with me, but it sounds like something God's been preparing you to do all along because you are very biblically grounded. That you've been doing for years, but moving from the telling people what versus teaching people how, that's a little bit of a shift for action Amy.

Amy

That might be a huge shift, because I always thought that it was my job. Truth is pre-eminent. Well, no, actually scripture says, "Love is pre-eminent." I don't want to tell people where they should land. I think Christians can legitimately land on different sides of issues. I really do. I don't want to tell you what to think, but what I want to start telling my people, my tribe is instead of spewing rhetoric, let's look at what the bible says about how to think about this issue.

Cheri

I love it. I am excited about this journey. I was just so taken aback by the whole idea of annoyance being a way to tell an area that God might want us to take action. I just never heard

of it like that before. To me, I hate being annoyed. I want to just swat people who annoy me. That really got me thinking, and I realize that looking back at my life, I have always been sensitive to issues related to being a highly sensitive person, even way before I knew that HSP was a term.

For example, in the classroom, I know many teachers who will call out a question and then they'll call on a student to put them on the spot and to keep everybody on the edge of their seat. I can't do that. I've never had the Popsicle stick jar with everybody's name to call out a question and then quickly pull up their name. I know how badly I freeze when I'm put under that kind of pressure.

Now, I'm not calling out anybody who does that. That works for teachers who are comfortable and who can create an environment where that works. For me to do that would be so disingenuous, because I'm so uncomfortable with it, I would make everybody else uncomfortable. I just know that some students do thrive under pressure. I found different ways to allow those students to shine without making the students who are more reflective, who need a little bit more time, who need to prepare before they present, without making them squirm or feel like they're in a really uncomfortable place.

One of the things I become so aware of is that students can't really leave the classroom. If something uncomfortable is going on, if a teacher's making them feel uncomfortable, they have to wait until the bell rings. The possibility that I could accidentally bully them to some degree or create an unsafe environment in which they feel bullied, that has just been a characteristic of my teaching for so many years.

I realize, "Oh this is something I've," and because I'm so annoyed when other people do this in a setting where they don't have to where they don't have to put somebody on the spot. Where it's just not necessary to cause them to flood with adrenaline. I look back and I'm like, "Yeah, that's been a need with my name on it for decades." I only just recently found out that it's called being an advocate for people who are highly sensitive.

Amy

I love that. Oh, I love that. Well, and again for both of us, this is a picture of what it looks like to look back and to say, "What has God been doing all along that I just haven't recognized?" That's powerful!

Cheri

It is. It is. I think we all have a need with our name of it. It's just recognizing it.

Amy

A need with my name on it, literally, one of the things I've been realizing is that God is pointing at a need in my life, and He's saying, "You need to learn how to listen better." I loved what Susy was teaching us about servant leadership and how that ties in to listening. What did you learn from her in that?

Cheri

I learned that I like talking first, that's the problem. She said that in a meeting, she has learned to let everybody else on her board speak first and then she weighs in because if she weighs in first, she may have too much influence and she may cut off the conversation. I'm the one who in class, my hand was always the first one up, if I remembered to raise my hand, 'cause I always wanted to contribute and be heard and have attention.

Amy

Yeah, I understand that.

Cheri

I want the last word, too. You know how Jesus says the first will be last; the last will be first. I want to be first-hand last.

<Laughter>

Amy

That's hilarious! Well, my situation, what I was thinking about in this boardroom situation is that I'm not a highly creative person, so what I have a hard time with is in a brainstorming situation really taking my blinders off and seeing things in a new way. A lot of times, what I had done, because I'm not fast on my feet, because I'm not highly sensitive, I will think about a problem for a really long time beforehand.

Just here's a weirdo example, but we need you to put a bathroom fan, an exhaust fan in an old house we bought. The electrician came over, and we had a tiled ceiling that was very complicated. And he was like, "I just don't know how we would do this." I said, "Well, I've been thinking about this, and here's how I think it could be done." He was like, "It could be done exactly that way. I can't believe that."

He couldn't believe it, but he just didn't know I've been thinking about it for a year or something. That's what I do in all these kinds of settings are I'll think about the problem, I'll ponder and mull and ruminate and come up with solutions. Then once I have a solution, I cannot see anything else. What I loved about what Susy proposed is that if I let other people go first and I listen to them, then maybe my solution could be a contribution, but it's not the only thing that I can see as the right way to do it.

Cheri

I love that contrast between contributions versus the solution, a contribution versus the solution.

Amy

Didn't you turn that into a sticky statement?

Cheri

I think I did. I want to disagree with you about not being creative. What is that about? Oh, my word! I do not think that means what you think it means, because you are creative. I've been hanging around you long enough.

Amy

Well, all right. I'll rub that in. I've got to go back and write down. We should come with a contribution, not the one right solution. Okay, takeaway for the day.

Cheri

I feel I should just stop talking for the rest of today. I've had a good idea. Yeah, because you know the reforming perfectionist and people pleaser, now what I want to do is ruin it by talking more about it. We're just not going to touch that in. Over and eager have shown up. You thought was good? Watch me ruin it. I'm sure none of our listeners ever talk anything to death. They have no idea what I'm talking about here.

Amy

I'm dying.

Cheri

All right. I thought it was so beautiful how Susy responded to the question about women who feel God's call to tell their story, but look around and say, "Everybody else is already doing it. What on Earth could I possibly answer?" She made two points that I just feel are so good that your experience, you have experience with the Lord that nobody else has and that your voice is unique. You and I both work with women in slightly different aspects to help them tell their stories. Talk about something that you've done, and how you've seen these principles being important.

Amy

Well, I'm a speaker coach so I work with other speakers all the time about how to tell their stories and how to effectively get their stories to connect. It's the thing I do in the world that I love the most, but I had an interesting situation where an event planner, she was familiar with my coaching and she asked me, "Could you bring those principles to our women about how to tell their stories in their everyday life?"

I got to thinking about that. I thought, "Yes, I could." I developed this retreat to help women learn to tell their stories. Well, the second time I had the chance to do this was particularly powerful. I taught through the session on how to use these different principles to tell your story, to lead people to Jesus in your everyday life. And then we had time, and so I said, "Hey, jot down five sentences to be able to tell your story in five minutes, and do it at your table." I just threw it out there and the truth was Cheri, I just had extra time I didn't know what to do with so I threw it back out there to them.

They did this and they began to tell their stories. Cheri, I've never seen anything like it. The Holy Spirit showed up. There were women. I'm watching them. I have zero expectations, right? Just zero, 'cause I'm just doing this on the fly. I'm watching as women begin to cry over each other's stories. They started to lay hands on each other and pray for each other over their stories. I was like, "Oh, my gosh."

Even I, the girl who loves stories almost as much as life itself, underestimated the power of a story, an individual story. It was incredible to watch. I know you help writers do the same thing.

Cheri

Yes, but I'm going to pause and point out that instead of telling them what to do, you taught them how to do it. Then you turn them loose to do it. I just want to say that's confirmation.

Amy

Thank you. Rubbing it in. Rubbing it in.

Cheri

Yes, I do work with writers. What I find is so much fun is when somebody has come, and they're afraid to go into some of the specifics of their story. They just go general, their life was hard or they'll say something like, "I didn't have the greatest childhood." I'm like, "Okay I don't need to know all the details, but that tells me absolutely nothing."

What I try to help them do is find just a few carefully chosen specifics of their story that will help them connect with their reader and often just something as simple as saying, "They share this really personal part of their story, but then they say something like, "You may not have had this exact thing happen to you, but I'm guessing that you know what it's like to feel afraid or embarrassed or ashamed or whatever the emotion might be." Just that little pivot point of taking it from those specifics that God has led them to share, and then pivoting it and shifting the focus on to their reader, or in your case, the listener makes all the difference in the world.

I find that women who have been afraid to tell their story, because they're afraid it's going to be all about them and they really want to glorify God and give Him the credit because He's the one who transformed their life. Just finding that way to pivot and realize, "Oh, we share our stories not to talk about ourselves, but to connect with our listeners or our readers so that then we can help them connect their story, that same emotional point in their story to God's transforming grace." That makes a huge, huge difference. It's always encouraging to me when I hear someone like Susy, who I consider so successful, saying that she also feels discouraged when she looks at other people thinking she can never be like them because I of course look at Susy and think, "Well, I'll never be like her." Obviously, this is a never-ending cycle. I loved her point that I can do what God has given me to do, the task right in front of me. How is that playing out in your life?

Amy

Well, there are two huge things in my life right now that I feel are too big for me. One is you and I are writing a book together. It's so exciting. Hey, we're making such amazing progress and listen; I made no secret of the fact that I consider myself a reluctant writer. Writing is the thing that's harder for me. Usually I haven't loved it but Cheri, I have loved this process with you. I think it's because ... so there's two things. It's been broken into smaller pieces. We have a manuscript development team. We alternate weeks. I have a chapter due every two weeks. It has just kept me on track in a way that has been so good. I think that when we have a big thing like that, we should break it into smaller parts. That's the way I feel about this whole racial reconciliation thing that God is doing in my life, like oh, my gosh, that's too huge for me. He's just saying, "Just take one step at a time, Amy. Just one step."

It's the breaking it into small parts, but Cheri, it's the collaboration too. It's the doing it with a friend that makes something big so much better.

Cheri

This sounds like a really good solution to my distractibility problem, because of course I'm distracting myself because the thing I should be doing feels too big and too hard. The other thing I have noticed recently is that when I'm busy doing what God has put in front of me to do, when I'm actually doing it, when I'm not allowing myself to be so distracted, I end up forgetting about other people.

I don't have time to compare. What I'm starting to recognize is when I feel myself comparing, I need to recognize that's a signal that I've gotten off track, that I've gotten distracted, and that really, I don't need to start fretting and worrying about, "Oh my goodness. How do I compare? How do I not compare?" I just need to get back on track. I need to just get back to what it is God called me to do, because when I do, then I'm focused and I'm moving forward and I'm feeling good about it. It never fails. It's the getting off track that then causes a distraction and the comparison to spiral out of control, but sticking with what God's put in front of me, I end up feeling good about what I'm doing. I end up satisfied.

Amy

So good! Well, it turns out that there's this great but very familiar scripture that ties this all up with a very beautiful bow and helps us to break out of the status quo and the butt-shaped imprint on the couch. It's Philippians 4:13 it says, "For I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength." I think we're all familiar with that verse, but it is an empowering verse.

Cheri

Absolutely. What's the bad rule for these two episodes?

Amy

I'm too small for big things. I think when we focus on ourselves, that's what keeps us stuck, right? When we say, "I can do everything through Christ," that's the focus on Christ and that helps us to get jolted out of that status quo.

Cheri

The bad rule is I'm too small for big things. What's the truth? What's the fact we can focus on instead?

Amy

I'm empowered by our big God, which puts the focus right where it should be.

Cheri

I love it. I love it. What do you see is the grit in all of this?

Amy

Well, for me, always, anything I'm trying to do, I have to overcome my fear of failure or looking incompetent. I just hate that so much. It's residual, the residual effects of the mad dog. It is the rabid dog.

Cheri

I knew that dog was going to come back to bite me.

Amy

That's one of the things that have made me so afraid about this change in my ministry, because I realized that in this new phase that I will only be leading by one step or maybe half a step ahead. That terrifies me because that leaves so much more room for mistakes and failure than what I have been doing. And yet, I need to focus on God. What grace do you need Cheri to break out of the status quo?

Cheri

Wow. Well, listening to you, I see the grit of needing to do that, but I also see that you are stepping forward, and we can step forward into a place of grace where we know we're going to make more mistakes. And thus we're going to need more grace, and we're going to need more forgiveness because we're not going to be the expert. We're not going to be the know-it-all. You're not going to be 25 steps ahead.

That's going to require grit and it's going to put us, you, me, and all of us in a place of being very close and constantly in need of grace. Constantly, not once in a while, not for the monthly mistake, but for the very large possibility of minute by minute. Because when you're learning and growing and trying something new, you're not going to do it perfectly, and that's okay because it's not about you. It's all about God, and what He's doing through you.

Cheri

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode124.

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 *So Long Status Quo*.

Cheri

Grit 'n' Grace is expanding because of the generosity of our growth partners. You can learn more at www.patreon.com/gritngracegirls. We would love have you join our team.

Amy

Join us next week when we'll be talking to Paula Brown Stafford and Lisa Grimes, authors of *Remember Who You Are*.

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!