

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode 56: More Than My Project – How to Love Your Neighbors WholeHeartedly

Cheri

Okay I'm going to turn my phone off. How's that? I'm going to focus. Look at that. I don't have to be available to everybody. *So there!*

Amy

I left my phone in the car when we went to the ballpark last night. 'Cause I can't...I definitely have an addiction. I cannot *not* look unless it's not there.

Cheri

Yeah, let's not do an episode on that topic.

Amy

No.

Cheri

I don't want my toes stomped on that badly.

Amy

Although I am fascinated by the brain science of what our phones are doing to our ... what's happening to our brains...I mean I'm convicted by it. I just watched a *Sixty Minutes* thing about - its called "brain-hacking." And it was experts in the industry that are designing things and talking about how they hack our brains. It was disturbing.

Cheri

Mmmhmm. I went to a Learning and the Brain Conference a few years ago, and here's all these scientists excitedly talking about watching the evolution of the human brain taking place in just ten years. And they were talking about our kids as if they were lab rats. There was no conscience; there was no moral sense of responsibility. It was "Look what we've done! Look what we can do! Look what we get to observe!" And I'm like, "Observe?!?"

Amy

It's scary.

Cheri

Well, let's dive in and talk about our episode with Amy, with the *other* Amy.

Amy

Yes.

Cheri

We had a two-Amy episode. You can never have too much of a good thing.

Amy

Indeed.

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."

Amy

Today, we're reflecting on what we learned from our conversation with Amy Lively, author of *How to Love Your Neighbor Without Being Weird*.

Cheri

Well, she definitely stomped on my toes.

Amy

Mine, too. But Amy is one of those people who always pushes me forward in the best direction.

Cheri

You know, one of the things I was thinking as I was listening to her talk about not turning our neighbors into a "project" was many, many years ago at a completely different church; we kind of took this approach.

I think we were really well-intentioned, but we were in these small groups. And we were supposed to move from this small group out into the community, and so we decided to do this big Thanksgiving dinner for the "needy" in our community. Now none of us had ever met any of these "needy" people. We hadn't really interacted with them at all. And so we set up this amazing Thanksgiving dinner, and we were all there ready to serve and basically nobody showed up.

And, at first, it was kind of disappointing and once I got home I realized it was actually a big relief to me 'cause I just wanted to check it off my list. I didn't really care so much if people came and ate and had a good time and felt like they had entered into community with us. I just wanted to kind of feel good about having done my good deed. And I went to bed that night,

and I slept perfectly fine.

So listening to Amy talk about it, I was feeling really, really guilty about that. How about you? Any experiences of "project-tizing" people?

Amy

Oh, absolutely. One of the things I mentioned, and I asked Amy about, was about our neighbors and going to the neighborhood parties.

When I first moved into our neighborhood...I literally am the old lady in our neighborhood. Like every family was younger than ours. And so, it was just a parade of strollers walking by on the sidewalk in front of my house every day. And I was so delighted by this, and I was like, "I am going to *meet* my neighbors, and I am gonna *love* my neighbors, and I'm *gonna be* like the mentor mom in the neighborhood." I was psyched...

Cheri

It's always so fun to imagine on day 1, isn't it?

Amy

It really was. But what happened was, is that we got invited to some parties. It was a very social group in our neighborhood. And these parties were hair-raising, Cheri. I just don't even know how to describe it. Otherwise, it was... I was, like, "*Wow, this is still college.*" You know, it was a lot of drinking, and the thing that really bothered me was a lot of flirting started happening between spouses who weren't married to each other by the end of the evening. And I was like, "Yeah, I'm out!" Like, "This is not cute babies in strollers anymore!"

Cheri

Of course, it doesn't take a lot to raise the hair on a Good Girl, but what you're describing is disturbing.

Amy

Yes. That's true. I never fit into that scene in any way, shape, or form. As a friend of mine said, "I wasn't even a good teenager when I was a teenager." Like, I was that person. You know, the goodie-goodie that stood on the edge and gave everybody the hairy eyeball.

[Laughter]

Cheri

So, what happened?

Amy

Well, I just, we stopped accepting invitations and guess what? We stopped *getting* invitations. And it was like I just didn't know what to do with it or how to handle it. Amy's suggestion was so good, and I thought, you know, carry your water into the party in a glass, nobody really

knows or cares, but also leave early. Like, if things start getting crazy at the end, stay for a little bit, talk to people, love on people, and then leave before it gets ... insane.

You know one of our interns wrote us a note about this. Here's what Kelsee said, she said, "I can vividly remember being a freshman at IU, literally known around the country for its party scene, and hiding in my dorm room every Friday night afraid to come in contact with the girls prepping for a night of partying and avoiding eye contact with them Saturday morning, because I didn't know how I was supposed to interact with them and realized years later what an opportunity I missed to love them."

Oh... I so resonated with that. That started with me in college, and I brought it into my neighborhood.

Cheri

Well, what I heard you say is you didn't know how to handle it. By any chance, did you not know how to handle it perfectly?

Amy

Oh! Perfectly? Could that be?

Cheri

I mean, 'cause what were those suggestions? Those suggestions were small ways to do it a little differently, you know? Carry your water. Leave early. It's so easy to look for the perfect, huge, redemptive, heroic, rescuer, savior answer when it sounds like what you needed was a few practical ideas on how to do it a little bit at a time and learn from your experience, maybe?

Amy

Yes. This is the truth.

Well...and here's the other thing...I've talked about my pictures of perfect that live in my head, so here's my picture of perfect:

These cute little girls — these young women — walking by with their baby strollers ... they bring their darling babies to my house, and we sip tea together and chat about spiritual things. That's my picture of perfect!

Not the party where everybody's starting to stumble around and flirt with your husband! That is my M.O. and has been my M.O. When things get messy, I'm out. And what Amy is saying is look, this is messy, I mean this is messy ministry.

Cheri

Just yesterday I was standing at the kitchen sink thinking to myself, "How is it that I've gotten to age 50 and I am still so intolerant and still so shocked and surprised by people who are different from me? And why is it that I still have such a narrow code of conduct that I'm comfortable with?"

And I wish as a child that I had been exposed — and so now I'm kind of reparenting myself to expose myself — to all sorts of people and experiences so that I can be ... I was going to say inclusive — which is kind of a politically correct term ... I think the Biblical word is simply loving.

And the fact that I am so easily anxious, and I tense up so quickly. It's not other people's fault that they have that impact on me that I react to them like that... I just... it hit me yesterday that I still have so much to learn. That's really the bottom line.

Amy

Several years ago I heard a sermon by Clayton King, who is just such a powerhouse here locally. But he was talking about Jesus and the woman at the well. And he said, "Jesus knew that he could sit beside the woman at the well, and her sin would not rub off on him." And then he challenged us, "Do you know that you can sit beside sinners and their sin won't rub off on you? Their sin does not contaminate you." And I just thought, "*WOAH, what a powerful, powerful thing to say.*"

With Christ in us, somebody else's sin does not rub off on us. We don't have to worry about that. But then, I think my secondary reason, though, all of that makes me so uncomfortable is what will my church friends say if they know I'm associating with "those" people, in quotation marks.

So it's about not understanding the power of God in me, but then I also think it's also about approval. *Again...* that approval thing.

Cheri

Well, and you know, Amy made the point that, yes, it's great for us to be in our little protected sheltered groups. But then we need to go out. And it reminded me also of a sermon I heard quite a few years ago in which the pastor talked about John 1:14 which says "So the Word became human and made his home among us." And he said the word for "made his home" is actually the same word as *tabernacle* ... He said that "Jesus moved into the 'hood. And he pitched his tent among us."

And so, even the word *tabernacle* or *sanctuary*...it's the same word for *holy sanctuary*... when God said, "let the people of Israel build me a sanctuary" it's the same word for tabernacle, that our churches shouldn't be separate. That our sanctuaries shouldn't be these places that we retreat to, we hide to, we run away to, when we're uncomfortable *or* the places we hang out in feeling good about ourselves and feeling all clean and everything out there is messy. God didn't make that distinction in scripture, and Christ didn't live it that way.

Amy

That's beautiful, and that goes along with if we extend that ... that He came and tabernacled with us...Ephesians 1 says that we're indwelt with the Holy Spirit; WE are actually the tabernacle or the temple of God now. Anywhere we go, the presence of God goes.

When Anson, my oldest, went to college we had a lot of conversations about this, 'cause I had been learning and growing and trying to stretch myself in this area for a while. And I said to him some of my regrets in college was that I didn't go and try out for the choir, because it wasn't a church thing. And I wanted to try out for the fencing team. I'm a totally klutz; I would not have made it, but I should've tried out!

Cheri

How cool would that have been?

Amy

I know. I took fencing as my PE in college, and I loved it but I should have tried out. And I didn't do any of those because they weren't "church activities." And so, I said to Anson, "Look the light is in you. Take the light with you. Go to intramural soccer and take the light with you. Go to your music rehearsals and take the light with you."

Now, two years later, he transferred and we had a second conversation, because I said, "You did really well at taking the light with you, and I'm so proud."

Anson's my child who just really inspires me of how he just loves people so well and has friendships of all different walks of life and still walks faithfully with the Lord. But he had not built a strong faith network, and his faith was suffering because of it. It made me really think *I need both*. I need to take the light with me into these secular settings, into my neighborhood, into places where unchurched people are, and I also need to have a strong faith network. So it's not one or the other.

Cheri

No, that's a great distinction.

We also talked about kind of the general tone of the country after the election, and Amy made such a great point that listening is one of the primary ways of showing love. And she reminded me of some of the research done by John Gottman — he talks about the four horsemen of the apocalypse in marriage ... one of them was contempt. And he said contempt was the predictor of divorce. And it ends up being this predictor of fracture in any relationship. And very specifically he said, "Criticism is bad because it's a global condemnation of a person's character, but..." (so he's contrasting criticism with contempt) "If I speak from a superior plane, that's far more damaging, and contempt is any statement made from a higher level. Contempt is closely related to disgust and what disgust and contempt are about is completely rejecting and excluding someone." When I withdraw into perfectionism, what other people perceive is *contempt*.

Amy

Ohhhh!

Cheri

They feel rejected by me. I don't necessarily mean it. I know what's going on in my head but what they're receiving is that I'm too good for them, I'm above them, and so I'm looking down on them. And so I'm trying to be much more conscious of trying to take that deep breath and take those steps forward, and hold my water (metaphorically speaking!) and ask enough questions so that I can learn to listen better rather than running and hiding from the mess which makes other people feel ways that I don't intend for them to feel.

Amy

That is a genius point. Because you know the quote that perception is reality. It's so true. So even though you don't feel contempt, people feel it as contempt.

I have a friend ... we talked about different personalities and this reaching out to your neighbor, and just the other day she was saying that she was listening to our podcast...

Cheri

Yay!

Amy

—about friendship and our interview with Mary - I know, so sweet - she said it made her realize that she is an introvert, and a fairly extreme introvert, but we have become very good friends and she said, "I realize that my introversion, sometimes, and my lack of pursuit of people comes across as disinterest even though it's not."

And I thought *what a great insight*, and you just made an equal point. And I think, "How do our neighbors perceive us: our lack of reaching out to them; our lack of connection with them?" You know, some people, I think our culture has gotten kind of used to it. And they don't notice and they don't care. But then there are other people that probably really, really do.

Cheri

The last place we lived I could use my remote to open the garage door, pull my car in the door, use my remote to close it, and never ever actually interact with my neighbors. I could go weeks without physically seeing them all because of a remote and a car. And it takes intentionality to change that.

Amy

It does. It does. And I think about if we extend that perception thing. Especially if they see us going out every Sunday morning, a little bit more dressed up and with our Bibles in our hands, they might be making assumptions about why we don't reach out to them that aren't even true in that case, either. However, we are representing Christ in our neighborhoods, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We're the tabernacles in our neighborhoods. It's kind of...wow. We are the neighborhood church. Us. Personally.

Cheri

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Whew. That's convicting.

Amy

That pierced my heart as I said it. Whew!

Cheri

As we were talking kind of about the political atmosphere and social atmosphere, you had a particular example of a couple that you really resonated with how they did things.

Amy

Just like most of America, I'm totally in love with Chip and Joanna Gaines and *Fixer Upper* on HDTV. Cheri, do you know who they are?

Cheri

I wasn't gonna confess, I have no clue because Kathi is equally, I know!! But don't unfriend me, please. And don't tell Kathi I don't know who they are because she's writing a whole book because of Joanna Gaines. Keep going...keep going.

Amy

Well, when you come visit me we're going to have a binge-watching session. That's all I know.

Cheri

Yay!

Amy

They're so wonderful. And Chip and Joanna had been very forthcoming about their faith. *Cosmopolitan* published an article about them several months ago that was very disparaging about them and why they had not had a same-sex couple on their show and questioned their integrity, their motives. It quoted a sermon from their pastor. And it was just ugly. And, of course, the Internet blew up with people who attacked them, with people who defended them. And it was people who defended them on both sides of the aisle on the issue, which was interesting because they're just beloved. And so there was this long silence and then came a blog post from Chip. It was absolutely ... *exquisite* is the word I want to use. It was so beautiful. It was such a representation of what we should be as the body of Christ. It really never addressed the issue that they were attacked on. What it talked about was their deep love for people; their deep desire to serve people — *all* people — and they really want the love of Christ to show through them in the way they serve *everybody*, even people who don't agree with them. And that was such a picture of what Amy was talking about, which is, we are the example of Christ in our neighborhood. So what's that gonna look like, you know?

And I've said on this podcast before, when I look at Jesus I always feel a little ashamed, *not* because he shames me, but because He reached out to sinners in ways that I never have. And I'm convicted by that. I wanna change that. And I just gotta be honest: I've read Amy's book, it was one of my favorite books of the year a couple of years ago. I felt convicted, I felt motivated,

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and then I did nothing. I'm just being honest. Then we talked to her the other day, and I felt convicted, and then I did nothing. And I'm tired of doing nothing, you know? It's a place of struggle for me. It really is.

Cheri

Okay, I'm going to give you time to think ... what is one thing you can do? Not the 10-week challenge, what is **one** thing you can do differently?

I know for me, since I live on a Christian boarding school campus, my neighbors are literally all Christian. Now that doesn't mean I don't need to do a better job of listening to them and loving them, but I'll tell you what, I was convicted about listening to our interview with Amy again, and that is, my students in the hallways. They are also my neighbors, and many of them I really don't really know particularly well. I know the faculty and staff a little bit better, but I thought, especially since I only teach one class a day now. I zip in. I am focused, because I'm a driver personality. I'm a doer. I march into class we do our thing, we do it well, and then I leave, and I don't have any margin set aside for lingering.

And if there's no lingering, there's no listening. And so, one of the seemingly small, but for me, big things is going to be leaving with 10 or 15 minutes to spare. Basically, I want to be *interruptible*. I need to have some time that I can waste — and I know its not wasted time, I've got to change my frame of mind on that — but I just need to be able to look people in the eye. And, of course, it can be others than students, but I'm really gonna try to make a point to that. I mean there's certain kids who line the hallways as I'm going [to class] ... I don't even know their names.

Doesn't it start with knowing peoples' names, maybe?

Amy

I think that's a really practical first step for sure. And mine is similar. As you were talking, I thought, I have started walking more consistently in my neighborhood and I...

Cheri

Woohoo! Go, Amy, go!

Amy

I know right? #FitBy50, that's my hashtag right now. But I walk with my earbuds in, because I listen to podcasts while I'm walking, which I totally love, but what I need to do is if I see someone in their yard or on the sidewalk, is, I need to rip those earbuds out and pause for a minute and say, "Hello!" And if they look like they wanna talk, I need to be ready to talk instead of just buzzing by. "Hey!" with my earbuds in, you know, podcast going full blast.

Cheri

I love it! So let's wrap this up with a metaphorical question for all of us, and that is: "What's our earbuds?"

Each of us probably has an equivalent to earbuds. The thing that's our agenda ... that's stopping our ears, that's only what we've decided to hear. So how can each of us choose one small way to pull out the earbuds and do something different to listen that allows us to listen and express love to a neighbor this week?

Amy

Fantastic!

Cheri

So I think we've talked about the grit that it's going to take us to love our neighbors better than we currently are. What would you say is the *grace* piece in all of this?

Amy

Well, I thought through that and it kind of made me giggle, 'cause I thought, *I just feel so weird every time I try this*. You know Amy's book is *How to Love Your Neighbor Without Being Weird*. I always feel weird. So I think the grace is for ourselves that we're going to feel weird because it feels uncomfortable and new, but we just have to push past that. And if we do it with a heart of love, I think that's what's communicated to people, not weirdness.

Cheri

So grace, knowing that feeling weird means we're growing. Something us perfectionists always need to remember. It's not wrong; it's growth. It's not failure; it's growth.

Amy

Yes!

Cheri

Alright, you came up with a great bad rule for these episodes. Tell us about it.

Amy

The bad rule is, "It's enough for me to know and love God," and that's a bad rule because it's only the first of the two commandments that Jesus gives us.

Cheri

So what's the flip side? What the fact to focus on instead?

Amy

"God wants my neighbors to know and love Him, too."

Cheri

Head over to GritNGraceGirls.com/episode56.

Amy

Episode 56: More Than My Project – How to Love Your Neighbors Whole-Heartedly

You'll find links to this week's Digging Deeper Download, Bible verse art [coloring page], and transcript.

Cheri

If you've enjoyed Episode #56 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules, would you share it with your friends? You'll find super easy 'share' buttons on the web page for every single episode.

Amy

Be sure to join us next week, when we'll be talking with Mary DeMuth, author of *Worth Living: How God's Wild Love for You Makes You Worthy*.

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 'n' Cheri

BREAK IT!

Outtake

Cheri

Yeah ... well ... and you know, just, just yesterday I was sitting at the ... sitting?!? Yesterday, I was standing at the kitchen think, think ... <giggles> ... let's try that again! Yesterday, I was standing at the kitchen think ...

[Laughing]

Amy

Wow!

Cheri

YESTERDAY...!!! <more giggles> Yesterday ...