

***Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules***  
Episode #03: How to Enjoy God's Greatest Gift to Its Fullest

Amy: Interviewing Jennifer, I felt like, was listening to somebody who shares my brain. I have been like this crazy stalker girl of her ever since. She's going to be so sad that I ever got her phone number.

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Cheri: Hey, this is Cheri Gregory, and you're listening to Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. This week, my delightful co-host Amy Carroll and I got a chance to talk with Jennifer Duke Lee, author of *Love Idol: Letting Go of Your Need for Approval and Seeing Yourself Through God's Eyes*. We started our conversation by asking her about the title.

Cheri:

What is it that you mean by "Love Idol"?

Jennifer:

I know it's so crazy to think that love could be an idol. Paul tells us that that's God's greatest gift to us: love. That's really the trick of the enemy, though. He takes God's greatest gifts to us and twists them in a way that they become idols.

We know that anything can become an idol, right? Any relationship, we can make food an idol, sex, money, our work ... all these things that were intended to be in right relationship that can glorify God in our lives and on earth, in the enemy's hands, are twisted and turned in a way that we can't see Jesus. When the enemy twists love, it's done in a way where we want the love and approval of people over the love and approval of God. We can, in essence, worship other people that we would do anything to be liked, to be loved. We see it in our culture. We see it on social media.

In my own life, I have wanted the love and approval of people in my work. I have been very performance-driven in my career, previously, as a news reporter. Even, really, as a child, I have had this in me to want to be loved so much, even though I had so much love from the Father. I had so much love from my parents. I knew how good it felt to be approved and to do well, and it tasted good, and I wanted more. I began to do more and more things to earn the love and approval of people. It gets a person caught up in the same kind of cycle as with any other idol. It blocks our view of the love of Jesus, the love that we already have in God through Jesus Christ.

Amy:

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That is so interesting. You sound so much like me when you talk about that this started as a little girl, despite the fact that you had loving parents. I had loving parents. They didn't demand performance from me. What do you think the root is of that desire, that craving for approval, and thinking we have to earn it?

Jennifer:

The root is a good root. God placed in us a deep desire for love, to be loved, and to share love. Because of the Fall, it's been twisted into a way that we try to get it in other ways aside from God. It's actually rooted in a really wonderful place. So if you ladies, or if any of your listeners out there are feeling, "Maybe there's something wrong with me that I want to be loved so much," it's actually a really good thing. There's something really beautiful that God has created in you, but the Enemy is trying to get in there and twist it so that you will try to get that from people instead of from the Lord. I think that it is in our wiring, in all people, regardless of how we grew up.

I know that for myself, I've thought, "I have no reason to feel this way. I was loved and cared for. I had an earthly father that showed me, in a lot of ways, what it was to be loved by a heavenly father." I know a lot of people that have huge daddy issues, and that's been the root of their approval seeking. But for me, I think that I really craved Mom and Dad's approval and my teachers' approval. I remember from a young age feeling on the outside of friendships and relationships, and I know how awful that made me feel.

There were times where I had been embarrassed by not knowing something, by being made a fool of, by being on the outside, by being uninvited. You can grow up and still feel like a 10-year-old girl on the inside. You find out that all of your friends were invited to an event that you weren't invited to. There are still cool kids' tables when you grow up and you're an adult.

I think it's coming into right relationship with that wiring that we have to receive the love of the Lord and to share it in healthy ways with other people. When we understand that our approval comes from God, it changes how we will try to receive, or not receive, the approval from people. It's a matter of getting the vertical love and approval really fixed right in our hearts so that we can be in a right relationship with our love and approval with the people around us. And how we love them, and how they love us back, and the kind of approval that we give each other. It's not bad to want people's approval, it's just when it is out of line and over-weighting what God has already given to us.

Cheri:

I appreciate how you were so honest in the book. You specifically said that you liked people more than God, and craved fulfillment from people more than fulfillment from God. I'm not sure I've ever read a book in which I sat up and went, "Oh, she said it. She actually said those words ..." well, you wrote them out loud. It really resonated with me,

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because I don't know that I had felt like I could actually admit to that. You put that early on in the book, and then — in my case, I kept on reading because you'd hooked me because you'd described my experience so clearly — then you went on to describe your experience of learning how to live pre-approved.

Jennifer:

There's a little story behind that word, pre-approved. What's the first thing that we all think of when we hear the word pre-approved before we started talking about this today?

Cheri & Amy:

The credit card offer.

Jennifer:

The credit card offer. It was so funny. We live out in the country, and we have a mailbox at the end of the country lane. It's quite a ways down there. Every day, when it's nice, I walk to the mailbox to get the mail. There was the usual stuff in there. I'm an Iowa farm wife, so there was Pork Producers magazine, Lillian Vernon catalog, Lands' End, bills, and a credit card offer that had told me I was pre-approved for something or another. I walked back up to the kitchen and started to sort the mail and throw some things away, and that word caught my eye: pre-approved.

At this point, I was very much in the middle of writing that book about approval, and I thought, "That is it right there. This one word." We are pre-approved. Before God even made the earth, He decided in advance to love me. While we were yet sinners, He decided then to die for us. I went to the Scriptures that day, and I found evidence on nearly every page of scripture showing a premeditated love and approval for His people, a premeditated love and approval for me, not by what I thought I could do to earn it from Him or from people. It just was. I thought how often I treat that good news ... that's actually underlined in my Bible ... how often I treat it like the junk mail, like a credit card offer, to be dumped into the garbage and not really appreciated for what it was.

I began to look at scripture, then, through the lens of being pre-approved. In every day, even now, because this is an idol I have to lay down every day. I ask the Lord to remind me who I already am, to take away the pressure of having to try to be someone that I wish that I could be.

Cheri:

What does it look like, and what does that sound like — and I'm just thinking in the everyday ordinarys of life — to live pre-approved?

Jennifer:

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For me, living pre-approved moment by moment begins every day in my quiet time with the Lord, asking Him to "tell me, once again, who I am to you," like the lyrics of that song. It begins always in scripture, and in those verses that have been underlined since I was a child, asking God to reframe them for me, to personalize them for me, that His love and approval for me is premeditated.

In fact, I have little printables that I have on most of the mirrors of the house that say pre-approved. When I am getting ready in the morning, I am seeing that I am pre-approved. I have one sitting on my scale. When I stand on my bathroom scale, it says pre-approved. When I walk out the door, there's one by the front door that says preapproved. I have one by my computer that says, "Jennifer, you're pre-approved." I might not get the approval I want on a Facebook post, or a blog post, or some article that I've written for a devotional somewhere, but I have to know that I have been pre-approved for a purpose by God, and He has called me into something. It helps me to keep my eyes fixed on Him and His approval instead of the scorecards of the world. Those are some of the practical things I do to try to live pre-approved, and the story behind how that word came to be.

Amy:

That is such an amazing, beautiful truth said in such a modern way. We all have gotten those letters in the mail. Let me ask you, Jennifer, how does that knowledge or that reminder that you're pre-approved by God change the way you interact with other people?

Jennifer:

Because I know I have the approval of God, I don't have to work for the approval of people. It takes away all of the things that we want to do to try to impress or fit in. It helps me to see other people who feel like I do, who have felt those insecurities. It helps me to reach out to other women in a way that says, "I see you where you are; you have nothing to prove to me."

It reminds me that God says I am pre-approved ... Jennifer is pre-approved. But you know what? So is Cheri, and so is Amy, and so is that person at church that kind of annoys me when she never brings stuff to the potluck that she's supposed to bring, or who doesn't show up on time. The same grace that is extended to me in my brokenness is extended to every other woman, too. It changes how I am in relationship with them, and how I am in relationship with my children. My husband's pre-approved. It just changes the expectations that I have on myself, but also the expectations that I have on other people. It helps me to live a more grace-filled life toward myself and my own performances and a more grace-filled life ... I pray to the good Lord above that it does ... toward other people in my life.

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Cheri: In Episodes #01 and #02, Amy and I shared with you where the main title of this podcast came from: "Grit 'n' Grace." For the next couple of weeks, we'd like to unpack the subtitle: "Good Girls Breaking Bad rules." And today, Amy's going to talk with you about what we mean by "good girls."

Amy:

I think when we're pursuing perfection that it comes in two different forms. It's funny because I had seen it as very black and white. Women are either one or the other. I've realized that I swing between the two. There's the good girl list. That list is the things that we think, all the things that we think that we have to do or say to gain approval. It's a follow the rules kind of thing. Then there's the woman who also has the façade of perfection but she holds the never good enough list. That's the list of all the things she has in her past that cause shame ... sometimes women who hold the never good enough list got it handed to them by someone else, a parent who said, "You'll never amount to anything," that belittled them.

Recently a friend pointed out to me that sometimes our culture hands us the never good enough list.... That never good enough list is all the reasons that we think that we can never earn God's love.

What I realized is that I swing between the two. It was my best friend, Josie, who pointed this out that that's even possible. In the realm of accomplishments, of achievement, of work, I tend to be the good girl. I have that list and I think if I work the list that absolutely I'll gain approval. Then, in the realm of the social, of friendships, of relationships, I swing towards never good enough. I have that little girl feeling that I'm never going to fit into this group.

I think it's the same façade, it's the perfection. But the good girls, they're trying to create the façade by work. And the never good enough girls, they're pretty sure they're never going to be able to measure up, but goodness knows they're going to die trying.

Cheri:

The particular bad rule that Amy and I are hoping that this episode will help you break is the rule that goes like this: "You must be all things to all people." One of the things I find especially diabolical about trying to be all things to all people is that when we're young we can actually pull it off because we don't know that many people.

Amy:

We're not so tired as we are now at almost 50.

Cheri:

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Exactly. We get good at being all things to all people. Then we start adding on relationships and adding on things we can do. At some point we realize, "Hang on! I can't do it all!" We were never meant to do it all, and we were never meant to make everybody happy. I know I've read in a variety of places that if we actually connect well with 20% of the people that we come in contact with, that's pretty good.

Amy:  
That's a low bar!

Cheri:  
Of course, you and I are pulling out our paper bags going <hyperventillating>, "What do you mean? 80% of the world is going to hate us?"

No, they're not going to be a great match for us.

Amy:  
That's so great. One of the jobs I've had in my background, I've had a smorgasbord, but I was the Welcome Wagon lady for our community. I would joke that I was paid to be perky, which is sort of my natural disposition anyway. Every once in a while I'd come home so crestfallen. Barry would go, "What's wrong?" I was like, "She did not appreciate my perkiness." That was devastating. She was an 80%.

Cheri:  
I can totally see that!

I'm such an approval junkie that even now Annemarie, my daughter, is 25 — when we go shopping together, we'll pay for something with a credit card and I'll grab the receipt. I'll go, "Look, look," and I'll point to the word "approved" at the bottom. I'm like, "They approved of me again."

She'll be like, "Mom, you are such a dork."

It's like, "Sorry, I'm just recognizing a basic need!" For my particular personality, the sanguine or expressive personality, approval is such a core need.

Whatever your personality may be, we hope the message you are hearing loud and clear from this episode is that "You are pre-approved by God!" And if you'll come on over to the web page for this particular episode of Grit 'n' Grace, you'll find a variety of resources that we hope you'll find valuable.

First of all, you'll find a link to the downloadable cut-outs that Jennifer mentioned that say "Pre-Approved" that you can cut out, and you can even color them and put them around various places in your house. We're doing a give-away of her book *Love Idol*.

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There'll be a transcript of this entire show. And then we also have a link to a personality assessment, if you'd like to know a bit more about what your particular God-given personality may be.

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You've been listening to Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Next week, my delightful co-host Amy Carroll and I will be back, talking about what we learned from Jennifer Dukes Lee and how we've been applying it in our everyday lives.

For today, grow your grit ... embrace God's grace ... and when you run across a bad rule, you know what to do: Go ahead and break it!