

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode #04: The Astounding Shift of Living Pre-Approved

Amy: So many times when friends tell me stories like that, though, I'm like, "I wish I could go find that woman and tell her off for Cheri." That was so incredibly rude!

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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 are just kind of kicking back and talking about what we learned from our time with Jennifer Dukes Lee last week, talking about her book *Love Idol*.

To kick off the conversation, Amy is sharing one of her top "ah-ha!" moments.

Amy: When she talked about this idea of being pre-approved it just really hit my heart in such a profound way. Later in the day I knew that I was having this really difficult conversation coming up. As a matter of fact, I've had an inordinate amount of conflict in my life in the last month or so.

Cheri: Of course, conflict is your favorite thing, right?

Amy: Oh, right, because my favorite thing is a lack of messy. When things get messy, my usual thing is to run away and to hide and kinda quietly back out. But God is really challenging me to have the hard conversations so that the relationships are strengthened instead.

I had this conversation scheduled, and I was not looking forward to it. Most of us don't look forward to hard conversations. But this idea of being pre-approved ... I was immediately able to apply it because I went into the conversation knowing that I'm pre-approved which gave me this peace and this confidence that what I was saying wasn't illegitimate. It wasn't just whining because it was a situation where I felt like I wasn't being cared for and that I felt that I was being treated like I didn't matter. So I had started to feel like I didn't matter. So it changed my feeling about myself going in.

The other thing that surprised me is that it so changed my feeling about the person I was talking to also. I had, truthfully, been really kind of mad at this person. I'm not a person who's going to write a nasty email necessarily. But I had thought the mean things in my head. It was a reminder going in that this person on the other side of the conflict,

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that his heart is as tender as mine and that he is pre-approved by God and loved by God as much as I am pre-approved by God and loved by God. As such, I need to treat him the way that Jesus would treat him. It was just so helpful on every level, especially for me in the case of conflict.

Cheri: You didn't go in feeling needy. You didn't go in trying to get your approval needs met by this person ... I know for me I go into these things. I'm like, "Okay, if I can just help them understand, then they'll turn around and be on my side." I walk out and they never understand; they're never on my side. The neediness I went into that conversation with has only grown because I have such an agenda for this other person. So it sounds like you went into that conversation with realistic expectations.

Amy: Part of what it did was it made me think through what do I want the end of this to be? What would be success for me? A friend of mine really helped me work through it before I went into the conversation. She talked about Brené Brown, who I'm sure we'll talk about in the future, too — she talks and writes about perfectionism — Brené talks about the stories that we create in our heads.

That's how I approached this person as I said, "Hey, here are the events that happened. Here is the story in my head. I feel uncared for. I feel like I don't matter. But I do want to say that I understand that that might not be a correct perception."

The beauty of what happened in the conversation is that he was able to correct my perception to some degree. Some of it was justified, and some of it was not. I tell you, feeling pre-approved, knowing I as pre-approved, allowed me to take that step toward the hard conversation. If I had never had the conversation, I would never have known that some of the things that I believed were true were not actually true. It was just, again, it was God proving to me that I can trust Him, that my mistrust of other people is not always founded and that the hard conversations are worth it. Knowing that I'm preapproved will help me in the future have the hard conversations and also have them faster because I had put this off for long enough that my negative feelings had grown out of proportion.

Cheri: Those of us who are the people-pleasing type, we avoid the conflict because we don't want anything to go wrong. We want to "keep the peace" in the relationship which, of course, there isn't real peace but we tell ourselves that our discomfort is better than what we imagine might happen, whether it's a blow-up or an argument or whatever.

Amy: Right.

Cheri: The problem with those stories we tell ourselves — and this is going to be true especially for those of us who are Highly Sensitive People — is our brains respond to them as if they're true.

Our brains don't know the difference between imagination and reality, often. We start telling ourselves that a person is uncaring, and so we start responding to them — literally, our brains start firing as if they're an uncaring, hostile, dangerous person when they may not even be aware that that's what we're thinking about them. We then end up with a relationship that's spiraling down and we tell ourselves, "See, I knew it. If it's this bad without actually having the hard conversation, imagine how much worse it's going to get if I even try to handle the conflict!" Whereas the truth is what you discovered.

Even if ... I think it's so beautiful that you had the positive outcome that he was able to and willing to correct the stories that you were telling yourself. Sometimes that doesn't happen. Sometimes the other person is going to say, "Nope, you're right. Those stories are all true. I really don't like you." Or they just listen and they don't say anything else." Going into that conversation pre-approved, we don't need their input to be affirming or correcting or whatever. We can get that need met by God rather than constantly going to the other person to have that need met.

Amy: That's so good. I think about how many relationships in my past four decades or almost five that I have walked away from, because exactly what you said that I believed the story was true. Now I think maybe sometimes it was and maybe sometimes it wasn't.

This is a person I treasure so much, and I know he treasures me. I am thankful to have had the conversation so we can go forward in our friendship. The weird thing is it actually strengthens the friendship. These conversations, I always perceived them as negative. One thing that you said is the lack of open conflict does not mean there's peace. They're not equivalent, but I've always made them equivalent in my head. I'm thankful I'm learning and growing.

Cheri: Why do you think this strengthens the relationship?

Amy: When we have the hard conversations when we walk through the hard places and we come through on the other side together, they're stronger.

Cheri: It sounds like there's an increase of trust. You've added something onto the history that you have together so you can count on each other more because of this. I'm thinking of my husband who is downstairs lifting weights ... the more that he pushes his muscles, they may feel weak afterward because he's literally breaking down the fibers of his muscles, temporarily, but then they rebuild and they're stronger. My old approach

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of, "Let's never try anything. Let's just pretend everything's fine" led to very weak trust muscles, I guess you could say, in my relationships. My relationships were really kind of weak and flabby. They felt comfortable but couch potato comfortable, I guess.

Amy: That's a great insight.

Cheri: Rather than having the strength to actually move and do the heavy lifting. That's what you guys did. You did some heavy lifting together in your relationship.

Amy: You made a good point. That doesn't always happen. The more that I learn and grow, the more I'm starting to be an advocate of laying our cards on the table, not in a hateful way, not in a yelling, screaming way, but, "Hey, I'm going to say all I have to say. I invite you to say all you have to say. And then, let's work through this together."

Cheri: I've had people ask me, "Well if I already know the hard conversation is going to be somewhat painful to me, and I already know how the other person's going to respond..." — and sometimes I think they really do, they've been together long enough — "...Why even bother?" Here's the answer I have, and you've just illustrated it. If we do our part it changes who we are. It makes us stronger. If we, at least, attempt the heavy lifting, our relational muscles are going to strengthen even if the other person doesn't reciprocate.

I'm now really focusing far less on the other person's response, which used to be everything to me — "I need the response. I'll dance. I'll sing," anything necessary to get the response from the other person.

Now I'm much more what is it that's going to build my integrity, that's going to keep me who I believe God has created me to be and continue growing me into that person regardless of how the other person responds, certainly with bounds of civility and politeness and healthy relationship. My focus has shifted from needing a certain response from the other person to literally needing to do what it is I'm feeling God calling me to do in the relationship, regardless of the outcome. And that's kind of a freeing place to be at.

I'm not saying it always feels great. If the conversation goes badly I'm still going to pull out my two best friends, Ben and Jerry, and probably cry over a few episodes of Gilmore Girls. But it's not going to devastate me the way that it used to.

Amy: Really for me what I decided one of my okay outcomes was is that I had done everything that I could do to maintain the relationship. And that, even if everything had gone south, that wouldn't have felt good but I would have been able to walk away with peace knowing I did my part. That's all we can do, really. We can't control that other person.

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Cheri: That's a really good place to be at.

Amy: One of the things that Jennifer said that was so eye-opening is, "An idol is anything that keeps us from seeing Jesus" and she said, "it keeps us from seeing the love of Jesus."

Where did we get this idea that to get people's love or get God's love and approval that we have to do everything to make them happy? This isn't the way the world works and it's not, even that is a deception to believe that we have to work to do it or we have to do everything we can to make them happy to get love and approval. It's crazy.

Cheri: Probably for the perfectionist part of it, it almost seems too good to be true that we already have what we need and that we don't have to hustle and go working for it.

The other thing that Jennifer said that I so appreciated, she said we can enjoy approval and affirmation from others without having to crave it. It's that tipping point into craving where it becomes unhealthy. For me, that was so important because I tend to be all or nothing. When I read her book I was about ready to go, "Fine, I'm not going to get approval from anybody ever. I'm going to shut people up if they try to compliment me. I'm just going to fast from all human interaction that might be positive." She was like, "No, no, let's have some balance here."

We talk about being Jesus with skin on for other people. Other people can be his hands and feet and his voice in our lives. It's when we can receive and then, at least for me, being done. I receive it and then I don't need to keep asking for more.

I don't know if I ever told you this story. When I was newlywed, I made myself this amazing raw silk suit. I tried a new technique to do the pockets. They were rounded pockets, and I did triple topstitching on them. We went to church and I wore it. I was hoping somebody would notice. As a Sanguine/Expressive personality that's the only reason I sewed. I do not enjoy the attention to detail. The perfectionistic part in me pressed all the seams perfectly. I spent hours and hours ... obsessing, I'll use that word, obsessing over it.

We go to church and I'm hoping somebody will notice. It's welcoming time and we're supposed to turn and say something to the person near us. A woman turns around and she puts her hand on my knee. She says, "Honey, did you make that suit?"
I'm, like, Ahhh, the angels are singing. "Yes, why yes, I did."
And then ...

Amy: Uh-oh.

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Cheri: ...then I said, "How could you tell?" and then she said, "Oh, honey, my pockets always turn out that way, too."

Amy: No. Oh my heavens. It was the reverse slam.

Cheri: Oh my word ... that has become code word in our house for any time I'm fishing or pushing. Daniel will just go, "Pockets."

If I had just stopped at, "Did you make that suit?" ... "Why yes I did!" and then just moved on and talked about her, I could have received what I was perceiving as a compliment rather than pushing it to that next level. It's the inability to receive what I'm given and the need to milk the situation for just a little more, Just a little more, just a little more, that gets me in trouble at least.

Jennifer said that the Love Idol is an idol that she needs to lay down every single day. Your question was what does that look like. What do you think that looks like for you to lay down your "love idol" every day?

Amy: Well, she made an excellent point. It really starts in our time with God, that the root of all of this is knowing that we're loved by God. If we know that we're pre-approved by him, everything else changes. I just started thinking about in my everyday reactions to people. Good grief, how many times a day do we have these interactions with people and we react in a way that lets everybody know that we don't know that we're preapproved? I thought really every day we've got to take this idea of being pre-approved, being loved by God. I loved it. She used the word "premeditated" love. We have God's premeditated love for us. Take it and apply that in every little decision, every little interaction every day.

Satan would love for us to not feel loved. I think that's the thing that's constantly whispered in my ear is, "You're not really pre-approved. You are not really loved." It is a daily battle. I just love that she pointed that out. It's kind of like what we've talked about with the books that we've written is that you write a book like *Love Idol* or *The Cure for the "Perfect" Life* [revised title – *You Don't Have to Try So Hard*] or *Breaking Up With Perfect* and people think, "Oh, she wrote that book because she knew something." No, we wrote those books because we're still in process. I love that Jennifer admitted that.

Cheri: You know it just occurred to me while you were talking, she talked about the pre-approval being the thing that came in the mail that she was pre-approved for the credit card. I think what I do is I go through life and I treat people as if I'm going up to purchase something, and I'm afraid that credit card is going to be declined. I may be pre-approved for the credit card overall but I'm worried that I have this itty-bitty credit limit and I've already gone over it.

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Amy: You've overspent.

Cheri: I've overspent. I need to learn to act as if it's never going to be declined as long as I'm banking with God. (Okay, so now I've got a really, really cheesy metaphor that I have to work through...)

Amy: I love that idea because years ago I was doing a word study on the word agape. One of the definitions that I ran across said "love feast." I was, like, wow: God's love is a feast but how often do I act like He has me on a diet? That He doles things meagerly out to me like there was just a little plate of something on the table for me. That word just gave me such a visual of the abundance, of the lavishness of God's love, that it's a feast. He doesn't have us on a diet.

Cheri: I love it. That is like the best thing ever.

You know, we started this podcast hoping that maybe we could bring some hope and encouragement to you, our listeners, but let me tell you: I had a total fangirl moment there. I'm like, "Amy is brilliant and I get to listen to her!"

Well, in the last three episodes, we've been kind of breaking down the name of our podcast for you. We explained what we mean by grit, by grace ... last week we talked about good girls. This week, we'll talk about what we mean by breaking bad rules.

Amy: The things that I've been going through and the way that I've been learning from God is realizing that hiding behind these masks, which is basically why we keep these bad rules — to create a facade of something — that it actually obscures God's glory in our life. So I thought, "Who gave me the right to ever try to make myself into something that God never created me to be. Who gave me the right?" So, that was really an "aha"moment for me.

Cheri: Wow, okay, so I'm listening to you and now I'm flipping that to what I have a tendency to do, which is I try to force other people to be who I need them to be so I can then feel good about myself. So now I'm thinking, "So, who gave me the right to tell other people who they have to be? To fix and force them (which is a fancy way of saying manipulate them) into basically doing and being what will make me feel better." Again, that's the bad rules at work.

I'm at the stage on so much of this where I'm recognizing them a little faster than I used to, and I'm being able to take action on them a little bit sooner than I used to be able to. That part, at least, is really encouraging.

Amy: You know, Cheri, I'm so glad you said that, for our audience. I think that they need to know about us, that we are women still so much in process. I'm super excited about this podcast on so many levels. And one of them is that we continue to get to talk to women who are further along in their journey even than we are and learn from them, and we get to learn from our audience and each other ... it's gonna be great!

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Cheri: You've been listening to Grit 'n' Grace, with Cheri Gregory and Amy Carroll. Be sure to stop by the web page for this episode for a bunch of great resources, and to enter the drawing for this week's giveaway.

For today, grow your grit ... embrace God's grace ... and if you run across a bad rule, go ahead and break it!