

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #17: Choosing to Be Human — The Redeeming Work of Play and Grief

Amy:

Well, if you come to North Carolina, and go sailing with me ... you can see the wild ponies on the islands.

Cheri:

Are you serious?

Amy:

It's so awesome.

Cheri:

That sounds so much more fun than going on some day, where there's crowds of people...

<music>

Hey, this is Cheri Gregory, and you're listening to Grit and Grace, Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Today, my delightful co-host, Amy Carroll, and I are talking about how we've been applying what we learned from Lucille Zimmerman, author of, *Renewed*, [*Finding Your Happy in an Overwhelmed World*] about play, grieving and forgiveness.

Good morning, Amy, how are you?

Amy:

I'm doing great, how about you?

Cheri:

I'm doing good.

Amy:

Hey, I've been doing some playing. I think that's why maybe I'm doing so well.

Cheri:

Tell me about it. What have you been doing?

Amy:

So I know playing is all relative, and I started even second guessing whether my decorating bent is playing at all. And then I thought, well, I'm allowed to define it, right? I am redecorating. Now, it's bittersweet because I'm redecorating my boys'

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rooms.

Cheri:
Awww...

Amy:
I know, but they took all the furniture, I had to do something.

Cheri:
So, you have an empty room?

Amy:
Yes.

Cheri:
Okay, so hang on a second. I'm guessing this is kind of a little combination of grieving and playing because as you're ...

Amy:
It is!

Cheri:
... dealing with that room.

Amy:
You're right. You're right, like, I'm having so much fun, shopping my house, cleaning out my attic and finding all this stuff I haven't been using because I'm trying to do it on a shoestring. Frequenting thrift stores, this is another thing, I'm not sure I've talked about on the podcast, but I'm a huge thrifting fan. Anyway, it is fun to me. It is play, so I love it.

Cheri:
What I love is how you started out a little worried whether it counted as play, or not. Like there is some rule in the world that defines play for all of us. Does Amy Carroll get to decorate or not and consider that play? Is that found in the rule book?

Amy:
Exactly.

Cheri:
Good for you.

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Amy:

Is it perfect play? Thank goodness for Jennifer, who talked us out of thinking there's only one way to be happy. See? We're learning from all these people.

Cheri:

Oh, it's so true. Well, you know what I did last week that I'd been actually avoiding, and it's one of my favorite things to do in the whole wide world. I went horseback riding for the first time in a while.

Amy:

Wow.

Cheri:

I've always been a horse crazy girl. I don't know if I've ever told you, but I collected 300 model horses when I was a kid. Oh, yeah.

Amy:

Wow.

Cheri:

I had them all on glass shelves and everything, and I've read all the horse books, I took horseback riding lessons when I was little. I think of horses, and I start tearing up, in happy kind of tears. I hadn't been riding for a while because the last time I went riding, nothing went horribly wrong, but I got scared. I'll just leave it at that. I stayed scared for like 20 minutes, and that's a lot. That's a lot of anxious memory; so, I was just avoiding and avoiding.

I had a friend, who invites me to go with her, and I kept having legitimate reasons to not go. Like, I was out of town, or I was sick or whatever. She asked me last week, and I had no legitimate reason, and I started looking for reasons to not go, and I was like, "Oh, hang on a second. This is my favorite way to play, and I'm avoiding it."

Amy:

Oh yeah.

Cheri:

I think for those who are reforming perfectionists, for something that should come as naturally as play, and like you pointed out, when we were kids, we knew how to play, we can find every excuse in the book. We can find so many ways that it becomes hard or scary, or unnatural. And the good news is, I went, I had a great time. I mean, I live on a beach, I went horseback riding on the beach.

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Amy:
I'm so jealous.

Cheri:
It was gorgeous, and we went for a trot, and I didn't ... My favorite part was not falling off. You know.

[Amy laughing]

At my age, that's considered lots of fun, not falling off. That was my success story for play last week. I overcame some fear so that I could relax and just have some fun with something that's always been fun for me.

Amy:
That's terrific. Did you read, *Misty of Chincoteague*?

Cheri:
Yes, oh my word. I owned all of Marguerite Henry's books. The whole *Black Stallion* series. Actually, I wanted to go to Chincoteague.

Amy:
Of course!

Cheri:
It was on my bucket list, to go to Pony Penning day someday, because I wanted to see the horses swim the channel, and to see the auction. I went online, and I did some research, and I'm like, "Oh wow, you have to plan two to three years in advance because everything books up."
We put it on our list for, it may have actually been, next summer.
Then I did a little bit more reading, and I discovered that it's a total tourist trap. There's crowds, and you really don't get to see anything, and I was so disappointed. Then I realized, but this is what being an adult means. You find out the truth about these fantasies you had as a kid, and it's like, "Okay, I'm just going watch video on You Tube, and that will suffice."
You talked about when you were a mom of young kids, and you had a friend that you were actually jealous of because she was so good at playing with her kids and you felt like you were so bad. If you could go back to your younger self as a mom, what would you tell her about play?

Amy:

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Oh... I mean some of it is just time, right?

Cheri:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Amy:

It's how do we allocate our time? And we allocate our time to what we think is important. I allocated my time to a lot of cleaning. I would tell my younger self, "Put down the mop, for heaven's sake, and get down on the floor."

Cheri:

Cleanliness is next ...

Amy:

That's what I would say.

Cheri:

... to Godliness. How can you get down on a dirty floor? Come on, really?

Amy:

Yeah, I mean, there's a balance. I've had so many people, after reading my book, say, "Oh, so you mean we should embrace our imperfections. We should just not make the bed any more."

No, there's a balance in there somewhere. Things have to get done, but play is important, and I don't think I saw it as important.

Thankfully, my children do have happy memories. I asked my son... We rode through our hometown the other day, and we hadn't been back in a long time. He was in the car with me, so I asked him, "So, what are some of your good memories of being here?" He talked about how we used to take walks down to a little fountain that had goldfish in it, feed the goldfish, and then walk back home, and stop by this old-fashioned drug store, where we got Orangeades.

I hadn't thought about that in ages, but that just ... I mean, it popped right out of his mouth. I wasn't a total failure. I did play some, but not as much as I had wished that I did.

Cheri:

I think the point that you made, that you didn't recognize it as valuable is so important. Recognizing it is.

The other night, and this is going to be a marriage illustration ... my husband has a habit of rhyming, and I'm a punster, so rhyming drives me crazy. The later at night it gets, the more crabby I get, and the more likely I am to snap at him for his
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rhyiming. The other night, it was getting late, and we were both red, and I could just feel that he was about to start rhyiming, and I could just feel the premeditated resentment building in me. Like I was just waiting to pounce on him. I'm like, "What on Earth is this?" I'm like planning to be crabby before anything's even happened. I'm like, "What if I go ahead and start rhyiming?" I just let off a string of rhymes. Well, he was so excited. He just thought that was the best thing in the world. We had this whole rhyiming duel for like five minutes, and it turned into a pillow fight, and we just giggled. Our son, he actually stuck his head out of his door ...

Amy:
I love it.

Cheri:
He's like, "Would you two calm down in there!" It was like ... and I realized it's a choice. I have a choice to go down my typical groove of being grouchy because this thing annoys me, or I can just play. I can say, "Let's have some silly fun, and be dumb, and get a ton of laughs out of it." What I did, was I chose to value the play.

Amy:
Well, what I'm thinking of as you're talking about playing with your husband, I'm talking about playing with my kids, I just had a week in California, where I got to play with my best friend. We went and did some touring and things together. It was so much fun. We laughed, seriously ... okay, I have to confess, I laughed so hard, I really thought I might not make it to the potty.

Cheri:
Hey, I'm telling you, that's some good laughter, right there.

Amy:
It was bad. It was bad. I'm getting too old for that. Anyway, true confessions, more than anybody wanted to know, but I ... play is bonding.

Cheri:
Yeah, yeah.

Amy:
It's what you were talking about with your husband, that is a moment he is going to remember.

Cheri:
Unfortunately, you're right.

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Amy:

I had moments with my kids, thank goodness, that they remember. I'll always remember laughing behind the building in Lake Tahoe, until I was afraid I wasn't going to be able to run fast enough.

These are bonding moments, and they are so human. I think that was when we talked to Lucille, what really struck me, as we were talking about these really deep, human needs with play, grieving, and forgiveness. It was awesome.

One of the things that you brought up in the interview with Lucille was, how grief came in some unexpected ways, and you brought up jealousy. That was interesting to me. How has the grief changed and transformed over the year that your mom's been gone?

Cheri:

Boy, that's a great question. Probably the best way I can describe it, is as a softening. It was just so sharp, and I just felt so ... I felt like the main character in, "Frozen", for the first few months. Like, anything I did, shards of ice were coming out of me that could hurt others, and even that could hurt me. I just felt harsh. I was so angry.

I felt it kind of softening, almost like it's been slowly melting. I think the most important thing that the finality of her death did, is it made me realize that anything I ever wanted from her, I can't have from her.

I tried to get everything, all those emotional and nurture needs out of one fallible human woman. She could only give what she could give. So I've been much more proactive and also more receptive about seeking it from other people. Hopefully in appropriate ways.

I've also noticed that the grief has transformed into a gratitude for what I do have. Instead of looking at some of the pieces of her clothing that I kept and wincing, or quickly shoving them in the back of the closet, I'm more likely to pull them out and either try them on, or I've had some of them altered now, so I can start wearing them.

Amy:

Nice.

Cheri:

It feels good, it's like I'm putting her on. I spend my entire life trying so hard not to be her, trying not to be like her; but, of course, I turned into her in my own way because ...

Amy:

We do.

Cheri:

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We do. You know, we just do. I am much more welcoming of her in me now, and much more aware of, "Oh, that came from Mother."

She gave me, for my wedding ... one of the wedding gifts was a set of laminated recipe cards, and she had typed them on a real typewriter, on 4 x 6 cards, and then laminated them so that if you spilled anything, you could clean it off.

I used to resent the lamination. Like, "See, she couldn't handle imperfection." Now, I'm like, yeah, but they've lasted almost 30 years, and they're in great shape.

Laminating them for durability was valuable.

I'm really choosing to incorporate her, and just celebrating the little glimpses I see in my everyday life, in unexpected ways. I'm not saying it's all easy, but the gratitude is probably, now, the most surprising and welcome part.

Amy:

That is so beautiful, and it's beautiful to me to hear because I haven't lost my mother, and I dread that day. I hear such a redemption in the grieving of your whole story with your mom. That's really beautiful, Cheri.

Cheri:

When we were talking to Lucille, this whole idea that we all have a mixture of good and bad in us, really seemed to appeal to you. Elaborate a little bit on why that really struck a chord with you.

Amy:

That really has helped me in processing some hard things that came my way. One of them this year, was I got this nasty gram from a woman in response to a blog post.

Cheri:

How rude!

Amy:

I know! It was so unexpected, and it was so, so unfair. I have to tell you that I ... that it was funny because my normal response is just to be cut to the heart on things like that ...

I'm a perfectionist, and I want everybody to like me for heaven sakes!

It was tough to get. Usually those kinds of things are hard for me, but this time I actually laughed out loud, which is so not typical. I started thinking about how could I have that response, that's so different?

I think this year, that I have had to come face to face ... well really, the last couple of years ... face to face with some of the bad, ugly, dark parts of myself.

And I may have never written a nasty gram like that to somebody (or at least that I want to talk about). I may have never written that nasty gram, but goodness knows, I've thought those thoughts.

In that moment, I really felt this sense of forgiveness and grace towards her, even though she was trying to hurt me. I thought, "Wow, I've been that person." At least in my head.

It's very helpful when we start thinking about we're not just one or the other. We're not either all good or all bad. We're all a mix of both. We're sinners, at our core, scripture tells us that, and anything good comes from Jesus ...

Cheri:

Absolutely.

Amy:

... in us, and God's image in us. Just realizing that I can forgive someone else because I'm capable of that same thing.

Cheri:

Wow, so I see an awful lot of empathy there that when we're in the midst of perfectionism, we really don't have empathy because it's "my way or the highway". It's, "I'm all right, and you're all wrong.", and that mixture and recognition of yourself that you're capable of the thing the other person is doing. Wow, how deflating to perfectionism. And, to be able to laugh at it, oh my goodness!

Amy:

Yeah, that's a big step for me. Really, really big. Last year, I was asked to write a blog post about betrayal, and I had the same ... it was tough. I had the same realization of, I think I'm more able to give grace now because I'm less invested in proving my own perfection, and more aware of my need for grace. It just gives ... it does give me a greater empathy for other people. We're all in the struggle together.

Cheri:

We would love to hear from you. We're planning a special Holiday series and we want to make sure it meets your needs. If you'd head on over to the website for today's episode, you'll find a link to a short survey and full details about this week's giveaway. You'll find the webpage at cherigregory.com.

We hope you've enjoyed episode number 17 of Grit 'n' Grace, Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Tune in next week as Amy and I start our brand new series, Holiday Break -- How to Break Bad Rule and Rock Holiday Delight. For today, grow your grit. Embrace God's grace. And when you run across a bad rule? Go right on ahead and BREAK IT!!!

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