

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #22: Truly Yummy: Making Holiday Food Nourishment for the Heart

Cheri:

You know the grit for me over the holiday season is...stomaching some of the people I'm going to have to have the meal with. That's probably too honest.

Amy:

Oh...you know what, you just said what everybody else is thinking. Although I don't have personally any people like that in my life cause they might be listening!

Cheri:

Yeah, okay, so just throw me under the bus!

Hey, this is Cheri Gregory, and you're listening to Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules.

Did you know you can join the conversation on our website at GritNGrace.info? That's Grit the letter N Grace, all one word, dot info. We would love to hear from you in a comment or a voice message!

Well today, my deLIGHT-ful co-host, Amy Carroll, and I are discussing all things delicious – holiday food and cooking!

So it turns out that we have something in common: Neither of us really love being in the kitchen. And we're kind of stuck with this bad rule "You have to cook every. Holiday. Thing. We. Eat."

Amy:

Yes. Well I was surprised to hear that you don't like to cook cause I mean I see your baklava on Facebook on a regular basis, and just long to be in your kitchen. I was surprised by that. Why don't you like to cook?

Cheri:

Well that's because of my son. My son is 23 going on 24 and he's just recently over the last few years gotten into a cooking kick. But I don't like to cook because when I was growing up my mother had such a very...again, perfectionistic way of doing things in the kitchen- for her she would say it would be very systematic. You know we had to level everything off with a knife and everything was exact and precise and she didn't allow anybody else in her kitchen; It was just her and me. Which actually in retrospect was kind of a sweet time for us together. But I was so hyper-focused on doing everything perfect and doing everything right, and I didn't ever learn that the kitchen could be a place of community. And so I did exactly what she had done, which was kick people out. We would have guests over and they would ask if they could come help and she would

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be shoing them out saying, “No no no.” She didn’t want them in the kitchen with her because they might not do things right-

Amy:
Wow

Cheri:
-and my personality should have welcomed people into the kitchen. And so what I finally realized is the reason I don’t like to cook is it’s so isolating. But it’s isolating because I’ve isolated myself. So the reason I’ve started enjoying cooking more the last few years is because my son just shows and up and says “Hey mom, do you want to learn to make scones?” or “Hey mom, let’s learn to make baklava.” and I love being in the kitchen as long as there’s other people there with me.

Amy:
Ahhh. That’s really insightful. Well we have what my husband refers to as a “one butt kitchen.”
[Laughter]

So when there are two butts in there it becomes a little crowded. So we try. The idea of community in the kitchen just really, really appeals to me. I’m gonna have to try to make room for another tushie.
[Laughter]

Cheri:
I love it.

Amy:
Well mine is- I don’t mind the cooking itself. It’s all the preparation that goes in ahead of time. So it’s the finding the recipe, making the list; I especially hate going to the grocery store. Berry and I really need to figure this out because he loves to go to the grocery store.

Cheri: Wow...

Amy:
So after 26 years you would think that we would have worked out some kind of gee and haw there but we haven’t yet. But anyway we’re working on that because I do see the value of family meals. And especially now that my boys are at college and they just come home for short visits, I don’t want to rush out. I see the value of slowing down, sitting down at the table. And the table really is a place to build community.

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Cheri:

So true. One of my friends, Denise Hughes, pointed out that for those of us who are highly sensitive people, cooking is really over-stimulating. I've never thought of that, but the kitchen, when you're in the midst of doing a big meal, you have all the tasting, you have all the smells, you have all the sounds going on...I mean there's just a lot of sensory stimulation, and I realized that I tend to try to cram it all in one day- or I used to. What I'm doing a lot better at now that I'm aware that I need to be more strategic about it, is I am starting to spread it out over several days so that the grocery shopping happens several days ahead and I do the pre-chopping or you know whatever some of the pre-prep is and then I put all of that in the fridge so maybe I can actually spread it out over 3 or 4 days so that on the day that the meal is actually going to be served I'm not trying to do everything all at once.

Amy:

Yes

Cheri:

I'm not trying to do the shopping and, oh, by the way, the house cleaning and figure out what I'm gonna serve everything on or in, and what I found is as the meal is being prepared, I have to take intentional breaks to just get out of the kitchen, sit down, put my feet up, maybe listen to a song, and there's a part of me that's like, "Oh you're being lazy!!" it's like no... I'm saving the sanity of everybody in this house by making sure that I'm not working myself up into this frenzy of, "Ahhhhh, the meal!!! It has to be done perfectly on time!" But I'm just pacing. Pacing and pausing. Pacing and pausing are so important for highly sensitive people and I think they're important for all of us.

Amy:

That's fantastic. One of the things that I love in my kitchen, is my crockpot. For two reasons: It allows you to pace and pause. It also allows me to go to work when I'm at my best, which is morning. By 5 o'clock I'm done. That's just my wiring. 5 o'clock in the morning and I am up and ready to go and singing Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah. But at 5 o'clock in the evening...I don't want to do anything.

The crockpot works really well for me. We've included some recipes this week and some links to recipes and one of the recipes that I've included is a soup that is so amazing. I love it because it can be frozen. So that's another way to prepare ahead, have some pauses, pull it out of the freezer, be able to fix it later-Christmas Eve or sometime when you're not expecting a big meal but it's hearty and good.

Cheri:

Wonderful. I look forward to that one. And I'm gonna put up a recipe for my mother's rice pilaf.

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And that's a recipe that if the family lore is accurate, it comes from Turkish Armenia. So it's really authentic and it's easy to make and it's absolutely delicious. And it involves butter. So how can you go wrong with that?

Amy:
Yes.

Cheri:
Alright. One of the of the corollaries to the bad rule you have to cook everything that we eat, is that hot foods must be served hot, cold foods served cold, and the meal must start on time.
And the thing I'm slowly realizing is that the temperature of the food doesn't matter as much as the tone of the home.

Amy:
I have to really fight against that rule because...because I feel so inept in the kitchen... what that translates to is that we don't ever have anyone over.

Cheri:
Mmm

Amy:
So I have a friend that is an incredible cook. She's known for her cooking. They had invited us over three or four times. It was clearly my turn. And I love this friend and her husband. They're one of these- you know how hard it is to have a couple that you really connect with and they are one of our couple friends. It was my turn I had been hemming and hawing, didn't know what to fix, was afraid I couldn't do it as well as she did. Finally one day I was praying. I felt like God really pricked my heart about just my attitude about hospitality in general. So I texted her when I was finished with my quiet time and said "Wanna come over for pizza tonight?"

Cheri:
Good for you.

Amy:
It didn't allow me time to obsess about how clean or not clean my house was. I thought I am just gonna break the barrier here of having them into our home. It was fun, they didn't care, I didn't cook...It was the perfect evening.

Cheri:
They weren't like horribly offended? And didn't stop out of the house...saying, "We're never coming back again?"

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Amy:

No! That's what's in my head.

Cheri:

Exactly. Exactly. And, you know, one of the things I'm slowly realizing. Is I put so much time into trying to - I was gonna say please others but really the word is impress others. A number of years ago...More than a decade ago, we were staying with some family for a week, and I genuinely wanted to help with the burden of all the food but rather than think what they might like, I decided to make the best food from my family - which would be Middle Eastern food. And so, we went to the grocery store, we spent over 100 dollars on groceries, and spent the whole day making a full Middle Eastern meal. Well, this was for a family who is used to meat and potatoes. And so, you know, we put everything out on the table. Now, my husband, by this point, we had been married for 20 years - he was used to tabouli and pilaf, and cheese burek, and falafel. And so, for him all of this was normal. But for this particular family, honest to goodness, the man of the family sat down took one look and went "What is this?"

[Laughter]

Amy:

Ohhhhhh.

Cheri:

A very honest family! And, you know, we passed the food around and he let everything go by, and he got up and made himself five peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. And I was soooooo crushed. And in looking back at it, I realized he was a smart man, and I should've been grateful because I made him my favorite food and now there were leftovers! There was more for me.

But I took his rejection of my food as a rejection of me when he had done the responsible adult thing. He had made food that would keep him from being hungry that evening. And so, again, it's so easy to get all of these expectations and emotions wrapped up into something as basic as food that is supposed to keep us sustained. It's not about the food, it's not about the perfect recipe, it's not about the perfect presentation... it's about are we coming together as a community around our table? Whether it's with our family or with our friends.

Amy:

That's it. That's it. The food sustains us, the table creates the community. So, if we could simplify it down to those two basic elements, it really gets rid of the bad rule.

Cheri:

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I love it. I love it. You had a good fact for us to focus on to replace the bad rule. What was that?

Amy:

Food is just the vehicle for friendship.

Cheri:

For me, that is so mind-blowing because food has so much added baggage, for me, beyond that. You know that my background includes an eating disorder, and, of course, just all of that - that perfectionism in the kitchen and the idea that food is just a vehicle for friendship.

And to shift the focus away from whatever the angst might be - whether we feel adequate in the kitchen or whether we have battles with food personally, the focus is on the friendship.

And, when we do that, if we do bring some unhealthy baggage to the holiday table, it starts to free us, 'cause we're not focusing on the food. We're not focusing on our own skills and abilities. We're focusing on the other people, which goes a long way to break any bad rule that we might have.

Amy:

Absolutely. Well, Jesus... he is our example in all things. He's also our example here. We've been reading Matthew 11 from the message for the last few weeks, and there were two key phrases in that passage: He says, "Get away with me" is one of them. The other one is, "Keep company with me." And I'm always struck when we read the New Testament, when we read The Gospels, and read the words in red; Jesus is constantly challenging us to deeper relationship. So if we make our meals over the holidays about relationship more than about the perfection of the food, I think we'll be on track.

Cheri:

I love that. The word company, of course, I think Well company's coming, you know, we have to spiff up the house because company's coming. We have to fix this huge meal because company's coming. But if Jesus is saying, "Keep company with me," listening to you, my first thought was, "Oh, he's in the kitchen with me." We're fixing these meals together, and I don't have to feel alone or isolated. What is the difference it could be to think, But I'm not alone. I'm not isolated here. At all times I'm keeping company with Christ, and that can make a huge shift in perspective. And to realize that whoever it is that He brings around the table, whether it's family, whether it's friends, and whatever we're serving... Whether I'm slaving over the hot stove or slaving over that hot phone call to the pizza delivery guy - either way, it's about community, not some competition about whether we can fix the best food or set the best table. I mean certainly you know not to swing the other way: excellence. Those of us who are recovering perfectionists are aiming for excellence. But in terms of the permission that we're trying to offer to our

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listeners, this might be the year to pull out the beautiful china and the crystal goblets; this might be the year to pull out the paper plates.

Amy:
Yes.

Cheri:
That's not what makes the big difference either way.

Amy:
Well, even in choosing the food and choosing the recipes as you challenged me to do- which I really, seriously (when you asked me to gather the recipes) I broke into a cold sweat. But I realized I do have recipes! I do cook. And one of my favorites that I've done the last couple of years is something that I put more effort into is I really do love to bake. I just don't do it much 'cause I don't need to eat the baked goods, but at Christmas time I do some baking. One of my favorite things to make is Spritz cookies. I don't know if you've ever made them...

Cheri:
Oh I love them!

Amy:
My grandmother always made Spritz cookies, so the smell of Spritz cookies and the taste of Spritz cookies... that's Christmas time to me. But that goes back to the relationship with my grandmother that I had as a little girl. So now I've brought that to my boys, too. And look: Spritz cookies are great. You have to have a cookie press to make them, so it's a little fancy in that way... But the cookie press is like a play dough fun factory. So - it's just like that! So then you get something yummy in the end of it. So inviting your kids into the kitchen to make cookies is a terrific thing to do. It's relational, it's yummy... so you hit both of those. So I think you can choose foods that build relationships, too.

Cheri:
Ooo I like that idea. I hadn't thought of that. Choosing foods that help build relationships.
Alright, so what do you see as being the grit and the grace piece in this whole conversation?

Amy:
Well, for me the grit would be to actually do some cooking instead of just copping out and going out to eat or that kind of thing. But there is time for that, right...?

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Cheri:

...Mhhhm. Oh, absolutely.

Amy:

There is self-discipline involved in knowing okay so I need to do some cooking and actually doing it. That's the grit for me.

Cheri:

You know the grit for me over the holiday season is stomaching some of the... people...I'm gonna have to have the meal with. Well, and just realizing that smiling and nodding for an hour or two isn't gonna kill me and listening is a beautiful art, and I guess that leads straight into grace...it's realizing that we're all flawed and we're all quirky, and just like I'm having to smile and nod at somebody across the table there's people at that table who are probably having to smile and nod at me. And so, we all need to be serving up large portions of grace at our holiday tables to each other.

Amy:

Yes. Beautiful.

Cheri:

[music]

We hope that as you begin your meal planning for the upcoming holidays, that you'll remember that the focus isn't the food; the focus is what the food allows. Gathering around the table over a meal allows friendships to flourish, and memories to be made. If you head on over to the webpage for today's episode at GritNGrace.info – you'll find a number of free downloads, including some of our favorite family recipes that we're excited to share with you.

And you'll also find this week's "permission slip" to remind you that you don't HAVE to obey the bad rule that says, "You have to cook every holiday thing we eat." Instead you can focus on the truth that food is a vehicle for friendship.

We hope you enjoyed Episode 22 of Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. Join us for next week's HOLIDAY BREAK, when we'll discuss clothes, appearance, and body image during the holiday season.

For today, grow your grit...embrace God's grace...and when you run across a bad rule, by all means: BREAK IT!