

## **Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST**

*Episode #237: Why the Future of Flawed People is Brighter Than You Think*

**Cheri Gregory**

So, Amy, how do you feel about your flaws?

**Amy Carroll**

This is such a funny question because just two nights ago, Barry and Anson and I were sitting in a restaurant and I was pontificating about people's flaws, and Barry goes, "Amy, what do you think your greatest flaw is?" And I was like, "Oh, I don't want to talk about that." How do you feel about your flaws, Cheri?

**Cheri Gregory**

Yeah, I think my biggest flaw is judgementalism. And I think I'm so much better at identifying other people's flaws. But when I do become suddenly aware of a flaw that I haven't really seen before, all joking aside, it can completely derail me. I can be like, 'Oh, I am the worst of the worst of the worst.'

**Amy Carroll**

Yes, so often we can feel disqualified by them.

**Cheri Gregory**

Yeah.

So Jodie Niznik, author of *Crossroads*, assures us again that God uses very ordinary, very flawed people. Woohoo!

**Amy Carroll**

Using Esther and Jonah as Biblical examples, Jodie encourages each of us that we have a significant place, warts and all, in God's story.

**Cheri Gregory**

Well, this is Cheri Gregory –

**Amy Carroll**

– and I'm Amy Carroll –

**Cheri Gregory**

– and you're listening to Grit 'n' Grace —The Podcast that equips you to lose who you're not, love who you are, and live your one life well.

**Amy Carroll**

Today we're talking with Jodie Niznik, author of *Crossroads: A Study of Esther and Jonah for Boldly Responding to Your Call*. Jodie Niznik is the women's and adult ministries pastor at Irving Bible Church in Irving, Texas. She has served in various roles on the pastoral team at her church over the last 12 years. Her calling and passion is to equip people to take their next step in their journey with Jesus. She loves to write about and teach scriptural truths in practical and easy to understand ways.

**Cheri Gregory**

At first glance, Esther and Jonah don't have much in common. Esther is an orphan girl out of place in royal courts, who nonetheless becomes Queen and saves her beloved Jewish people.

**Amy Carroll**

Jonah is a reluctant prophet who ran as hard as he could from God. And when he finally gave in and his efforts eventually saved his enemies, he did nothing but complain.

### **Cheri Gregory**

Well, Esther and Jonah endured wildly different circumstances and had distinctly singular callings. They were both appointed by God. They were placed in a certain time and space in history.

### **Amy Carroll**

God carried them through unique experiences and gave them specific gifts. Despite their opposite attitudes of willingness, their lives are proof of the great things we can accomplish when we follow God's call.

### **Cheri Gregory**

In this nine week inductive Bible study, Jodie Niznik invites you to learn that you too are uniquely equipped and called by God for a particular assignment in a specific time and place. Now you stand at a crossroads. And the choice is yours.

### **Amy Carroll**

Will you choose to boldly respond like Esther? Or will you fight your calling like Jonah? With thoughtful questions and practical exercises, Jodi gently helps you examine your life through the lens of Scripture and take brave, bold steps forward into the life you long for.

Jodie, your new Bible study *Crossroads* examines the lives of Esther and Jonah, which seems like an unlikely pairing to us. So tell us the backstory of this study. Why did you write it? And what do you see Esther and Jonah as having in common?

### **Jodie Niznik**

Well, the reason I wrote it is honestly because the Lord just put it in my heart and mind because I was brainstorming what to write about for the women at our church. And I kept coming back to Esther and Jonah. And I was like, oh, but they're kind of shorter books. And as I kept brainstorming, I was like, oh, but wait, these are both people that have these significant callings on their lives, and they have drastically different responses to God. And so it just was very intriguing to me to look at these two people together, and to really see what can we learn from them. Because honestly, I think we respond a lot like Esther in times. And I think we respond a lot like Jonah at times. So I think we have a little bit of both of these people kind of, or their responses are kind of embedded in us. And so for me, that was really the backstory on the why behind it. They're just fascinating stories and fascinating characters and scripture. And so yeah, that's where that all came from.

### **Amy Carroll**

That's fascinating. And I love Esther and Jonah, because both of them are so clearly flawed. They give me hope.

### **Jodie Niznik**

Oh my goodness. Yes. Well, everyone in the Bible, like as you go along and you study any character in the Bible, you're like, oh, yeah, God doesn't use just perfect people. In fact, he uses very flawed people. And that gives such incredible hope to me.

### **Cheri Gregory**

Absolutely. So what makes Esther different from any other book in the Bible, and how does this absence point to one of the main themes of the book?

### **Jodie Niznik**

Yeah, so one of the things that's really interesting about the book of Esther is if you read through it, you'll notice that God is not mentioned at all in the entire book. It is the only book of scripture where His name is not mentioned. And it's really interesting. You're like, is that a mistake? What's going on? Where is God? And actually, what I think it points to is one of the main themes of the book is the providence of God. And providence is simply that God is always working in our lives. He is in the background, he is orchestrating just everything, and he is taking care of us.

And so that is one of the things I think is genius about the book of Esther, and many scholars believe is the genius of the Book of Esther, is that God is not explicitly mentioned, but He is in the background orchestrating everything, and I think, goodness, isn't that our lives as well, because we don't get it, and then God speaks to us clearly. Or, you know, we don't get these audible voices, most of us don't. And so I love that. Esther's story is, we're hunting for God, because I think that's what we have to do in our own lives too, is look for where is He? What is he doing? We have to notice. So that's one of the really interesting things about Esther's story.

### **Cheri Gregory**

He's woven throughout the fabric of the story.

### **Jodie Niznik**

Absolutely. Yeah.

### **Amy Carroll**

In one lesson, you also compare Esther to Daniel, because both of them were called before Cain while they were in captivity, but they display their faith and background really differently. So how does that apply to us today in our own calling?

### **Jodie Niznik**

Yeah, so one of the things to know about both Daniel and Esther is that they lived in a day and age where Jewish law was that they had strict dietary regulations that they lived by. And that was how they expressed their faith. That was how they honored God, both of them are pulled into these unique situations. Daniel in captivity is given food that does not adhere to the dietary laws. And so he is compelled by his conviction. And his faith says, no, I'm not going to eat that food. And then if you know, the rest of the story of Daniel, God does provide for and protect him, it actually strengthens him because of this act of faith that he does.

Esther, on the other hand, put in kind of a similar situation, also given food that does not adhere to the dietary regulations feels compelled by God and because of the journey she's on to eat this food. And then God, of course, provides for Esther and the rest of her story is that she becomes the queen of the nation. And what I love about both these stories is they have very different responses, both compelled by their faith to do something very different. Daniel says, no, I can't do that, because that's breaking the law. And Esther says, no, I must do that, because this is what God's calling me to. And so I just think that's so important for us, and so instructive for us. Because Cheri, you're called to something. Amy, you're called to something. I'm called to something, but I can't look at your life and go, oh, she made that decision. So I must have to make that same exact decision as her, because my faith may compel me to do something different.

So we have to have this deep, intimate relationship with the Lord to know how do we respond when we get into these situations. Someone may be convicted one way and somebody else may be convicted a totally different way. And so I think it's really, really important for our faith to just even see those two people doing something so different. One person, actually, we could look at Esther and be like, well, she was being immoral. She was breaking the law. And Daniel was being righteous. But no, they were both

listening to God because of their unique circumstances and what the Lord was calling them to.

### **Amy Carroll**

That's a very freeing perspective. It frees us from our own formulas, but it also frees us from judgment of other people.

### **Cheri Gregory**

So what can we learn from Esther about how to approach our own for such a time as this moments? How can we prepare for these Crossroads moments?

### **Jodie Niznik**

So one of the things that I love about Esther's story is she is advised by her kind of adopted father Mordecai, and that 'for such a time as this' passage is actually words that he speaks over her. And she's afraid in this moment – so tiny bit of backstory on Esther, she is in a situation where an edict has been given by the king and the king is this like, volatile kind of crazy guy. I mean, he makes rash decisions. And he's just not a good person. And so he has made this edict that all the Jews are to be put to death. What he doesn't know though is that his Queen Esther, his wife is a Jew. She has felt compelled to keep this part of her identity a secret from him. And her adoptive father, Mordecai is advising her you have to go before the king because otherwise we're all going to die.

And she says to him, look, I haven't been summoned to the king for 30 days now, and the law is if I go before this man, he can have me just put to death on the spot. And knowing what we know about this man, Xerxes, is that he is this volatile rash man, he could have absolutely killed her. That was a reasonable thing for her to think. And so she says, I haven't been before him, and Mordecai speaks these words over her, but who knows that you have been put in this real position for such a time as this? Who

knows that maybe this is your moment. And she gathers strength from that. She's like, yeah, you're right. And if I perish, I perish. I'm gonna go. She feels compelled by God at that point.

So what I think we can learn about this for such a time as this moment, for her it's this big, huge thing that she has to do. But I think she probably had many for such a time as this moments in her life. It's just that those words were spoken over her in this moment. I think, for us, we have many for such a time as this moments. Some of them are little, some of them are big, but there are these times where we have to step out in faith and say, okay, but who knows that I have been put here for such a time as this, that God has orchestrated these circumstances for such a time as this. It's even something that my friends and I, after studying the Book of Esther, years ago, started to use as a little bit of a shorthand in each other's life. We'd be like, well, maybe this is for such a time as this moment. And it just kind of would give you a little bit of courage to just take that next step and follow God.

### **Cheri Gregory**

You know, I've grown up hearing that phrase and thinking, well, wasn't Esther lucky to know. But she didn't know. She had no idea. We know, because we know the whole story. But in the moment, she didn't know for sure. And so the fact that she it really was a step of faith. And that phrase can give us courage.

### **Jodie Niznik**

Yeah, I think one of the things that I really love to do is slow down when I'm studying these Bible characters and think – you're right, we know the rest of the story. She had no idea when she stepped over that threshold to go before the king, she could have died. Absolutely. That was actually likely, I think, because he had actually banished his first queen. So it was likely that she would die. It was very risky.



## **Amy Carroll**

Well, patience and timing are a significant part of Esther's story. So what can we learn from Esther about God's plan for us?

## **Jodie Niznik**

Yeah, so another part of that for such a time as this story is that she goes before the king, he does put his scepter out, which is his way of kind of giving her grace that, yes, she can be in his presence. And he says, what do you want Esther? Why are you here? And in that moment, you think she'd be like, here's all the reasons and she doesn't. She just says, I want you to come to a meal. And so she invites him to a meal. And you're reading the story. You're like, what are you doing, Esther? And then he goes to this meal with her, and he's like, what do you want? Why are we here? And she's like, I want you to come back tomorrow for another meal. And you're like, what is going on? why are you doing this? And it's really interesting, because some reason she feels compelled by God, because she's fasting, she's praying, she's got the community fasting and praying with her. And so I believe God is helping her discern, wait, wait, wait.

And so she's heeding that direction from the Lord. And it's God's perfect timing. Because Xerxes actually finds out some really important information. He can't sleep one night, he's like, hey, read me the history of what's happened. And he finds out something that actually changes everything. I think that's so important for us to know because we live in this world where we're like, instant instant instant, yes. Why is this taking so long? Like I'm terrible waiting in grocery store lines. I mean, like, you know, we're like white knuckling it, like traffic, whatever it is just makes us anxious. And to think that we would have to slow down and be patient. It's actually a spiritual discipline, I think.

And I tried to practice and put patience into my life. Even literally, by choosing the longer grocery store line. I'm like, I will just do little things like that, just to try and help me slow down and be patient to cultivate this space where I can wait on God because his timing is never our timing. I mean, maybe that's not true. Maybe every like once in a blue moon it is. But I think most of the time, it is not our timing. And we're always it's either too slow or too fast. I think we mostly – it's too slow. Let's be honest. Right? We just need to have this space to be quiet, so that we can heed the spirits leading in our lives and wait for the right timing because he's working. That's the providence of God. He's always working. He's working in the background. He's orchestrating everything.

And a lot of times and we've all had this experience, we can look back and we can be like, oh, that's why I needed to – ah, I see now. And I think the older we get, maybe the more wisdom we have, knowing that He is actually faithful. And he's doing all of those things for us, and we can wait on his timing.

### **Cheri Gregory**

Well, speaking of spiritual disciplines, fasting is an activity that you suggest. What are some examples of fasting that we can do today in order to hear God's calling for us?

### **Jodie Niznik**

Yeah. So I think one of the important things about fasting to know is that it is not a way to try to earn anything from God, it is really a way for us to posture ourselves in a position of really wanting to hear from Him. So food is obviously one of the main ways that we can fast. And fasting from food is a really interesting experience because it actually creates physical longings in our bodies. And those physical longings drive us to spend time with the Lord, to sit and pray, to notice what he's doing. And so those kind of physical cues in our body help us seek Him more.

But I know for a lot of people, especially women, fasting from food can get really wonky. And so I wanted to, you know, I brainstormed, okay, what are other things we can fast from? We can fast from a specific food or a specific drink, we can fast from social media, we could fast from listening to the radio while we're driving. So we can just like choose silence, you know, unless you have a lot of little kids in the car, then it's probably not very quiet. But you could fast from shopping, you could fast from you know, buying anything that's not an essential item. So there's lots of different things you can fast from.

And all of those things, as soon as we kind of feel that desire for something – so the important thing is that we fast from something that we will actually miss. Because if we don't miss it, then it doesn't actually trigger in us this desire to pray and to seek and to turn to God in place of the desire for whatever we have, or wanting. So the point is to actually experience this craving, this longing, and then to consciously fulfill that need with God instead of the other substance or habit. And I think a lot of times, we're just comforting ourselves with things. And it does help us, I think, creating some discomfort sometimes is good for us. Because I don't know, I like to be comfortable. Man. I do not like to feel hungry, thirsty. If I want something, I want it now. You know, and so to, to purposely deny myself something for a season, it's not forever, it's for a short season, whether it's a day or a week, or it could be like during the lent season, the 40 days leading up to Easter fasting from something you know, intentionally during that season. It helps me seek God and really listen better to him.

### **Amy Carroll**

Well, so let's get to Jonah too. Unlike Esther, Jonah's calling from God was clear. God is very much seen as a main character in his book of the Bible. So how can we discern our calling from God? This is such a key question. This is the question we all want to know, Jodie.

## **Jodie Niznik**

Well, yeah, so Jonah is really fortunate in that God is very direct, like there's the audible voice of God telling Jonah, hey, you need to go do this. Jonah's response, as you will read, if you haven't read the story, Jonah's response is that he literally goes the exact opposite direction of where God tells him to go. So we don't get that kind of, I should say, it is not normative for us to get that kind of, you know, audible voice or near audible voice. I mean, I've had one experience in my life where I felt like God just like, cut through. And He was like, you need to do this. And I was just like, I'm sorry, who are you talking to? Like, it felt so clear to me. But like, that is not the normal experience.

And so how do we discern what God is leading us to, how He's calling us to follow Him? And there's a lot of different tools you can use. One tool that I introduce in the Bible study is called a daily examine. And that's just simply a tool that was created hundreds of years ago, but it's really just a space to sit down intentionally. And it's like five minutes, maybe, a day. You do it at the same time, every day in you ask yourself the same set of questions. The questions that I suggest in the book are 'When did I feel closest to God? When did I feel furthest from God? When did I notice the fruits of the Spirit in my life? When did I notice the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit in my life?' And then 'How am I going to set my intention in the next 24 hours to really seek after God?' There's lots of different examine questions that you can do. You could Google it, I'm sure, and come up with lots of different things.

But the point is to start seeing really these little signposts that point into a direction that help us go okay, I think that's the next place that I need to go. Especially these seasons where we are trying to make big decisions. Do I do this? Do I change my career? Do I step out in faith and do this bigger thing that feels a little bit scary and daunting for me? Whatever that is, this is a helpful tool to help us see how is God leading and directing us, it's just really a way to slow down and notice him. There's other ways that we can notice God's calling, I think trusted advisors, you know, men and women who love

Jesus and love us are huge in our lives when we're trying to make decisions. Going before them and saying, hey, I'm thinking about this. What do you think? And letting them speak truth back over us about oh, yeah, I can totally see that in you. Or are you really sure that's a smart move> So trusted advisors are a big thing.

Praying, like what do we sense from the Lord when we are in prayer with him? Do we sense kind of as we're laying this before Him? Do we feel like there's resistance in our soul? Do we feel like there's invitation from the Lord? You know, when we read Scripture, we're like, what scriptures are speaking to us? What is the Holy Spirit seem to be like pulling off the page and popping up to us? And then what are the circumstances around us? Like, you may be thinking about changing careers, and there's a great job all the way across the country. And yet, you're married and your husband's job is here, and your kids are here, like so some things you're like, okay, that doesn't actually make sense for me to leave my family and go take this new job. So there's some clear circumstantial things about where we are in our life with the Lord is already established in our lives, because he's not going to sometimes he does uproot things. But like, there are things He's not going to do, like, ask you to leave your family, things like that, that we know Biblically, he's not asking us to do that under normal circumstances. So those are some of the ways but it's just a lot of time and prayer and trusting. And then ultimately, it's taking a leap of faith and saying, okay, I'm going, I'm taking a step.

### **Amy Carroll**

Those are very helpful, practical questions and steps, though; Cheri and I talk a lot about living an examined life, and you've helped us to do that.

### **Cheri Gregory**

So we don't get swallowed up by a giant fish if we don't follow God's call. But how does God get our attention in other ways?

## **Jodie Niznik**

Yeah, thankfully, we do not get swallowed by a giant fish. I can't even imagine. I mean, seriously, can you imagine how terrible that must have been? Not to mention how gross it must have smelled. Anyway. So no, we don't – you know, one of the things that I think God shows us in the story of Jonah is that storms get kicked up because of Jonah's actions. So one of the things he does is he runs from God and the exact opposite direction, he boards a ship and says, take me far away. And so they start heading out and the storm kicks up, and he winds up getting thrown over because that's what they think they need to do to get the storm stopped, which it actually does stop the storm, and Jonah gets swallowed by this fish. So I think sometimes our actions kick up these storms in our lives.

But I also think, sometimes we just get caught up in storms. And those are still something that God can use to get our attention. I mean, I think about the sailors on the boat, they're just doing their job. They're just sailing along. And because Jonah has made a decision, this huge storm gets kicked up, they experience the storm exactly the same as Jonah does. It's just as scary. It's just as life threatening, but it's not because of something they did. But I do think God will use any of these storms, any of these things that seem to happen in our lives to help get our attention. I mean, I think of like COVID, right, like, I didn't do anything to bring COVID on, did you? And yet we all experienced this incredible upheaval in our lives. And God had something to teach every single one of us through that. And it was different. It was different. For every single one of us, He was knocking off some edges, asking us to trust Him in a new way to helping us put some things to death that maybe we needed to in our lives. And so that was a collective storm that we went through. But I think God was definitely wanting to get our attention through it.

## **Amy Carroll**

So Jodie, every time we do an interview, we ask our listeners for questions, and they give us the best questions. And I think you've already answered the first one, which is 'How can we take time to identify and come to know what the call is so that we can walk in it?' And you gave us those steps and questions for an examined life.

### **Cheri Gregory**

So the next question is 'When God calls, what is the next step? Some callings are for the moment and we need to act now. Some are callings for what I want to be when I grow up. So how do we know the next step if by any chance God doesn't give us the whole big plan in advance?'

### **Jodie Niznik**

Oh my gosh. Okay. So here's the truth. God almost never gives the whole plan in advance. And that's what I think is so interesting about the journey, you know, He illuminates the next step, He helps us see just where we need to go in. And actually, I think that's the grace of God. Because, like, reflect on your own life, if you knew all of the things you would go through would you do? You'd be like, Okay, I'm out. I don't really want to do that journey. Thank you. And so he just wants us to actually in obedience, keep our eyes on him and faithfully take that next shaky step. Sometimes it really does feel very scary. I mean, there are the kind of everyday callings that we have. I think those moments when we feel that like little, hey, you should do this, or go talk to your neighbor or whatever, we need to seize it.

There was a time when I was – my girls were little, they were in the backseat of the car. And we were driving down this road. And there was this older woman who had walked down to the end of her driveway, and she was struggling with her trash can. And I literally felt like I should stop and help her. In that moment I gave like 50 reasons – you know how fast your brain works when you're justifying things, I gave like 50 reasons, nope, my kids are in the car, she'll be scared, what's the strange woman doing

stopping, all of these things, and I kept driving, and I will never forget that moment. Because I feel like the Lord was like, you missed an opportunity to be a blessing. And it was so – it's just such a powerful moment in my life. I was scared I was gonna look foolish, or I was gonna scare her. But like, I needed to just stop the car. Hey, let me help you get your trash can up to the top of your street. See you later. And I'm on my way.

And maybe she would have said no. And maybe she would have thought I was weird. But I would have been obedient in that moment. Because that was this Holy Spirit moment. So I do think it's also it's it's learning to distinguish His voice from our own voice. His voice says things like stop the car and help the woman with their trash can because my voice is like, no, I got places to go, you know. So I kind of can know the difference, a little bit of the difference between our voices. The bigger callings, oh, man, those are the things where I do take space and time and really sit and try and discern, are we making the next right step for this longer journey that we're getting ready to embark on?

And you know, in those smaller callings, I also like to say to people, if it's loving, and it's generous, then take the risk and do it. What's the hurt, right? So if you feel like you have one of those moments, where the Lord's like, do something, if it's loving and generous, do it. Don't second guess it. The bigger callings, take some space to discern. And then take the next step.

### **Amy Carroll**

That's really great advice. And I have a few of those disobedience regrets too. But they do shape that next time that God's calling comes along.

So Jodie, what closing words do you have to motivate our friends who long to know and to respond to God's unique calling in their life?



**Jodie Niznik**

Yeah, you know, my favorite verse in Scripture has been my favorite verse for a long time, Ephesians 2:10. And it's that we are God's workmanship. We're his beautiful creation. And we have been created in Christ Jesus to do good work, which he prepared in advance for us to do. What I love about that verse is that he's created us, he's made us just the exact way we should be. And he created the work for us to do, I don't have to go out there and find it, all I have to do is follow him into it. That's so freeing for me. Because I have been given my life to live.

In this time and space in history, God has given me gifts, he's given me unique experiences, both good and bad. And all I am called to do is follow Him into the next thing. I'm not called to look like someone else. I'm not called to try and take on gifts that aren't mine, or a calling that's not mine. I'm called to just do the things he's asking me to do. And it looks different for every single one of us. And so I think I would just encourage people, cultivate your relationship with the Lord, He has good work prepared for you that only you can do, and He wants you to do it. And it's good work. And there is great joy even when it's hard, there is great joy in knowing that we're following him.

**Cheri Gregory**

I love, love, love how Jodie contrasted Queen Esther and Jonah. I would never have thought of pairing these two.

**Amy Carroll**

It really is counterintuitive. But it was a different look and a deeper dive than other comparisons that I've seen or other teachings about Esther or Jonah on their own.

**Cheri Gregory**

Absolutely.

So who do you identify with more, Amy? Are you a Queen Esther or are you a Jonah?

**Amy Carroll**

Hmm. Well, I'm gonna have to ponder that one. Can we talk about it in the next episode?

**Cheri Gregory**

Oh, absolutely.

**Amy Carroll**

Let's do it.

**Cheri Gregory**

Well, friends, we sure hope you've enjoyed listening to Episode 237 of Grit'N'Grace: The Podcast as much as we've enjoyed making it for you.

**Amy Carroll**

And we want to say a big thank you to Jodie Niznik, author of *Crossroads: A Study of Esther and Jonah for Boldly Responding to Your Call*, and her publisher Kriegel Publications.

**Cheri Gregory**

Check out our web page at [gritnegracethepodcast.com/episode237](http://gritnegracethepodcast.com/episode237).

**Amy Carroll**

There you'll find this week's transcript, a link to order *Crossroads: A Study of Esther and Jonah for Boldly Responding to Your Call*, and a link to Jodi's website, which has some great resources related to her books.

**Cheri Gregory**

If you've enjoyed this episode of Grit'N'Grace, would you consider leaving us a review? You'll find a super simple video showing you how at [gritnegracethepodcast.com/review](http://gritnegracethepodcast.com/review).

**Amy Carroll**

Next week, we'll be discussing what we've learned from Jodie Niznik, author of *Crossroads: A Study of Esther and Jonah for Boldly Responding to Your Call*.

**Cheri Gregory**

For today, grow your grit.

**Amy Carroll**

Embrace God's grace.

**Cheri Gregory**

And as God reveals the next step to live your one life well,

**Amy Carroll**

we'll be cheering you on!

**Both**

So **take it!**