

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST

Episode #261: Finding Women Who "Get You" When You Feel Misunderstood

Amy

Being misunderstood is the worst.

Cheri

The Worst!

Amy

If you've been in that circumstance, you're in good company, and your story isn't over.

Cheri

Mary DeMuth, author of ***The Most Misunderstood Women of the Bible***, unpacks the lessons she learned while she studied the scriptural stories of ten real-life women.

Amy

This is a conversation full of mic-drop moments that left us with tears in our eyes and jaws on the floor.

Cheri

Well, this is Cheri Gregory ...

Amy

... and I'm Amy Carroll

Cheri

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

Today we're talking with **Mary DeMuth**, author of ***The Most Misunderstood Women of the Bible: What Their Stories Teach Us About Thriving***. Mary DeMuth is an author of more than forty books, a podcaster at Pray Every Day, an artist, and a literary agent with a passion for the Lord. She and her husband, Patrick, have three adult children and reside near Dallas, Texas.

Cheri

Understanding *Isn't* Overrated.

Amy

Ask any woman—most of us know what it's like to be misheard, mischaracterized, or misrepresented by family, friends, or strangers.

Cheri

Few of us feel deeply known and understood all the time.

Amy

Worse, many of us have endured long, painful seasons of misunderstanding in which the people around us have questioned—or worse, judged—our motives and actions.

Cheri

We have asked ourselves questions, such as:

How do I correct these misperceptions?

Do I try to defend myself—or does that only make me look guilty?

How can I recover my joy even if someone believes something about me that isn't true?

Amy

This problem—and your feelings and questions about it—is nothing new. In fact, women have faced it since the dawn of time.

Cheri

In this engaging book, Mary DeMuth tells the tales of ten women in the Bible who were misunderstood in their own time and often still are—bringing to each of them a deep humanity that makes her, and her problems, more relatable to twenty-first-century you.

Amy

If you are struggling with feeling misunderstood, let these stories inspire you to grow and remind you that you are not alone.

Cheri

And remember: There is always One who understands you perfectly and stands ready to comfort, strengthen, and defend you through every situation you face!

Amy Carroll

Mary, welcome back to Grit'N'Grace!

Mary DeMuth

It's so great to be here. Thanks for having me.

Amy Carroll

We always love to have you, we want to hear the backstory of this fascinating title, *The Most Misunderstood Women of the Bible*. Tell us some of your reasons for writing this book.

Mary DeMuth

Well, like you, I have had my share of being misunderstood, and had an instance a couple of years ago, where it just really got very bad. And I remembered in the middle of the situation being assigned motives that I didn't have. And I think that's one of the most, that's one of the biggest pains that we experience as Christ followers is when someone assigns a nefarious motive where there actually really isn't one, and we're actually trying to do the best we can. And it caused me just ask a lot of questions, like what does it mean to be misunderstood? How do we navigate it well? And then that was coupled with just my desire and love of reading the Word of God, and seeing all these other women within the Word of God that also were misunderstood. And I thought, you know, let's tell their stories in a fleshed out beautiful way. And let's glean from what we can learn from them about being misunderstood and how to just live as Christian women in this world. So that's kind of the the marriage of two ideas that came together. And that's how this book was born.

Amy Carroll

Well, the title really resonates with me, I'm in Enneagram One. So anytime my motives are questioned, especially if it's not fair, it just really, that is what gets under my skin more than anything else.

Cheri Gregory

Well, and I identify with that, because as a highly sensitive person, it's one of the things that bugs me the most when people are thinking that I'm being a wimp, when actually no, my brain is interpreting those smells and sounds and sights very intensely. Different stimuli can produce different reactions in different brains. But aside from that soapbox, you have a love for storytelling. And in this book, you combine the story and Biblical context. So we are research nerds, and we would love to hear a bit about your research process and how you did this.

Mary DeMuth

You know, to be quite honest, the best research I did was simply a plain reading of Scripture. And what I found is when I was doing observation, which is just the first thing that you do when you're reading scripture, I was finding out so many interesting things

like, wow, you know, looking at the person of Eve, you know, she is there, but Adam is there with her. And he blames God, she does not, and just kind of simple, basic readings of the Scripture, there was so much insight that I gained just from that. And so I read and read and read and read. And then I would go to just normal research, and a lot of it was online, but I also had some good books as well, and just trying to get the cultural context of each story. And I also, when I'm writing those stories, I'm using the exact words of the Biblical narrative. If there's dialogue in the Biblical narrative, I'm using the exact words. And then I'm bringing in some nuance and cultural context into it. So basically, I'm writing 10 short stories about these amazing women. And then, and then there's the nonfiction part of me that is like, okay, so what what does it mean if Hagar was misunderstood, then how do we navigate it as well? What does she teach us?

Cheri Gregory

Love it.

Amy Carroll

Well, I am drawn to just your focus on scripture there. And when we asked you for a focal passage you gave us Philippians 2:12. So could you read that to us and tell us why you love this one in particular?

Mary DeMuth

Sure. So it says, "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." And of course, that's the Apostle Paul speaking to the Philippian church, and he's encouraging them to continually walk out their sanctification journey. And I think something happens to us. We can get lethargic, or we can just kind of skate along in our Christian lives. And we can continue to do the same things over and over and over again, beating our head against the wall. And really, what the Lord is calling us to is a radical reformation of the way that we're doing things and so therefore we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, meaning it is a holy act, and we are serving a holy God, and He deserves our very best. And so therefore, if we're having some negative ways that we're relating to others, or we're letting other people dictate our mood, then that can change. And that changes in community, it changes from reading the Word of God, it changes by praying, of course. But most of that happens in community. And of course, where are we most misunderstood? In community?

Cheri Gregory

Absolutely. So one of the epiphanies I've had for this year is that somebody told me it is possible to just let people be wrong about you. And I was like, "That is probably the worst idea I've ever heard in my entire life." And then I realized, well, if I actually lived that way, 90% of the drama would like completely disappears. So we are living in a culture where everybody seems to be misunderstanding everything, and everybody and a lot of it seems intentional, feels intentional. So how do you think your book will help us with this?

Mary DeMuth

Well, I think it's the book married with the Holy Spirit's work in your life. But yeah, that's a really good question. One of the things I've learned is just one of those studies from the Gottman Institute out of the University of Washington, they studied married couples, and they had these markers of even before you're married, you're interviewed, and they decide whether your marriage is gonna work or not. And they can pretty much predict it on this one thing. And that is whether you can assume positive intent of your spouse. And meaning if your spouse is late coming home from work, and you automatically jump to he's having an affair. And that's not assuming positive intent. And so I think we've lost that ability, not only in our marriages, but we've lost it in our relationships and the onset of social media has, has taken away the uncomfortableness of judgment.

And so therefore, we are easy and quick to judge and jump to that negative intent. Because we're raw ourselves, we haven't gone to the Lord to get our hearts settled and made whole before him. And we're taking offense. And if you look at the New Testament, particularly when Paul was talking about the weaker brother and the stronger brother, the weaker brother is the one that is easily offended. It's the more offendable one. And so if you find that you're being more and more and more offended, it means that you are the weaker sister or the weaker brother and that you have some growth to do.

Amy Carroll

I wish you would get off my toes, Mary. Back up, sister, back up!

Cheri Gregory

Welcome to light and fluffy with Amy and Cheri and Mary today. But no, no, this is so good. And you know that statement about losing – I don't remember exactly how you said, but losing the discomfort that comes with judgment. You're so right, when we're when we are able to judge others from behind a screen, instead of being face to face and seeing the impact that we're having or even feeling it in our bodies as we're with them. That is a profound observation that I will be thinking about.

Amy Carroll

Yeah, I think you've just given us a lot to unpack right there. So let's go back to the women. In your study, though, when you are researching and writing your book, what surprised you most about some of these women and their stories?

Mary DeMuth

Wow. So there's a lot of them. There's 10 different women. I think the one that I'm most passionate about is Bathsheba. I think we have I've heard way too many sermons – even recently, and so this is not some like something from the 40s and 50s, this is from last week, that she is some sort of hussy. And, like on her rooftop in her swimsuit, and you know just it none of that is true. And we know it just from a plain reading of Scripture. She was on her monthly cycle. She was most likely doing a mikvah which would mean she's cleansing herself from her monthly cycle, which is not romantic at all.

Any of you have had a monthly cycle know that cleansing your monthly cycle is not after beautiful and romantic.

Amy Carroll

Only a man could misinterpret that. Can we just go ahead – I'll say it, I'll say it. Okay, go ahead.

Mary DeMuth

Yes, so poor Bathsheba. She's just – and that's why we know that it's David's child, because she hadn't had relations after that moment where she was most most fertile. Anyway, she is not a part of it. I even read a book recently where it said she was and I just got really – I almost threw the book. Because I was like, No, you don't understand the difference between the dynamics. You have a king of a Realm who asks for you. You are not a U.S. woman who can say nah, brah. You have to do it. And so she had no way even if she screamed, all of his, all of his closest people who could call him on the carpet, including Uriah, were gone, he had removed himself away from any accountability of anyone that he would ever listened to. So they were all gone. All he had were people that worked for him. And no one could confront him. And of course, the only one that could eventually did, which was Nathan, which the Lord sent.

And we also – just the other thing that I saw about that story that I found was profound. And may be true, may not be true, but there is no mention that she – again, plain reading of Scripture – no mention that she and Uriah had children. And so my conjecture was that perhaps she had struggled with infertility as a lot of women in the Bible did. And so when she got pregnant, imagine, just imagine the grief and joy mixed together and then to have that child die. I would imagine if that she did have children with Uriah, they would have come over with her, and there would have been a mention of Scripture. And so she could have been thinking she was barren. And it may have been Uriah's, probably – we just don't know. It's just conjecture. But because there's no children mentioned, just think about the grief, and the pain that would have happened to her after conceiving a child and then losing it.

Amy Carroll

Oh, I felt all of that as you were talking about it.

Cheri Gregory

So you cover the stories of Eve, and Leah, Bathsheba, Mary of Magdala, Naomi, Tamar, the Proverbs 31 woman, among others. So which Biblical woman has been the most miscommunicated about?

Mary DeMuth

You know, I think it would have to go back to Eve, because there's a lot of blame laid at her feet. And I won't say that it's not her fault. Because I think humanity is equally indebted to the sins of both of them to Adam and Eve. But we do forget that Adam was with her but mute throughout the whole thing, throughout the narrative of she and the enemy of our souls. He just didn't say a thing. And when she grabbed her arm forward

to reach, he did not say "No, stop." So they were equally culpable in that, and then when she handed it to him, he ate. And then as I mentioned earlier, in our conversation, he blamed God, "that woman you gave me," and she blamed herself, and she actually blamed the serpent, the serpent who is the one who deceived me and I ate. So she took responsibility for what she did. She blamed it also on the devil made me do it, which is a common thing that we say, but it was true. He did try to deceive her, and she was fell prey to it. But she had an actual honest confession, and Adam passed the buck. And so it's just interesting to me that we, you know, blame her for all this stuff when she was just equally culpable.

Amy Carroll

So I mean, I, I listened to that. And I think, you know, that culpability or that blame, actually, of Eve has really been passed down through the generations for women. So why do you think this book is so important for where Christian women are in today's times?

Mary DeMuth

You know, I, again, I'm going to go back to that really boring refrain about plain reading of Scripture, I think also that we have glossed over these women, because they simply have not been taught from the pulpit. And so I would encourage people after reading this book, to go back to the Scripture and to say, "What else am I missing?" There are some amazing women characters, and especially if you look at Jesus in the New Testament, He's like, dignifying women left and right. He has the longest theological discussion with anyone in the New Testament, male or female, with the woman at the well. She's not one of the ones I cover, but she's amazing.

And here is this weird, beautiful dichotomy of what the God of the Bible is doing. He's highlighting these women. And we because there's been so many men interpreting scripture, we miss it. We don't hear it, we don't see it. And that's why I think this book is important because it's highlighting people who grieve, people who lose things and are in lost positions, people who are deeply and profoundly misunderstood, like Mary of Magdala. She was misunderstood by history. The Pope, an early Pope basically said she was the woman who washed Jesus feet with her hair, equating her with a prostitute which never was in the scriptural context. She was the woman who is delivered from demons. She was not the you know, the prostitute, but that has been happening as a misunderstanding for centuries, and that's why it's so important that we women read the stories with open eyes and open hearts and open minds.

Cheri Gregory

So in the most misunderstood women of the Bible, your readers can step right into the lives of so many of the women they've read about. How important was empathy – and I'm really hearing this in your voice, I'm just hearing the empathy come out. How important was that for you during the writing process>

Mary DeMuth

It was profoundly important. And any sort of storyteller has to have empathy for the person they're telling the story for. So a little tidbit about me is that when I started my writing career, I was only a novelist. And I thought I would only write novels for the rest of my career, I have now since written a lot more nonfiction and fiction, but part of it is crawling into the skin of those characters. In fact, I even had an experience in writing one of my novels where I wrote a villain based on someone in my life that I was so frustrated with. And by the end of the book, and after writing her for 380 pages, I actually had this deep empathy and love for the person I was struggling with. And so there is something to be said about walking in the shoes. And I also believe, as readers of the Word of God, we forget that these are actual human beings. These aren't archetypes. These aren't, you know, just randos that are one dimensional people on a page, these are actual human beings who had real losses. And once we have that empathy with them, then we can go on the journey with them and learn more from them.

Cheri Gregory

So do you find that that kind of empathy for them as real people translates into self compassion?

Mary DeMuth

Well, that would be my prayer. I'm really bad, just to be super honest, I'm really bad at self compassion. And it is the thing that the Lord has been poking me about in the past year where I am the biggest bully to myself. And so I am learning slowly, I'll just confess, I'm not very good at that. But I, as I have had compassion on these ladies and realize how broken they are, just like I'm broken, I realized the Lord loves them so much, so He must love me too. And I should probably be nice to Mary because she's worthy of being loved. Struggle, though.

Amy Carroll

Whoa, that made me tear up because I just did a self assessment on self compassion. And my score was very low. So I can identify and I can't wait to get your book.

Mary DeMuth

I would take that test. But I would get like a negative seven.

Amy Carroll

Oh, my gosh, it was –

Cheri Gregory

Are the two of you competing to see who would get the lowest score on a test of self compassion??

(All laugh)

Amy Carroll

So, Mary, I first engaged with you when you were writing fiction, and loved your fiction so much. And so in your telling of the stories of each of these real women, which one of them resonated the most personally with you?

Mary DeMuth

I would say probably a tie between Hagar and Phoebe. So Hagar, you know, she's the one that gives God a name. Only one in Scripture to do that. She's really the first person to actually emote in Scripture, like she really weeps. And there's a lot of things about her that are beautiful, but she feels definitely on the outcast spectrum, and unseen, unheard of, unnoticed, and yet she calls God 'the God who sees.' She named her son 'the God who hears.' And I think that's just a beautiful thing for all of us who feel kind of misunderstood and on the outskirts of life. And then with Phoebe as a Christian communicator, and as a woman, I love her so much, because in – most likely, according to most scholars, because she was named at the end of the book of Romans, she was most likely the person to bring the book of Romans to Rome.

And if you were listed in that place in a letter, it also meant that you knew the heart and the passion and the elocution of the book, really well. So you were not only to bring it but you were to perform it in the way in which the person who wrote it would have said it. And so she would have had to know Paul very well and known his inflections and known what he would have emphasized and what he would have been quiet on and, and how he would have said that whole book and I think about where would we be without the book of Romans. And as a woman who struggles with outward teaching gifts – struggles is probably the wrong word, but it is a struggle – I am constantly feeling misunderstood. Like I'm trying to be a power grabber. And you know, honestly, girls, all I want to do is just preach the gospel. For, and, and I don't care if there's men or women in that group, and they don't have to be below the age of 12, for me to be able to do that, and so that's probably controversial, and I'm probably gonna step on some toes, but I believe God has called me to declare the word of God. And so many times I have been prevented, I mostly cannot do that in the south where I live, I have to go above the Mason Dixon Line to be able to do that, or go overseas, and then I'm completely free to teach as much as I want. It's just, it's a grief that I have.

Cheri Gregory

So whose story was the most difficult to tell?

Mary DeMuth

Well, there's a bunch of Tamars in the Bible, but the Tamar that I talked about here was the one who was raped. And her story ends very badly. And I felt like her story needed to be told, because there are some people out there with trauma, that they're not seeing the end of that story, they're still in the middle of their trauma. And yet, there is hope in her story. There is this beautiful thing that happens where her brother takes her in. And then later, when he has a daughter, he gives her the same name as his sister. So there's another Tamar coming. And there's this hope that comes from that. But I also want to dignify people who are in the middle of that, you know, as the storyteller would

say, in medius, rest in the middle of the story, where you're not seeing the happy clappy ending and the health and wealth gospel is of no use to you because you're broken.

And, and so she's like the patron saint of the non health and wealth gospel, because she's just broken. And yet God loves her. And He comes in the middle of that. And there is this hint of redemption throughout her story. And so that's why she's the hardest, because I mean, a lot of us are in her place, sometimes.

Amy Carroll

This is all so good. And you've given us some tools in the book, Mary, to help us process all this. So you end each chapter of the book with truth about fully understood you, and questions for discussion. Why was it important to you to finish each chapter with a proactive set of steps?

Mary DeMuth

I felt like it was this book should be talked about. It's a book club kind of book. And so I wanted to give people the tools to not only know okay, what's so what's the silhouette of the story? So what if Hagar felt like she was alone? Well, what's the truth about me? Oh, God does see me. He does hear me. He hears my cries. That's important for me to know. But then how do I..? I don't think we really grow in isolation, we grow in community. And so having those questions for discussion with other people, I think would bring some pretty impressive insight. As we discussed it, we, my husband and I were in a small group just this last week, and someone brought up an issue that they were having. And my husband said, "Well, have you ever considered this?" And the guy just stopped, and he was like, "Oh, my gosh, I've been two years of therapy. I have never thought of this this way before." And that's the power of community.

Amy Carroll

Fantastic.

Cheri Gregory

Absolutely. Well, we're a big book club, believers. Love, love, love that you've written a book that would easily become a good, good book for that purpose. So you are a prolific writer, I think that's a good word to use here, having written over 40 books in a world of multiple forms of communication. Why do you think the written word is still so important?

Mary DeMuth

I believe it's a relationship. So when someone picks up a book, they're beginning a relationship with an author. And they're having basically a one way conversation, but it's a beautiful way to articulate theology, and story, and the Lord and all of those things. Not that all books are about Him, but in a way they all are. But it's a way to have a longer argument, a way to have a longer narrative away to in our very distracted society. I think it's it's imperative that we continue to write full length books, come what may, because yes, I hear all the stats about people with really short attention spans, but if you start reading books, and use it as a discipline in your life, it's only going to improve

your mental health that's going to improve your emotional health as well, because you'll be carried along in this beautiful story world.

Amy Carroll

Well, and as much as I love a podcast, obviously, podcasts make it sort of impossible to have those c'est la moments that were like written into the Psalms. This morning I was reading a book. And I had one of those moments that I had to sit with a sentence and let God speak further to me. And I just don't think there are any other forms other than the written form, and particularly long form that work that way. So I love that you have that emphasis.

Mary, what closing words do you have for our friends who are listening to that want to learn a better way to work through being misunderstood?

Mary DeMuth

The first thing I would say is your job is not reputation management. If it is, it's going to wear you out. God is the holder of your reputation. And sometimes you have to be like Jesus standing before his accusers and just be quiet. There's a deep connection that you have with Jesus when you do that when you exercise silence. Now, that doesn't mean that there aren't times where you speak up there. It doesn't mean that you let people bully you. But there are times in the misunderstanding journey where I've just had to say, yeah, I'm going to be misunderstood. And I'm just not going to say a word because this is part of my spiritual discipline. And it has always come back as peace to me, versus running around frantically trying to like put out all the fires that someone's gossiping about me or whatever, and trying to say, hey, I'm good. I'm good. I'm good. It's exhausting. And if I do that all the time, I will never be preoccupied with the kingdom of God. I'll only be preoccupied with building my own kingdom.

Cheri

Friends, we so appreciate you tuning in each and every week.

Amy

And we're especially grateful to **Mary DeMuth** and her publisher **Salem Books** for making this week's episode of Grit 'n' Grace possible!

Cheri

Check out this episode's webpage at <https://GritNGraceThePodcast.com/Episode261/>

There you'll find: this week's *transcript*, a link to Mary's new book, ***The Most Misunderstood Women of the Bible: What Their Stories Teach Us About Thriving***; and a link to Mary's website, which is full of amazing resources.

Amy

Be sure to join us next week when we'll be processing what we learned from our conversation with Mary DeMuth, author of ***The Most Misunderstood Women of the Bible: What Their Stories Teach Us About Thriving***

Cheri

For today, grow your grit ...

Amy

... embrace God's grace ...

Cheri

... and as God reveals the **next step** to live your ONE life well ...

Amy

... we'll be cheering you on ...

Amy 'n' Cheri:

So TAKE IT!