

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST

Episode #266: How to Handle Your Strange Season with Hope

Amy Carroll

Cheri, do you consider yourself a noticer? I mean, someone who notices other's needs and dives right in to help?

Cheri Gregory

I like to think of myself as a noticer, or does that count?

Amy Carroll

Well, maybe... Explain.

Cheri Gregory

Well, okay. So I have tended to think of myself that way, because people call me a helper. And, you know, we've talked before about being a problem preventer, and, you know, kind of seeing what other people can't see. Well, you didn't ask me if I was a meddler, did you? You asked me if I was the noticer. And while they might be related, they're not the same thing.

What I have come to understand more recently is I notice things that I already care about, and they impact me, but I can be completely oblivious, and not even picking up hints on things that aren't on my radar. And the older I get, the more realize there are needs out there that I know nothing about.

How about you?

Amy Carroll

No. I am close to completely oblivious in my natural state. I'm working on it. So I'll talk about it some more later. But I think your answer is really interesting, that we tend to notice what matters to us. That's very human.

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 processing what we learned from Rick Johnson, author of *When Grandparents Become Parents: How to Succeed at Raising your Children's Children*. Rick is a best-selling author of 12 books that have been translated into 15 languages. He has appeared on 300 radio programs and television shows around the United States and Canada, is the former co-host of a live weekly radio show, and is a frequent guest host of other local programs. He and his wife Suzanne have two adult children and one grandchild who they are currently raising.

Cheri Gregory

There's a quiet epidemic in our culture.

Amy Carroll

The fastest growing type of family unit is grandparents charged with the task of raising their children's children.

Cheri Gregory

Though there are myriad reasons for this – such as the death of one's adult child, parental drug addiction, abuse of living situations, or incarceration, to name just a few – the effects tend to be the same.

Amy Carroll

Senior citizens who are expected to spend their golden years relaxing or traveling are now seeing their dreams dashed.

Cheri Gregory

Those on limited incomes are feeling the strain and are frightened about their futures.

Amy Carroll

And the mental, spiritual, and physical exhaustion of parenting and disciplining children many decades their junior exacerbated by a technology gap is overwhelmingly real.

Cheri Gregory

And yet, through their sacrificial service, these seniors are acting as kinsmen redeemers for their grandchildren,

Amy Carroll

keeping them out of the foster care system and giving them the best shot possible for a successful life.

Cheri Gregory

In *When Grandparents Become Parents*, experienced author Rick Johnson details both the challenges and solutions these heroic seniors face.

Amy Carroll

Offering strategies and resources, including real advice from other grandparents to deal with major areas of stress,

Cheri Gregory

and incorporating humor, common sense, and practical advice along the way.

Amy Carroll

So Cheri, this is such an interesting topic and one that I haven't considered very much. So let's dive into who we are not.

Cheri Gregory

Alright. So we started out by talking about whether we're noticers and I have to admit, I did not notice this sort of thing. I think I was kind of like vaguely aware of it. So ever since our interview with Rick, I have been trying to be more aware and more of a noticer. And yes, of this particular topic, grandparents raising grandchildren, but also what other life situations have I just been – as we said – oblivious to.

And so my lose who you're not statement is 'You're not alone in the complexities of your life.' Sometimes those complexities are traumas, they may be losses, they may be disappointments, they may be regrets, they often are a combination of all of these. And I think the first thing I want to say is just to our friends who are listening, you're not the only person on the planet to experience a cascade of crud. I put something else in my notes, but I don't want to offend anybody. You're not the only person on the planet to experience a cascade of crud.

And I don't mean that to be comparative suffering. And I don't mean it dismissively in the least because each person's exact circumstances are unique to that person. So you know, if you're listening and you're in the middle of a cascade of crud, I want to say your exact circumstances are unique to you, and that's valid. And also there are others, there are many others who know what it's like for the hits to just keep on coming.

And so to me, the important thing here is, no matter what we see happening on other people's Instagrams or Facebook's, it's important to know that you're not alone. And then closely related to that is God is neither picking on you, nor has He abandoned you. This is not something I've personally struggled with. But I have people who are very near and dear to me, for whom one of the first things that they struggle with when the cascade of crud happens is "Where's God in all of this? Why has he abandoned me? Why isn't he here?" or "What did I do? What do I need to confess?"

And so I think that's a an important thing to recognize is that He's not picking on and He hasn't abandoned you. And then there's a little bit of a caveat I want to add here. And that is to anybody listening right now, if you're not in the midst of complex circumstances, then you're not off the hook. And I'm speaking to myself here, I'm preaching to the woman in the mirror. And you and I, Amy, are big Brene Brown fans. In fact, we both read *Atlas of the Heart*, and she has a definition of empathy or a way of looking at empathy that is really challenging me in all the best ways. She said, "We need to dispel the myth that empathy is 'walking in someone else's shoes.'" And then she goes on to say, "Rather than walking in your shoes, I need to learn how to listen to the story you tell about what it's like in your shoes."

– and then here's the really important part – “And believe you even when it doesn't match my experiences.”

Amy Carroll

So good, isn't it? Yeah, I love her definition. Because I think some people have described empathy in a way that means that we duplicate trauma for ourselves that we enter in so much. And what she says is that is not necessary. However, the whole believing part is so important, isn't it? Because I think so many times if someone else's story – we see this a lot in the race conversation, if someone else's story does not match our own experience, we just don't believe it's true. As if the world couldn't offer someone else something different than what it's offered us.

Cheri Gregory

Alright. So my lose who you're not statement was ‘You're not alone in the complexities of your life.’ What's yours?

Amy Carroll

Okay, so I'm gonna say mine and brace myself to say it and then explain, alright? ‘You're not a loser, when your season of life isn't like everyone else's.’ Okay, I hate the word loser. So I hate that word. It's such a harsh, terrible word. But I have felt that before. So I thought, well, I'm just gonna say it out loud.

One of the pain points that Rick really talked about that struck me was that they're retired. He and his wife, they're retired. Life doesn't only not look like what they expected and planned, but it doesn't look like their friends. And I think that's really painful. And I couldn't help but think about what they're losing, they're losing the peace of an empty nest, they're losing the freedom to set their own schedule and travel, they're losing the joy of grandchildren as grandchildren, because I look forward to that. And it's a different kind of relationship. And they're losing out on that.

Cheri Gregory

Well, isn't that the joke, the best thing about grandchildren is sending them home?

Amy Carroll

Exactly. And they never get to send them home. And they have to discipline them. And they have to be the – so there are a lot lost there. But then I'm sure they're always looking at their friends and going, “But they have that,” right?

But then I started thinking about how many other people and other seasons of life that might be experiencing something similar, the woman who's silently struggling with infertility, all her friends are having baby showers, the person who is unemployed as they watch their friends climb the corporate ladder, a student of any age, who can't afford the higher education that they want. So they're working while they're watching their friends go to school. I mean, we could go on and on and on. But maybe some of our listeners are in a season where there's a certain thing expected in that season. You're watching all your friends do it, and you are not and that is painful. And we're sorry, I mean, because it's just – I don't know what else to say. It's hard.

But then I was thinking back to a mission trip I took when I was in my 20s, and I remember one of the sayings that the leaders constantly said to us is we entered into another culture, and in some ways, if you're not living the seasons of your friends, you're living in another culture.

Cheri Gregory

That's a good analogy.

Amy Carroll

Yeah. And I would say just because it's different doesn't mean it's bad. Right? So yes, there's pain and they seasons and we, you know, you guys have heard us talk; we don't embrace toxic positivity here on Grit'N'Grace. So we're not asking you to look for the silver lining. But I think that we can always embrace some joys in the different. It's different, but not all of it is bad. And so, you know, I think if we look for the joys in our particular season, that can be helpful. Still acknowledging the pain of it. It's not one or the other. But both.

Cheri Gregory

Absolutely, yeah, I love that. Just because it's different doesn't mean it's bad. And that's – that willingness to challenge the black and white thinking can make a very real difference.

Alright, let's shift from lose who you're not to love who you are. And what I put together here is 'You are created for community, especially during the toughest of times.' And so I just have, I don't know why, but today, I decided to do outlines. So I have three points to make.

So first of all – and I want to talk directly to our friends who are listening. So if you're in complex circumstances that are very similar to Rick's, if you are actually parenting your own grandchild, or grandchildren, we're hoping that hearing his story helps you feel less alone. And if you're in a different set of complex circumstances, then find others who get it. Okay, there are support groups available, there are sometimes local – and now I know a lot of us are tired of Zoom. But sometimes it can be really a wonderful tool for connecting with people who are in a similar set of complex circumstances, who end up being that safe bubble of people who get you in ways that maybe nobody else in your immediate vicinity are able to get you. So that's the first thing, is if you're in complex circumstances, find others who get you.

My second thing is if you're not in complex circumstances right now, this is a time that you can practice being a member of a community that believes someone, even when the story they're telling doesn't match up with your experiences, okay? And that when really hit me, I'm like, "Oh, I know what it's like to be in complex situations, and to be trying to find help and or trying to keep going and stay afloat and all that." But I kind of feel right now, like I'm in a space in my life, where I'm like, okay, I'm not currently in crisis, which is really nice. And I'm really grateful for. But now I feel a sense of responsibility, thanks to our conversation with Rick, to not just heave a sigh of relief, and you know, coast along here. But how can I practice skills that will make me a better listener, but not just a better listener, a better believer, someone who listens to somebody else's experience and believes and does a better job of noticing, a better job of noticing somebody who needs to be listened to?

And I'm thinking of my kids, when they were in college, especially their early years of college, you know, especially through their early 20s, I dismissed a lot of what they told me, I was like, "Oh, it can't be that way. No, no, no, surely they're making it—" and then I never really thought they were making things up. You know, now that I say that, I'm like, no, no, I didn't think they were lying to me, I just, it was – what they were telling me was so different from my experiences 20 and 30 years ago, like they went to the exact same college Daniel and I did. And our experience was vastly different. And I did not pause, I did not stop and go hang on a second, why the difference? And challenge the idea that their experience probably was a lot more like mine, and they just didn't realize it. But I'm trying to do a better job of listening.

Amy Carroll

That's powerful insight, Cheri.

Cheri Gregory

Well, it's born of regret, and trying to use that as a motivator to do better.

And then the thing I noticed here, my third thing is that Rick brought up they lost all of their friends when their son died. And then he also brought up the fact that most younger adults with younger kids don't want to hang out with older adults with younger kids. And so, you know, I guess my my third thing here is, I want to become the kind of person because I'm not right now, I'll admit, but I would like to be the kind of person who draws together community, and really looks for people who may not be naturally an easily finding community for whatever the reason might be. And wow, somebody who's intentional, and I don't mean using them as a pet project or a pity project or anything like that, but just really looking to develop a wide circle of community so that membership isn't defined by certain qualifications by certain similarities.

Amy Carroll

That's so good, Cheri, that is so – there's so much to unpack in that insight that you just had, because I think about, you know, I have so many questions about why did they lose all their friends when their son died? And you know, how I have regrets about how I have not dealt with other people's grief. And you know, it's easier to kind of disappear than to deal

with your own insecurities. Do I say the right thing, and all that kind of thing. So there's a lot there. Building a community that's really wide.

Cheri Gregory

Alright, so what's your love who you are statement?

Amy Carroll

'You *are* being equipped for empathy in your strange season.' So, Rick's strange season, because I thought, well, what's what are some words we can wrap around this, that it didn't match up with his peers, his strange season of life isn't wasted. It is preparing him to comfort others or to show empathy is the way we've talked about it in this show.

One of the scriptures that I love, so I'm jumping to the Scripture section right now, but I love 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 that says "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." So I mean, there's so much in that verse that I love. But you know, God is the source of all of this. He's the father of compassion. He's the God of all comfort. And so when we're in these strange season seasons, we can turn to the Father of compassion, and the God of all comfort. And then what he does is he he uses that in us so that that we can comfort those in any trouble.

So that's kind of what you were saying, Cheri. Not just that now Rick is equipped to comfort grandparents, although that's a big piece of it. But once we have experienced that comfort and compassion, it changes us. And so now we are better equipped to offer comfort and compassion to others. I was thinking back to when Nolan was little. And we have shared this, the two of us have shared this in real life, that Nolan went through a season of really high anxiety. And I would say to the point of phobias, lots of phobias, lots of fears. And so when he was like, three, four years old, other little kids may have been charging into life with just you know, abandon, and Nolan was afraid of everything. And so it curtailed our family activities. It certainly just kept him very, very stuck in a season. And you know, it was hard, but we sought some counseling. And we worked through it with Nolan. He came through on the other side so strong, and not only so

strong, but really wanted to share his story and wants me to share his story.

And so I remember a mom reaching out to me, I had written about it at one point, and she said, “Do you think Nolan would talk to my son?” And he did. Oh, man. So, and, you know, that was just when we were going through it. It was so hard and so painful. I mean, like one of my favorite Bible studies we couldn't go to because Nolan was afraid of the garage door opening. Now looking back, Cheri, well, he's an HSP. We know that now. So the sudden loud noises were very scary to him, anyway, but he was able to share his story, I was able to comfort the mom, he was able to comfort the son. There's nothing wrong with you, you're gonna be okay. You know. And so think about these seasons that we are being equipped for empathy towards others, and our strange seasons.

Cheri Gregory

Hmm, I love that. I love that. Well, and can I add something to this verse? I just did a teaching on it last week. I did a little bit of diving in and I won't geek out on you too much. But according to the concordance I looked at there's actually two different meanings for the word comfort in here. And so I'm gonna go ahead and I'm gonna go by memory here. So if I get it wrong, I'll put some notes in the show notes that correct it but if my memory serves me right here, one way you could read this would be “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion,” which one commentator said is like that is the great name of God, like that is the thing He should be most known for, His compassion. I'm like, really? I need to dig into that because that's not how it was presented to me in my childhood.

Amy Carroll

Right? And in Exodus 34, when he tells Moses who He is, He lists compassion first.

Cheri Gregory

Okay, so I love that. Okay. And then “and the God of all comfort” and the the word there means help and encouragement, among other things, “who comforts us in our troubles,” that one means draws close to us, comes

near, "so that we can comfort those in any trouble." You want to guess what that one is?

Amy Carroll

Drawing near?

Cheri Gregory

It's the drawing near one.

Amy Carroll

It's the ministry of presence!

Cheri Gregory

So we can draw near to those in any trouble with the help and encouragement we ourselves receive because God has drawn nearer to us. I just love that alternation. Yes, there is tangible help. Yes, there is the encouragement of, of actual words. So the comfort is a thing. But it's also and primarily that verb of drawing near of being close.

Amy Carroll

So powerful. Oh, yay, I'm so excited! I think we did our Scripture part well this week, Cheri Gregory, well done.

Cheri Gregory

Alright, let's move on to live your one life well. And I had a bunch of questions to ask – these will be posted in the show notes for those of you who like to do reflective journaling and stuff.

So the first one, 'What are the complexities of my life?' You know, sometimes we can just go running around, okay, I'll speak for myself, I can be running around like a chicken with my head cut off feeling overwhelmed. And sometimes it's good to sit down and really process what are the complexities of my life? And then the second question, 'What do I need?' And yes, we're allowed to use that term. What do I need, and who can provide it? And I kind of broke that down to – and I'll admit, I started with myself, just because often I forget that there are things I can provide for myself, like, I'm so busy trying to take care of everybody else's needs, that there are certain things that I can and even should provide for myself. And

then the second one I put 'What can only God provide?' Okay, like, if I'm running to other people to get the kind of comfort only He can give? I'm always going to be disappointed. So what can only God give? And then when it comes to others, how can I specifically request what I need? How can I be very, very specific about it?

My third question, 'Where can I find a supportive community of people who get it?' Whatever that complicated circumstance is, there probably is already an existing support community that's out there.

Amy Carroll

Cheri, where should people look for our support community? Because I know you've done this actively in your own life. How can they find something?

Cheri Gregory

Oh, that's a great question. I'm a big believer in word of mouth. You know, I would I start with people I'm close to and I look for repetition. Like, if people I trust are recommending something, the same thing, then I'll check it out. But for most of the kinds of support communities I've gotten involved with, the other thing I'll say is I've tried a variety and found what I did and didn't like, and I don't mean being picky. I just mean, like, if their worldview was substantially different, different, or if it turned out they were more of a dumping ground – which is, that's okay, if that's what some people need.

So first and foremost, referrals. Sometimes there'll be referrals from professionals from a licensed counselor, you know, that kind of thing is known. People I know and trust. And then it sometimes, it takes the time and energy. That can be one of the reasons it's hard to find a good support community because it's like a no, I have to go try them out and see if it's a good fit, but it's worth it.

Amy Carroll

It's so good. That's so practical. And you didn't give up just because one didn't fit. You went and tried another one. Love it. Okay, now, I thought that was really important, because probably people are gonna listen are like, "Yeah, but how do you do that?"

Cheri Gregory

Great question. And don't just Google it. Like if you Google it, and you find a list, and then that's confirmed by friends and professionals, then that's good. But I wouldn't start with Google, I'd start with your trust. It's amazing what our friend networks know about that we don't, but they do.

So. Alright, so two other questions. Four, 'How can I be a supportive friend who believes someone else's story even when I don't get it?'

And number five, 'How can I be the hands and feet of Jesus to someone else?'

So, Action Amy.

Amy Carroll

Alright. So I have three that are kind of related.

Look up. I think that can be so easy – I don't think, I might personally know that it is very easy to become absorbed in our own life. And I mean, listen, life is busy. My life is like crazy busy right now. And so it is really easy for me just to look at my own life and kind of navel gaze. So the first step is look up.

Number two, look around. Start tuning into the lives and words of the people around you and emotions of the people around you and just you know, be intentional and be prayerful. Ask God, "God, would you show me the needs you want me to meet?"

And then number three is actually do something. Do something to make someone around you feel less alone in their strange circumstances.

Cheri Gregory

I love that. Reminds me of something we put in *Exhale*, noticing the need with your name on it.

Amy Carroll

Oh, love that. Yes. Yeah.

Cheri Gregory

Alright. So the grit in all of this. Daniel and I watched a mostly forgettable movie last week, but it had a line in it that will stick with me the rest of my life. One character said to the other 'Having someone help you doesn't mean that you failed. It just means you're not alone in it.' So let me say that again. Having someone help you doesn't mean that you failed. It just means that you're not in it alone. So for some of us, the grit is asking for specific help so that we're not in our complicated circumstances alone. And then for some of us, the grit is noticing and offering specific help so that we're in it, whatever the it may be with that other person so they don't feel so alone.

What's the grace?

Amy Carroll

Well, I'm just gonna say I am not a natural noticer. I am not. I mean, I have – I love people, you know this, right? You know, I do love people, but often I'm just oblivious. My mother is a natural noticer. She is the one who is there in a second with what people need, because she's like, so tuned into that, but it's not an excuse. And so I'm working on it because we can get better at it. It just takes I think more work for those of us that aren't natural noticers.

But so the grace is I am working not to beat myself up for the times the opportunities I missed and being empathetic. And you know that one of my favorite phrases is "Let me circle back." So I've decided like that can happen in conversations, because I'm not fast on my feet. So often, I'm like, I have to come back later and say, "Let's circle back and talk about this. And I've decided that empathy can circle back too. And so when I miss it, I try not to beat myself up, because that just keeps me stuck. If you're so useless, you know, that just keeps me stuck. And then I don't do anything. But if I think 'Oh, I'm growing in this, so I'm gonna circle back and be empathetic, I can do it.' Better late than never right? Think about if some of Rick's friends had circled back and said, you know, "We should have been there." that probably would have solidified the friendship even more, or made it even more strong than it ever had been. I love circling back.

Cheri Gregory

Absolutely.

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

Amy Carroll

And we're especially grateful to Rick Johnson and his publisher Salem books for making this week's episode of Grit'N'Grace possible.

Cheri Gregory

Check out this episode's web page at gritnegracethepodcast.com/episode266.

There you'll find this week's transcript and a link to Rick's book, *When Grandparents Become Parents*.

Amy Carroll

Be sure to join us next week when we'll be talking with Lynn Cowell ...

Cheri Gregory

... and Amy Carroll! ...

Amy Carroll

... co-authors of *Esther: Seeing our Invisible God in an Uncertain World*.

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! So –

Both

take it!