

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST Episode #285

## ***Different, Not Defective***

### ***Why We Each Experience Life in Such Unique Ways***

Have you ever had someone tell you, “You’re just imagining things,” or “It can’t be that loud” (or that bright or that itchy)? If you’re a Highly Sensitive Person, you’ve been there. Other people’s reactions to your heightened perceptions can feel isolating, even invalidating. But your experiences aren’t wrong; they’re uniquely yours.

So in this episode, we’re looking at how our DNA shapes the way we sense and respond to the world and what that means for those of us who are HSPs. We’re also talking about why it’s vital to listen to, learn from, and care for the HSP body that God has entrusted to you. Your differences aren’t defects – your differences are divine!

Welcome to *Grit 'n' Grace: The Podcast for Highly Sensitive Christian Women!*

I’m your host, Cheri Gregory.

Are you tired of the overthinking, overwhelm, and exhaustion that come with being a Highly Sensitive Person?

Are you ready to stop worrying that something’s wrong with you and start understanding and nurturing yourself as an HSP?

Together, we’ll build resilience, practice self-compassion, set healthy boundaries, unlock your creativity, and learn to embrace – not fight – your God-given sensitivity.

Let’s dig in!

Well, hey friend, I’m so glad that you could join me again today!

I'm going to take you on a quick little tour of the AirBnB our family stayed in last weekend, and invite you to count the number of plug-in oil diffusing "air fresheners" that you count, okay?

So here's one in the entry-way ... one in the family room ... one in the first floor bathroom ... heading upstairs we find one at the top of the landing ... one in the master bedroom ... one in the master bath ... one in the upstairs bathroom ... and one in the back bedroom.

If you got 8, that's how many plug-in oil diffusing "air fresheners" (ahem) ended up sitting outside on the back patio during our entire stay.

When I first walked in that front door and got one whiff of all that Febreze – which hit me like a tsunami wave of artificial... I want to say stench, but I'll say scent – I was a woman on a mission, tracking each one down, yanking it out of the wall, and carrying them all outside before I got nauseated and Annemarie got a migraine.

Now here's what makes being a Highly Sensitive Person so interesting.

You may be nodding and thinking, "Well, of course you did, Cheri! Who would ever put 8 'air fresheners' in one small home?"

Or you might be appalled, wondering, "Cheri, why would you do that in a home that doesn't belong to you? I would rather live with a smell I don't enjoy for a couple of days rather than get all dramatic about it!"

So let's start today by talking about three key concepts that are vital to understanding "Why We Each Experience Life in Such Unique Ways"

But first, I want to let you know:

that today's episode of Grit 'n' Grace is sponsored by the Sensitive & Strong Community Cafe. Your go-to learning community for Highly Sensitive Christian women who want to embrace her divine design and live out God's purpose for her life with confidence.

To learn more about the Sensitive & Strong Community Cafe, simply head to [CheriGregory.com/Cafe](http://CheriGregory.com/Cafe) and you'll also find the link in the show notes!

Ok, three key concepts that are vital to understanding why we each experience life in such unique ways: stimulus, response, and experience.

I'm gonna give you a few definitions and then we're gonna dive into some examples.

**A stimulus** is a thing or event that evokes a specific functional reaction in an organ or tissue of the body. A stimulus may be external or it may be internal. So just a quick example of a stimulus is the scent of food. That would be an external stimulus.

**Response** is the action that an organism takes as a result of a stimulus. So a quick example would be your mouth watering in response to the scent of food.

And just a little bit more of a breakdown as to how this works:

- A receptor detects the stimulus.
- The receptor converts the stimulus into an electrical nerve impulse.
- The nerve impulse travels through neurons to the central nervous system.
- The central nervous system decides on a response.
- The response signal travels through neurons to effectors, which are organs that produce the response.

And then **experience**. And I wanna talk specifically today about lived experience, which is "The personal knowledge and understanding you gain from your own life events, feelings, and interactions. It's the way you uniquely perceive and make sense of the world based on your background, personality, prior experiences, etc. It's not about theories or generalizations, it's about what you've directly experienced and how that's shaped you."

So for a quick example, when I was a newlywed, I was told that if I was running behind on having dinner ready close to when I expected Daniel to come home at the end of the day, I should quickly chop up and saute an onion in butter. That

way, when he walked in the door, he would be greeted by a savory scent that assured him something good was coming soon.

However, that would never have worked. Because in Daniel's lived experience, sauteed onions are gross and disgusting. If he had walked in the door and smelled onions, he would have turned around and walked right back out!

So instead, I tried to have a loaf of bread coming out of the oven right as he came home, because that was a far better fit for his particular sequence of stimulus, response, and lived experience.

Many of us grew up being expected to "just deal with it" ... "suck it up" ... "learn to live with it" – regardless of what "it" was.

The assumption was that if we forced ourselves to endure "it," we would grow accustomed to "it" and even learn to like "it," right?

But here's the thing: science has shown this assumption to be deeply flawed.

Let's take cilantro as one well-researched example.

Now, some people find cilantro delicious, and to others, it tastes like soap. In our family, the split is 50/50: my daughter, Annemarie, and I *love* cilantro while my husband and son grimace at the smell.

So imagine that I've bought a bunch of cilantro to make salsa. One bunch to make salsa. Imagine me calling my family into the kitchen, holding this one cilantro bunch that was all grown together at the same time, and pulling out 4 sprigs – again, from the exact same bunch – and handing one to Daniel, one to Annemarie, one to Jonathon, and saving the last one for me.

So again, it's the exact same stimuli.

Now imagine each of us eating our sprig. Now because of our DNA, Annemarie and I would be smiling and thinking, "Yum! We should actually make some cilantro lime cream sauce with this!" And because of their DNA, Daniel and Jonathon would be trying not to gag.

Same exact stimuli; different response. *Vastly* different response.

And let me be crystal clear here: My husband was raised in a no-nonsense family where you ate whatever was on your plate without comment. This is not him being spoiled or entitled. This is the fact – the scientific fact – that the exact same cilantro that tastes delicious to Annemarie and me tastes truly awful to him. He says it actually tastes worse than soap. And he also adds that he should know because he had his mouth washed out with soap as a child.

So when I make salsa, I put cilantro in half the batch – the half that Annemarie and I will eat – and leave it out of the other half. It's a small but hopefully significant expression of love for my husband and son. I recognize their lived experiences are different from mine in this area, and I try to demonstrate understanding and respect for that difference in the way that I treat them.

Now here's the important thing:

I would never, ever force-feed cilantro to my husband and son and insist, "Just keep eating it. Eventually, you'll learn to like it." I know better. It doesn't work that way.

In many areas of life, HSPs and non-HSPs encounter the exact same stimuli. But then, due to DNA differences, their brains interpret the stimuli differently. Very differently. Same stimuli, different response. Which means a different lived experience.

Not right, not wrong, not defective – just different.

So let me give another example. A few weeks back, my husband and I were staying at a Holiday Inn, and we had booked it specifically so we could use the exercise room. But when we went down in the morning, it turned out it was very hot and muggy. There was no air movement, and I could tell from the get-go that it was already too warm for me and I hadn't even started on the elliptical. Well, as Daniel was on the treadmill, I was on the elliptical, crossing my fingers that this would be the day that I could magically keep my temperature from spiking too high while exercising, I'm going to say this kid comes in – he was probably in his 20s – and he's in sweatpants and a sweatshirt, and I'm like, oh my goodness. I

was in shorts and a tank top, Daniel was in shorts and a tank top, and this kid is in sweatpants and a sweatshirt. I'm like, he's going to die.

But here's what was so interesting: we each had very different reactions. Same stimulus: hot, muggy room with no air movement, and we couldn't change the thermostat; but we had very different reactions. This kid starts pumping the weights and barely even glistening. And he was doing planks and all sorts of things that I'm looking at him going, oh my word. I would be dying if I even attempted those things.

Daniel is over on the treadmill, and he starts getting going to a pace that he feels good about, and he has the occasional trickle of sweat. Me, I was absolutely pouring sweat. I was drinking all the water I could. I even paused my exercise and went into the bathroom, and at the faucet, I drenched my hair completely with water, in hopes that that would help lower my overall temperature. But even after doing those things, I was just sweating profusely to the point that my exercise outfit was completely soaked. I barely made it 20 minutes in, but I was noticing that my pace was slower than it should have been. My heart rate was much faster than it should have been. It was way too, my heart rate was way too fast for the pace I was walking.

And I recognized that if I kept going, I was going to become nauseated, and then I was going to feel faint, and it was going to ruin me for the rest of the day, which was the exact opposite of what we were going for by exercising early in the morning. And I had to remind myself: my tolerance for heat has always been less than other people around me, no matter how hard I've tried to "just push through it." So I gave up, and I ended up taking an outdoor walk instead.

So the next day, I compensated. I had gone out and bought one of these huge drinking bottles that's insulated, and I filled it with ice and then water. And I think it was like 44 ounces or more than that, and in the 45 minutes I was on the elliptical the next morning – now, again, same exact stimuli, to be clear; we asked them if they could change the temperature, they said, no, the thermostat was actually broken, so it was a hot, muggy room with no air movement – and in 45 minutes, I drank that whole 44 ounces. I just kept sipping, sipping, sipping, this, this really, really cold water.

But because I had made that personal adaptation for myself, because I knew that if I can just get ice cold water inside of me, I can keep my temperature down, my pace was considerably faster, my heart rate was way lower, and I felt so much better. I felt invigorated. I felt like, Oh, this is, this is what's good for me. I'm getting the exercise I need to have a better day. There was no nausea, there was no feeling faint, nothing like that. Now, it was still a very different lived experience than Daniel was having, and that kid in the sweatshirt and sweatpants came back again, but it was much more in line. I wasn't being quite such an outlier, and I didn't have to leave the room.

Making small adjustments, like hydrating with ice water in the exercise room, is one way to care for ourselves as HSPs. But sometimes, it takes someone else to say something that transforms the way we see ourselves. That's exactly what happened to a woman I met at the West Coast Christian Writers Conference, and her story gave me the literal chills in the best possible way.

She told me that all her life, her parents had mocked her for being “too sensitive” and “such a drama queen.” Even now that she's a mother with teenagers of her own, they still make disparaging remarks about her at family gatherings.

But one day, when she'd jumped out of her skin at an unexpected noise, and her parents had said “There she goes again,” her 16-year-old son turned to her parents, his grandparents, and said this to them: “My mother does NOT over-react. She over-experiences.”

And when she told me this story, my first response was, “What an amazing young man!”

And my second response was to tear up at his reframe, because it resonated so deeply to me.

If you're an HSP, you do NOT over-react; you over-experience.

Now, what do you do with this new understanding? I am gonna give you five action steps here:

**#1: Listen to your body.**

Pay close attention to how your body reacts to the world around you. Whether it's a sound, smell, taste, or temperature – as in my experience – your body's responses are vital signals, not something to dismiss. And the key word there is vital, which has to do with vitality, which means life; these are life-signals, don't dismiss them, don't ignore them. Listen to what your body is telling you.

**#2: Trust your experience.**

Your unique perspective and responses are valid. Just because others don't perceive the same thing doesn't diminish or invalidate your experience.

**#3: Experiment with personal solutions.**

Adjust your environment or routines in ways that support your well-being, or create a space that feels comfortable and calming. Find what works for you and celebrate those wins, no matter how seemingly small.

And so often for us as HSPs, it's the seemingly small wins that end up being the key to the big things.

**#4: Reframe “different” as a strength.**

Embrace your sensitivity as a divine gift that helps you experience the world in a deeper and more meaningful way. Being different doesn't mean defective – it means distinct and valuable.

**#5: Practice self-compassion.**

When you feel misunderstood or overwhelmed, intentionally and fully embrace God's grace. Remind yourself that your responses are natural and deserving of care, not criticism.

Now just in case you were worried, let me hasten to assure you that before our family left the Air BnB last weekend, I was careful to take all those plug-in oil diffusing “air-fresheners” back into the house and put them all back where they came from. Because it was not my house.

The Sensitive & Strong Community Cafe, however, is my house. It may not have literal walls and roof, but I built it to be a safe haven for tender HSP hearts. In the Cafe, you can learn practical ways to listen to your body, trust your experience,



experiment with personal solutions, reframe different as a strength, and practice self-compassion.

One member shared, “This community has helped me grow in ways I never thought possible, all while feeling loved and seen and safe.” Another emailed me to say, “Even though we haven’t met, I feel very close to you. You’ve put my feelings into words during your sharing and teaching. I am so grateful for you and for the Cafe.”

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Thank you for listening to *Grit ‘n’ Grace: The Podcast for Highly Sensitive Christian Women!*

I hope this episode leaves you feeling encouraged and equipped to thrive – and to see your differences as divine!

Be sure to follow in your favorite podcast app and share this episode with a friend!

Now, if you’re brand new to the whole HSP concept, come take the “Am I a Highly Sensitive Person?” quiz – you’ll find that link in the show notes.

**And remember: God created you sensitive; in Christ, you are always strong.**