

WHAT LIFE CAN LOOK LIKE FOR CHRISTIAN WOMEN AFTER A DIVORCE

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of Flyingfreenow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 102 of the Flying Free Podcast! I'm still trying to get used to saying the word "100," but a couple of episodes ago we celebrated our 100th episode. It was pretty fun. Now we're moving on. Today I have with me Stacey Hanrahan and Robin Zimmer. If you've been listening to the Flying Free podcast for a while, you might recognize Robin. She is in Episode 82 where she shares her story. Stacey shares her story in the Flying Free program behind locked doors. But if you join Flying Free or if you are a member, you can check out Stacey's story. First, let me welcome you guys. Hi, Robin. Hi, Stacey.

ROBIN and STACEY: Hello.

NATALIE: I've invited them on today because I want to talk about the Flying Higher program. For those of you who are new or have no idea what I'm talking about, I have this podcast for everybody. Anyone can listen to the podcast. Then I have a website, flyingfreenow.com, with all kinds of articles and stuff for Christian women about abusive relationships. That's available to everybody. It's free. You can access it anytime you want to. Sometimes I will even go on YouTube and do a video that way.

But I have two programs now. One has been going for three and a half years called Flying Free. It's a private program for Christian women, women of faith, who want extra support. It offers coaching, expert workshops, a community forum, live events every month, and all kinds of stuff. But a lot of these women were getting strong and needing something else. They had been in the program for a while, and they wanted something more. Many of them were getting divorced (not that everyone in that program gets divorced) and saying, "What do I do now? Is there anything out there for Christian divorced women?" There really isn't much of anything. Do you guys know of anything?

ROBIN: No.

NATALIE: So I decided to make something for those women. That's how Flying Higher was born. So there is Flying Free. Then we will take all those butterflies who are flying free and help them fly higher. Flying Higher is for divorced Christian women. It's quite different from Flying Free in that our whole goal is... It is so easy for us to sit back and

think, "Abuse ruined my life. I spent the best years of my life in this horrible relationship. Now I'm a washed-up old lady. My family doesn't love me. My church has rejected me. I don't know what to do with the rest of my life."

In Flying Higher, I want to take all those women and show them, teach them, and train them how to become the best version of themselves for the second half of their life, no matter how old you are. Flying Higher opens to the public on January 27, in about a week. [Flying Higher is now open and accepting applications! Apply today at joinflyinghigher.com]

But I started a Beta group with about one-hundred and twenty women. They started with me in April or May 2020. Stacey and Robin are two of those women who were in the Beta group. That's why I invited them on here. I wanted to ask them some questions and have them share with you a little of their experience with Flying Higher so if you are thinking it is something you might be interested in, you will know on a practical level what it is.

There are three main parts to Flying Higher. One is that there is weekly coaching. The second is that there is a weekly lesson. We do a live class. You can come live if you want, or you can watch the replay. But there is a class every week. We do courses, so there are topics. For example, the topic we are in right now is called "Get It Done." We're learning about how to get past all the brain drama that happens in our minds when we have things we need to get done but we just don't get them done. They sit and rattle around in our lives, and it's very bothersome. Yet it is hard for us, sometimes, to get going. That's what we are doing right now. We have a live class, and we have a coaching session every week. Then we have a community forum.

First, why don't you each tell us a little about yourself, how long you were in Flying Free because you were both in Flying Free for quite a while, and why did you decide to join Flying Higher? What were you thinking when you joined? What did you think you were going to get out of it? Let's start with you, Robin.

ROBIN: I think I was in Flying Free... I started in August 2018. It was a year and a half, I guess, that I was in it. It was the first thing I have ever done for myself to get me to be better, to mentally figure out what was going on in my life. I woke up to the abuse. I had no idea it was such a thing. Through research on the internet I found you, Natalie. I thought, "Flying Free is opening up. I think I'm just going to spend the money." I didn't ask anybody's permission to spend the money. I just started Flying Free. It was truly a lifesaver. That is how I started, and I forgot everything else you said to tell you about.

NATALIE: So when I told you guys that I was going to start this Beta group, Flying Higher, what were you thinking at that point? Were you divorced by then, or were you still in the middle?

ROBIN: No, I wasn't. I had just gone through mediation in February of this year, and it failed. But I had gotten to the point where I knew I was in an abusive relationship. I knew I wanted out, obviously, because I was getting a divorce. So I thought, "Do I just sit here and spin my wheels, or do I do something else for me?" because I really didn't know. I had been "just" a mom for the last twenty years. I had been told that, growing up, I had wanted to be an architect at one point in my life. I was told, "You don't need to be an architect. You're just going to be a great mom." So I was a great mom.

Now, after being a great mom, my youngest is at home, but the other three are off in the world. Now, what do you do next? So Flying Higher was that next little shove that I needed to figure out that there is more to Robin than just being a mom. But I have no idea what that is. Flying Higher has helped me jumpstart a few things and think about what is next after divorce is final.

NATALIE: Okay, so I have a question. We were talking right before the podcast about a lodge that your mom owns. You were talking about the possibility of running that lodge, eventually. Tell us about that.

ROBIN: My father passed away two and a half years ago, and they own this hunting lodge that they've been running for twenty-some years. I have four other siblings, but none of them are really interested in it. Now that I'm living back here, there is the potential to take over the lodge. My mom is getting older, and I don't think she wants to do it full-time. There's a lot to it – cooking and cleaning. She hired my uncle as the guide since my dad was no longer there. So there's a possibility for it, and people keep encouraging me to do it. But in my mind I still think, "I just don't know. I've never done anything like that." I can do it. I've been hunting. I've been guiding. I've cooked. I've cleaned. I've done it all there except for the book work.

But it's a scary next step. Can I really buy this and take it over from my mom? What if I fail? It is scary, so I don't know. I'm recently divorced, so I'm taking this time to relax a bit and think about life. (Well, not really "think" about life.) That is a potential, but during twenty years of marriage, when you are told you aren't good enough and these other things are in your head from what other people said about you and you believed them, I question, "Can I really do this thing?" Of course I can do it. I do it daily during the fall. I just am not in charge of it, so I don't have that responsibility. So Flying Higher is helping me get over that hump. I raised four decent human beings. I think I can run a lodge.

NATALIE: And you can make that decision for yourself. You mentioned asking permission. I think a lot of us felt like we had to ask people's permission and get people's approval before we make a big decision like that. To realize that I'm an adult and can make my own decision about this, I can choose to do it if I want to and I can choose not to do it if I want to, and either choice is perfectly fine. I can also choose to do it for a while and then quit if I want to. I can make a mistake and that's perfectly fine. That's part of putting the puzzle of my life together, and it's all good.

ROBIN: Right. That's one of the things. Because it has been a family-run business for such a long time and because I'm technically the one who could do it as I have the time and money, I also don't want to be guilted into it either. "If you don't do it, then it closes down. Then where is the family going to meet on Christmas now?" I'm not even taking that into account. It's just, "Do I want to do it or not?" That is huge for me to not feel guilty over something. Either I want to do it or I don't want to do it in the end. There's nothing else that needs to go into that decision.

NATALIE: That's awesome.

ROBIN: I'm a big girl now!

NATALIE: You are a big girl now! It's awesome! We're all big girls. So Stacey, why don't you tell us a bit about you, your situation, and your journey to Flying Higher?

STACEY: Okay. I think I ran into your book on Amazon, and I figured out the Flying Free thing shortly after. I put two and two together that it was tied to the book. I got on the waiting list for a few months, and I think I finally got to join last November, about a year ago. [There is no longer a waiting list. You can apply to join the program today at joinflyingfree.com] I got divorced last December, so I did a lot of the journey after my divorce. But oh my goodness, it was so lifesaving. I tell everyone I ever meet about it.

NATALIE: I think it's interesting that you were in Flying Free, and most of the time you were divorced. But you still felt like it was really helpful for you?

STACEY: Oh my goodness, yeah. You have to process what just happened to you. The validation that I got and the camaraderie and the specific questions... You know, I'm still dealing with him even though we're divorced. I'm still dealing with this narcissist and understanding him and figuring out what the heck happened to me the last twenty or twenty-five years. So I love Flying Free.

But I will say that probably six or eight months in, less and less of the things applied to

me. I could still listen, but I was pretty much getting through this. There were a few I still really needed to hear, but many just were not applicable to me anymore as much, which was great. Then when you said Flying Higher was opening up and what it was, I was so excited because we've gone through this horrible situation, and like you said, "Now what?" It was so exciting.

I've been on my own personal journey trying to grow myself and figure out what I want to be when I grow up. I'm only fifty years old. I've got a lot more life to live. But I knew there were a lot of things I wasn't very good at or I didn't feel very confident in. Like Robin, I was told things all throughout my marriage about what I could and couldn't do. I was told who I was and what I believed. Now it is time to put feet to it. Now I've done some healing technically, but now what do I do with all the information I learned? How do I get past it and fly higher?

Learning about it, I loved how you said about how to be badass. I said, "I want to learn to be a badass! I can do that." I really feel that's what it has done. What it is really teaching us is how to put legs on the important things about life that we want to do. Like how to be thinner or healthier, how to plan things or get through things, or how to think about problems. How to handle things when you hit a wall or a crisis? How do we handle it? How do we think about it? How do we get past it? How do we think about what we're thinking? That is so valuable. I was going through the lessons in preparation for this and I thought, "Oh, I love that part! That was so cool to learn that!" It has been such a blessing. I'm excited for the other things we are going to learn too.

NATALIE: Can you give an example of a lesson that you looked at that you remembered, "That was really helpful for me personally?" Or do you have something that stands out in your mind that you think was probably a big changing point, or you had an epiphany in that moment that helped your life?

STACEY: The one that leaps off for me that was really practical was the diet one – the weight loss one. Again, as you mentioned in the weight loss one, it's not just for weight loss. It's for getting anything done. I enjoyed when you gave the specifics for how your body loses weight, which was fascinating. It broke down all these things I had thought about how to wrap your brain around it and conquer it, how to successfully navigate your cravings and your mindset about it (because mindset is about ninety percent of it, I would think), and the fact that exercise is important but not everything, so that frees you up to think you won't fail if you can't get on a treadmill.

Then I love "Days of Our Lives" too. It was in the "Days of Our Lives" when I just started crying. It brought a compassion for myself. The thought that how I think about myself

and how I think about my life matters, and that I'm valuable and I can do this... You're giving us the steps to do it. I really love this latest one we're doing too - "Getting Things Done." I just have six things I really want to get done. I love the Google Calendar thing. I was thinking about you, Robin. Your whole lodge thing is just a baby step. That's how I got out of my whole marriage. I just kept telling myself every day, "Just baby steps, Stacey. Just baby steps. Just do the next thing. Just take little bitty baby steps, and it's going to happen." That was how I got out of my marriage, and that's what you do to get things done. Boy, you get things done. We can get things done. We're just all going to be badassess.

NATALIE: Get all the things done.

STACEY: Get all the things done.

NATALIE: Yeah, the losing weight thing. It's basically stay on protocol, and all the rest is brain drama. So really, it's just dealing with the brain drama.

ROBIN: That's exactly it with me on the losing weight - the brain drama. For my whole life as a child I was abused by men in my family - dad, grandpa, uncles. They would make fun of me all the time, so I ate to fill myself up because I felt empty after these people, who I worshiped, would make fun of me. They'd never make fun of anybody else. I was called names like Bubbles, Line Backer, really bad names for a ten-year-old girl. So I used to eat, and I continued doing that. I would eat through emotions.

That was the one thing I started looking at. What is the emotion behind putting something in my mouth? I don't drink. I don't smoke. I don't do drugs. But I eat. That was huge for me to look at it from that perspective. What emotion is driving this? I'm not hungry - I'm emotional. So that one was huge for me. Feel the feels - it's okay to be angry. It's okay to be sad. It's okay to be disappointed.

Growing up, for me, we were taught in church that anger is a bad emotion. That it was sinful. Well, it's not sinful. Or being depressed is sinful. Wait a second! There are times we go through things where we just don't want to get out of bed. That doesn't mean we stop believing in God or we are awful people. That's just an emotion that we're going through. Anxiety - it's an emotion. Those were the two biggest things for me in Flying Higher. The calendar... I can't think of the name of it.

NATALIE: Using the Google Calendar?

ROBIN: Yeah, and planning. I have so many things in my head right now that I feel like I

want to do, and I know I need to write them down and make a schedule, otherwise it's just overwhelming. My office still needs to be cleaned, and I had that on my calendar five times.

STACEY: Maybe that will get done this week.

NATALIE: So come to coaching. Come get coaching on that.

ROBIN: Coaching – I am definitely going to start being more consistent with that, because volleyball is over and the divorce is over. So yes, definitely.

STACEY: And as we just talked about, we don't have to be in crisis to do the coaching. We can just do it when something is rattling around in our head. I think a lot of us think we have to be in crisis in order to take up that time. But no, she just wants to run models so people can see how it's done. So ladies, if you have something you want coaching on in Flying Higher, come to the coaching sessions so we can have it.

NATALIE: Coaching is one of the things we do every week in Flying Higher. It comes with your membership. You can put in a coaching request and then get personal coaching. It's in a group setting so everyone gets to hear you getting coaching, but you can also hear other people getting coaching. It's helpful. I'm in a program where I listen to other people getting coaching all the time, and it's so helpful for me because in so many of the things they are going through, I can relate to them on one level or another. It helps me to get insights into my own thinking. "I think that same thing. Why do I think that? Why do I believe that? How is that showing up in my life? What am I getting as a result in my life? It's not good, so why do I want to keep that? I don't."

ROBIN: I think also with the coaching, there are women out there that think other people are going to be judgmental. "Oh, we've already done that. We don't need to listen to you," or "Oh, that's a little thing. That's not a big problem." That's not true, because it's specific to you. If it's bothering you or if you need coaching on it, definitely get coaching on it even if it is "little," because it might help someone else who is sitting there too embarrassed to speak up or they don't want to be judged. (I'm telling you, we don't judge people in this group.) But it helps other people.

I know one of the gals, after the last time you coached me, she personally messaged me and said, "Robin, I'm so glad you brought that up, because I've been struggling and I didn't even know that is what I've been struggling with. But you brought it up in coaching and it helped me. I just didn't have the words to spell it out." The coaching call, for me, is one of the best things that Flying Higher does.

NATALIE: Good.

STACEY: I want to say one of the other things I enjoy about Flying Higher versus Flying Free. Flying Free is more for people who are in crisis, who are drowning and looking to be saved. So we're putting everything into this because it's the only way we can make it through the day. Flying Higher is kind of like, "Okay. I made it past that, and now I'm ready to become a badass." The lessons in Flying Higher are a little less overwhelming. I love that in Flying Free it is like a smorgasbord. You can look and pick what applies to you and what you are dealing with now. You can pick what you listen to, but there was so much information, which is great. But I always felt like I wanted to listen to everything at first, especially before I got divorced. But I like that Flying Higher is a little simpler, a little less time intensive, and easier to manage.

ROBIN: I think Natalie explained it as Flying Free is more like the emergency room where I'm in crisis, and Flying Higher is like, "Okay, we figured out what the trauma was, we're all stitched up, and now we're going to heal that broken part of us."

STACEY: Now we're going to become the doctor. We were the patient, and now we're going to be the badass doctor.

NATALIE: Right. I like to think of it as now we're going to train for a marathon. We're not in the ICU anymore. I'm going to be your personal trainer and we're going to kick some butt. We're going to get out there and run a marathon. Actually, our idea in our class right now is that we're going to climb a mountain. We're going to go mountain climbing.

STACEY: Right. I want to add that it's not just that we're saying, "Rah, rah! We're going to do this!" Natalie is giving us specific steps. Not only is she giving us the nuts and bolts of how to do it, but also what our brain should or could be doing and how to get past the things that it probably is doing. So it's really the whole package. It's the nuts and bolts of doing it and the emotional part, which is so important. I think we're all figuring that out in general in life. We're figuring out that the mental game is a lot of it. We're growing our lives and growing ourselves.

NATALIE: One of you mentioned the idea that we've been taught for so long that our emotions are bad, yet our emotions are the exact thing that we need to understand if we want to figure out why we have so much drama in our brains about things, because our brain drama is causing those emotions. If we're not aware of them, if we're just stuffing them and saying, "I'm not angry. I'm not this. I'm cool," but inside, our bodies are freaking out and feeling all those things, then we're never going to look at why. Why do we feel so much anger? Why do we feel so afraid? That fear and anger could be

blocking you from living your best life, so it's important that we're aware of those emotions and what we are thinking that is causing those emotions.

I'm curious before we close... I'm going to kind of put you on the spot. Right now, we are doing this course called "Get It Done." (By the way, if you join Flying Higher, you will have access to all the past courses. It could be overwhelming because we continue to have weekly classes. But if you want to dive into any of the past classes, you can do that at your leisure.) But we're in the middle of "Get It Done" right now, and I'm curious if you have a specific thing in your mind that you think, "I'd really like to get this thing done." Robin, you mentioned you want to clean your office.

ROBIN: It's messy because I just got divorced on Monday, and this is Saturday.

NATALIE: Oh my word. Congratulations!

ROBIN: Thank you. So I have put literally everything else on hold. My house is a disaster. My garage is a disaster. So I have this laundry list of things to do: clean out my pantry, clean my office, straighten this up. I'm going to start remodeling some of my house because it's fifty-plus years old. But I don't have the Google Calendar set up because I find it very easy to get distracted. So as long as I have them written down and can go cross them off... If I feel like doing the pantry on Monday, I'll do it. If I don't, I will find something else on the list to cross off.

But as long as I get one thing done that day, then I feel like I accomplished something and I can go take my dog for a walk or whatever. I don't feel like on Monday I said I have to do the office, and the last thing I want to do is look at divorce paperwork right now, so I shut the door. I don't want to keep it to that level of a schedule, but I know there are certain things I have been putting off that I really need to start organizing and getting done. I'm just making a general list and doing something each day, but not something specific on each day. That's where I am.

NATALIE: That's totally cool. That's a great example of how... I can give you tools and give you ideas, but because you're an adult... That's the whole point of this. It's remembering, "Hey, I'm an adult. I have a certain way that is going to work better for me that may not work better for someone else." You get these ideas and you get the brain juices flowing. Then you start figuring it out for yourself.

I recently heard this, and now I'm using it all the time. Someone said, "I don't want to make mistakes. I want to make sure I do it all right, do everything I'm told." But here's the thing. Our lives are like putting together a puzzle. When you put together a puzzle

(we've been doing a lot of puzzles during COVID) you take a piece and try it somewhere. It might not work there. You try it in another place, and it doesn't work there either. You have to keep trying it. Those are just micro-mistakes you are making because that's how you find out where the piece actually fits – by trying it out in different places. That's okay. That's normal and good. At least you're in the game putting the puzzle together.

ROBIN: That's one of the things. What Flying Free taught was that you don't have to feel guilty over not doing something or not being perfect. We're out of that. We don't have to be perfect for anyone anymore. So if it fits a different way, the puzzle piece fits a different way for me than it does for you, that is great. Try to use these skills you give us and keep going forward.

NATALIE: Yeah, I like it. Stacey, what about you?

STACEY: I have so many things on my list. I recently moved my mom, who is getting dementia and in declining shape in Seattle, to where I live. I've had to deal with all her bills, getting her house cleaned out (and she was a hoarder) and on the market. So I've lost control of my own life. I've even gotten behind in Flying Higher, and I don't want to miss anything. I will say that some of it, if I don't use it now, I grab onto what I can use now and set it aside for later, because not everything will apply to our lives right now. But now I've got the information and I've got the tools.

It also teaches you about other things. I think I'm going to try... The paperwork is kind of nebulous. It's not really specific. I want to figure out how I can get on top of it and get on top of my own paperwork, and also my own... I would like to catch up on the Flying Free stuff that I wanted to do, because I got behind on that as well when this whole thing started with my mom. So I'm in Flying Free and Flying Higher. I don't want to let Flying Free go because I love it, and there is stuff I want to catch up on.

But mainly I'm going to try to clean out my house. I'm finding that I am walking around thinking, "Why do I have all my homeschooling stuff still?" I couldn't get rid of it, and I'm getting ready to because I'm not homeschooling anymore, which makes me sad. But I have a bunch of stuff I need to get rid up plus my mom's stuff. I think that is going to be my focus: decluttering, selling my mom's stuff, and trying to winnow down the stuff in my life.

NATALIE: That's a huge job if you've got yours and your mom's.

STACEY: Oh my goodness, yes. I'm down to the stuff I want to sell. For my mom, since she was halfway across the country, a lot of her stuff had to get donated and tossed,

which was so sad. It was so hard on her, but I had no choice. I could only fit so much to get her here. She's not very happy about it. I said, "You can be mad at me. I understand. I wouldn't be happy about it either."

ROBIN: It's huge for us to be able to say that.

STACEY: I got that from Flying Higher, I kid you not. To be able to compartmentalize it and say, "I don't need to take this inside myself..." Also, one thing I learned that has helped me with this is to remember that your emotions come from your thoughts. So think about what you are thinking about. So often I would ruminate about things and worry about things, and it would freak me out. I wouldn't be able to show up for things in a healthy way. So that has helped a lot.

NATALIE: Cool. I really appreciate your willingness to come on here and spend some of your time being vulnerable and sharing some things you are struggling with and have struggled with in the past. Robin, congratulations on your divorce. It's so weird to say that. Isn't that weird?

ROBIN: What is even more interesting is that people will ask me, my oldest daughter asked me, "Do you say 'congratulations?'" It's sad that it had to come to this point, but I'm very happy that it's finally done. The abuse on top of abuse toward the end, for ten months – financial and psychological abuse like I've never seen before in my life. I'm glad it's over. You can congratulate me. I got out of a horrible situation, and I'm alive to tell my kids about it, or anybody.

STACEY: And you didn't cause the situation, so congratulations.

ROBIN: Thank you.

NATALIE: That's right. That's awesome. For those of you listening, Flying Higher is opening on January 27. [Flying Higher is now open and available to the public.] You can go to the website. It's joinflyinghigher.com. When it opens, there will be a lot more information than is probably on there right now. But you can go there and apply to join the program. That's all I have.

I also want to encourage you, if this podcast has been helpful to you, head over to Apple iTunes and leave a rating and review. That lets other Christian women know that this podcast is out there for them, and they can find it and get the help they need for the different issues they have in their lives. Thanks again, Stacey and Robin, for being with me, and thank you to those of you listening. Until next time, fly free!