SURVIVOR STORY: MARIE

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of <u>Flyingfreenow.com</u>, 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 132 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I have with me someone who has been both a member of the Flying Free Sisterhood program, and now she's a member of the Flying Higher program. Her name is Marie Griffith. We're going to be talking about those two programs and how they were helpful for her—how they've been instrumental in helping her fly free and then fly higher. Welcome to the podcast, Marie.

MARIE: Thank you. I'm so happy to be here, Natalie.

NATALIE: Before we get into the questions, why don't you tell us a little about yourself so people have a context for who you are, why you would join a program like this, where you are going, and all of that.

MARIE: Okay, I'll make that brief. I was married for twenty-six years. I'll say twenty-six years from the first time. Yes—we were married twice. That's another story.

NATALIE: Fascinating!

MARIE: We were married the first time in 1994. The second time, in 2000. We did it on the same day because we didn't want to change our anniversary date, so we always said twenty-six years. I had grown up in a Christian home, but when I was twenty-seven, I gave my entire life to Jesus—meaning "Here I am; use me however You want, God." My husband, though he never said this; I think he thought, "What? This isn't what I bargained for." I don't know that. I don't want to put words in his mouth, but he was not as interested in the things of God as I was. So that will give you a bit of insight into that. But because I did that, I went all in. I helped plant a church in 1995. I did ministry for over two decades. I homeschooled my kids for ten years. He was on board with that; he loved that. I took the kids to church, taught Sunday School, and did all of that. He would come if the kids would be singing or something like that, but most of the time he was not involved; except we finally went to church as a family starting in 2009. (That's a whole other story.) We were part of that church for eight years until we left in 2017 because we realized it was a toxic church environment. We didn't know what to call it at the time,



but it was spiritual abuse. That was the beginning of me realizing... When I was researching what happened to us and I learned about spiritual abuse, I discovered in my reading there were some of the same things in my marriage. But I just pressed that down. I'm an expert at pressing things down, not looking fully at what was right in front of me just to get through. We left that church in 2017. Between then and that time, my eyes were opening more and more to things happening in my marriage. Our kids were older. I thought... I always admitted to everybody and spoke out that I had a hard marriage. But that's what I thought it was—a hard marriage. I did not realize that it was a destructive marriage. My eyes were slowly opening to that, but I still would not have called it that until (I'm not sure if it was May 2019 or May 2020) I heard you on a podcast. I can't remember which one it was, but it wasn't Flying Free. You were a guest on another podcast.

NATALIE: Oh, okay.

MARIE: It just went on to the next episode. I wasn't even looking for it. I was still researching spiritual abuse because I wrote about it. I was still processing all that and writing about it. I was listening to something with Diane Langberg, and then you just started playing. So the introduction was, "You're about to hear from Natalie Hoffman. She was married. She was a homeschool mom." Check. "She was married for twenty-five years." Check. "Christian woman." Check. "And she was in an emotionally abusive marriage." I was like, "Oh! I've got to listen to this." You started talking, and I thought, "This is my story. She is putting words to my story." Natalie, from there I went to your Flying Free podcast and listened to every Butterfly story. I have to tell you—I did that for three or four days. I was taking all this in (this may resonate with a lot of women), and it was validating, but I was terrified at the same time. I put it on the back burner for a little while. I thought, "I just need to calm down for a minute. What is going on here?" I was in counseling already. I won't go into all of that, but because of that podcast and because I was already researching spiritual abuse, God used that to rapidly start opening my eyes to the truth. I can't remember the day, but I remember when it finally hit me that I'm in an emotionally abusive marriage. Every time I would go walking, which I did all throughout my marriage for my mental health as physical fitness has been very important to me, I would listen to your podcast. I've listened to every single podcast some of them several times.

NATALIE: And here you are on it!

MARIE: I know! I can't even believe it.



NATALIE: It's not even really been that long of a time when you think about it. It's crazy.

MARIE: It's not. That's why I say rapidly because for some it is slower. I think because God had already prepared me and opened my eyes through my research on spiritual abuse, I was ready—my heart was ready—to receive it.

NATALIE: What's interesting is you were getting help for the spiritual abuse with the church situation, and that woke you up to what you had going on in your marriage. For a lot of women, it is the opposite. They see the abuse in their marriage and then they compare it to what is going on in their churches. They start to see it there too. The bottom line is that they go hand-in-hand in many cases. Sorry to interrupt.

MARIE: No, it's fine. Anyway, I was listening to your podcast where you were promoting Flying Free. I wanted to get into it in spring of 2020.

NATALIE: So last year. Was it when Covid started?

MARIE: Yes. When would you have let people in? March or April?

NATALIE: Yes. It would have been April of last year. That would have been the opening.

MARIE: I almost did it, but I didn't because first of all Covid. The world was crazy. I didn't know what was going to happen. I'm the person who, if I'm going to pay for something, I'm going to do it.

NATALIE: Good.

MARIE: I'm just like that. I thought, "Do I have the time?" I was in the middle of writing my series on spiritual abuse experience, which was intense for me. So I waited. Then I regretted it. I regretted it two weeks afterward. I thought I should have signed up. But I kept listening to everything I could. I looked you up on YouTube and listened to some of those things. You had introduced me to Bob Hamp, Patrick Doyle, and Leslie Vernick, so I started taking in their resources. I kept getting stronger and stronger and I determined to sign up the next time you opened it. I did. I can't remember when that was. September?

NATALIE: The next opening would have been September or October.



MARIE: In the fall. I joined, and I did all the courses. My husband and I were already separated. Your podcast and all the resources I was taking in gave me the strength to separate from my husband on June 1, 2020. He moved out, which was the fifth time during our marriage that we'd been separated. I was still taking it in and going to counseling. I read Boundaries for Marriage, and that helped too. I credit the resources that you gave me with the courage to stay strong because on the podcast... I had never heard this no-contact thing. Sometimes you just have to go no-contact because that's how they keep pulling you in. So I went as no-contact as I could, more than I ever had before. It changed something in me, so by the time I entered your program, I filed for divorce two weeks after I joined Flying Free.

NATALIE: Okay.

MARIE: I'm an accountant by trade, so everything was in order. I did course one, course two, course three.

NATALIE: You sound like me. I must make sure I check it off in the right order.

MARIE: I'm not much of a TV watcher. It's a series if I'm going to watch something. I don't just watch TV every night. So that's what I was doing in the evenings. I was just doing your stuff. I filed for divorce—I forgot what the date was. But that was huge because even that day I went to sign the papers, I still thought, "God, is this right?" because when I gave my life to the Lord, I wanted to please Him. I did not think that God was mean. One of the core beliefs I have that kept me in that marriage for so long... I have seen many people divorce and have great lives. It wasn't like I thought God was going to punish me and I was going to go to hell if I got a divorce even though I heard, "God hates divorce." But I believed God would be more glorified if I stayed in the marriage. I thought it would look better. It would lift high the name of Jesus more if I stayed in the marriage. I forgot to mention this. (I think I mentioned before that you said it, but you didn't remember it. So who knows if you said it or someone else said it, but I credit you with saying this because it sounds like something I've heard in Flying Free over and over.) But God loves me more than He hates divorce.

NATALIE: I think Leslie Vernick is the person who said that.

MARIE: Maybe you were talking on this podcast about that because I know Leslie coached you. Maybe you said that; I don't know. But I heard that, and God used that to grab... I remember the first time I said that to my husband. I didn't say it—I yelled it to



him. I said, "God loves me," because he knew it was so important to me. It was so important to me to please God, and he used that to his advantage.

NATALIE: Yes!

MARIE: I can't tell you how many times he said, "I thought you were a Christian woman." You know all that. I've heard it all.

NATALIE: That is spiritual abuse right there. That's what that is—using God to control someone else.

MARIE: So I am divorced.

NATALIE: When was your divorce final?

MARIE: It was fast, Natalie, because our kids were older. Our youngest was eighteen. No, she had just turned nineteen. So I didn't go after any of his retirement or anything. Thank God, I live in my childhood home. He threatened a couple of times, "I could make you sell it, and I could get some of the equity." I said, "Okay. I'll get some of your retirement too." It was such a blessing. It was November 2020 when it was final, so it happened fast.

NATALIE: That's great. It doesn't usually. For anyone listening, it doesn't usually go that way.

MARIE: No, it doesn't. I hear that, so I thank God for that. I think I didn't realize how exhausted I was until he left. I knew I was going no-contact. When you walk around on eggshells for over two decades, you are exhausted. I'm sure you've experienced this too. I've heard this from a lot of the women. You make other connections. In 2011, I was diagnosed with tachycardia. The doctors could never figure out why in the world... What is this? They did all kinds of tests on my heart. They thought I had mitral valve prolapse. I thought, "I know why I have tachycardia." I've researched. It's connected to complex PTSD. Your body is holding all of that. I've read The Body Keeps the Score because of you. I've found out a lot of stuff and made those connections. But now I'm looking forward. Not that looking back is not important. Like God told the Israelites, "Remember. Remember Egypt." But He was telling them that so they wouldn't go back there. He also told them, "Don't romanticize what it was; it wasn't good," because they were saying, "Oh my God, you've got us here in the desert. We had all kinds of good stuff there." No, you didn't. You were a slave. They were beating you. So we've got to remember

correctly and truly. There's a lot of value in that, and I know God will continue to do that and heal me because I want that. But more importantly, I joined because something had to change. I had to change because I didn't want that to ever happen again. As you know... I say as you know because typically if you are in that kind of relationship there are other relationships like that. That's been true for me.

NATALIE: Yes.

MARIE: So I set a very hard boundary last week because I'm learning, I'm strong, and I'm doing that. My "why" is because I want to be all that God wants me to be, and I also want to be an emotionally healthy person for my children. I want them to see that.

NATALIE: Marie tell me about... You also went quickly from the Flying Free group to Flying Higher. If anyone is listening who is new to the podcast or new to my materials, Flying Free is a program I have for women of faith who are in the middle of an emotionally or spiritually abusive relationship. They could be in the middle of it or going through a separation or going through the divorce process. Then Flying Higher is something I created and started last year to help meet the needs of women who had been divorced—Christian women who are divorced—and want to rebuild their lives. Flying Higher is for Christian women who are divorced already; Flying Free is before they are divorced or if they don't want to ever get divorced. You went from joining Flying Free in October of last year, and I'm guessing you joined Flying Higher in January of this year. Is that correct?

MARIE: Yes.

NATALIE: Tell us a bit about... Let's go back before Flying Free. The reason for this podcast is that I want all of you listening to understand the benefits of being part of... There are so many free things out there for you. Take advantage of as many of them as you can. I put out a lot of free stuff too. It's great. Do that. Eat it like a little caterpillar eating all the good leaves so you can grow. But there comes a time when your growth is going to stagnate because your brain's programming is stuck on what it has been programmed to always believe and think. The program that I have helps rewire your brain systematically with new thoughts. We do it on a weekly basis in different ways. There are different things inside the program that help you do this. It's much more intense. If you like the podcasts..., would you say, Marie, that the program...? One of the things people say is, "I worried when I got into your Flying Free program it would just be a repeat of what you talk about on your podcast." What's your perception of that, Marie?



MARIE: No. Well, I mean the basic truths, yes. But I remember one of the first things I did when I got into Flying Free, I did the coursework and I listened to the expert workshops, which were excellent. I must admit; I didn't see the value of coaching until Flying Higher.

NATALIE: Yeah.

MARIE: So with Flying Free, I would get in. I would listen to the coaching. But I didn't do that as much as I do now. The expert workshops were amazing. Even yours. You did the one where you went to Bob and Polly Hamp's Conference and spoke about the brain. All that stuff is fascinating. I loved that. You did that in Flying Free, right?

NATALIE: It's in Flying Free and Flying Higher. Actually, no. I put some things in Flying Higher. It's interesting you brought that up because the ones I did with Bob Hamp this year in January 2021 I am putting in the Flying Free program this summer. So people in Flying Free will get those two workshops this summer. But I think I already put them in Flying Higher because I dump everything in Flying Higher.

MARIE: There is... I wish I could remember. I've looked back. I printed my coursework. You have workbooks or worksheets for all the courses in Flying Free and Flying Higher. I would print those out. They are different. Sometimes it's a journal exercise. Sometimes you have a video, and you ask us to do a reflection. Sometimes you bring a guest in. The courses are different, and I like that because it's not the same every time. We are using different parts of our... Sometimes we are doing the reflection. Sometimes you ask us to do a thought dump. All different things. I think that helps us as we learn. One course (I can't remember which one it was) I was standing in line to vote. I was listening to one of your courses in my earbuds while I was standing in line for an hour and a half. You said something that so radically changed my thinking about how our husbands, exes, or whatever use tactics that are abusive. I was still unlocking that whole thing about things being abusive. Part of it may have been when I asked my husband a question like, "Why were you gone so long? You said you were going to be back by 8, and you weren't home until midnight." He would turn it on me and said, "Oh my god, nobody could ever satisfy you. You expect perfection." You know that kind of thing. I remember standing in line thinking, "Why has nobody told me this? Why have I been in church for almost thirty years of my life and nobody has ever said this to me?" I was shocked. I had been going through this isolation. The people who knew who were in the church... I don't know that they had bad intentions. I don't think that. It's just that they don't know, or they think a pattern of infidelity is just a pattern of infidelity. They don't see that as destructive to a woman's soul as it is. I had never heard of betrayal trauma. I had never heard of complex PTSD. I had never heard of this stuff until your program. I'm sorry I got off track. You

asked me if I joined Flying Free and then I went fast to Flying Higher.

NATALIE: I was wondering... Well, you obviously got divorced during the time you were in Flying Free. So I supposed you figured to join Flying Higher next.

MARIE: I did because you kept advertising it as rebuilding. If you want to rebuild your life, and that is exactly what I felt I was doing.

NATALIE: Yes. You were ready for it. You had already done... I think you went on the accelerated version of Flying Free.

MARIE: I did.

NATALIE: Some people are ready for that. Some people come into the program and even getting an email is overwhelming to them. They are overwhelmed thinking they must read this email even if they don't feel like it. It is mostly because they are so overwhelmed by the abuse and by their life. One more thing is just too much. They feel that way and it keeps them stuck. We try to nurture those people along. Other people come in and cannot get enough. "24/7, I will ingest everything that you throw my way." So we try to have a lot for everybody. Tell everyone how when you come in it is a kind of like a Netflix subscription. If you just want to watch one hour of something one day a month, you can do that. You have a subscription. You certainly don't have to watch everything. I'm never going to watch everything on Netflix. But watch what you want to watch and take it at your own rate. That's another important thing I try to empower women with is to make their own decisions for what is best for them. Look around and decide. Every Monday morning, I give everyone an email. I've decided to start calling it my platter. This is your meal for the week. You can eat everything on your plate if you want to, or you can take one thing off your plate and eat it. But eat something. Eat something on the platter I give you every Monday morning, and you will grow. You will get stronger. Just eat a couple of bites if that is all you can eat. If you are really hungry, eat what's on this platter and I'll give you links to some more things if you want to eat more. Everyone needs to take it at their own pace. You took it fast. You jumped into Flying Higher. Why did you join Flying Higher? How has that helped take you further into your growth?

MARIE: I joined Flying Higher because I wanted to rebuild my life. I must admit, I didn't want to let go of Flying Free because I like to finish things, and I had not done all the courses yet. But I thought, "It's all right. I'm going to go to this next step. It's going to be okay." Best decision. It's been awesome. I'll tell you how Flying Higher has... I'm sitting in a



room that results from Flying Higher because I started when you started the course, "You are Your Greatest Hero." But because I was eating it all up and was like a hungry caterpillar, I thought, "But I want to do this other course." So I did "Get Anything Done."

NATALIE: Awesome!

MARIE: For five years I've been in this house. My husband was in this house until he moved out. I had wanted the sunroom to be redone and painted. Instead, it became a catch-all room. I could barely even sit in here. But this was my mom's favorite room, and I wanted it to be my sanctuary, too. My husband was not interested in that, I guess. But I did the "Get Anything Done" course, and I was inspired to do this room. So I did it. That's with me wondering about the budget because my husband had just left. I didn't have his income. My income was the same, but I was very unhappy in my job and about ready to quit because (another story) I'm going to seminary. So I did it! I got a new tile floor, painted it, got new trim. I just love it! It's one of my favorite rooms. That is a direct result of that course because you helped us think about it. There was one where you did the reverse engineering.

NATALIE: Yep.

MARIE: Think about what you want. I had a vision for the sunroom. Then you did it backwards. That was so powerful. Another thing Flying Higher has done is... I don't attend a church anymore because church is at 10:00 on Sundays. It's our Flying Higher time.

NATALIE: We have our Flying Higher classes every Sunday at 10:00. You don't have to come live. Not everyone comes live. Just a small percentage comes live. We record it, and you can watch the recording later. But there is a group of women who come live. I think it's fun to do it live. It's kind of our church.

MARIE: I'm not saying I won't ever go back to church. I am going to seminary, but not now.

NATALIE: Maybe you'll start another church that is yours.

MARIE: Right now, it is my community. I've made some good friends from there. What makes your program so beautiful is because it is for women of faith. There is something unique about hard marriages for women of faith. I think we've said why—because we do want to please God. So we go into our marriages thinking this is for life and it's supposed to represent Jesus and the church. But one person can't make that happen.



I've spent over two decades trying to make that happen. In Flying Higher I've been coached by you three times, I think. One time was last week during the forum. I don't know if you realized that.

NATALIE: No, I knew that was you.

MARIE: That's the day I set the boundary that I needed to. I think it was because I had gotten that coaching. I didn't know I was going to have to set the boundary. Something just necessitated that—but I did it. I don't think it was a coincidence that I was coached that day and that I was asking the forum what they thought. It's very important. I listen to the coaching every week now. If I can't be there live, I'll listen to it because I learn something every single time. What we don't realize is that you don't divorce, everything is okay, and we're going to just rebuild our life. No! Over half my life I've lived in an emotionally destructive marriage, and there's a lot of rewiring I need to do—in how I relate with my children, how I relate at work. Recently, I left a place where I was the accounting manager there. They taught me well. They treated me well in the beginning, but it had become a not-healthy environment. I just don't want to be in unhealthy environments if I can help it. I had the courage even though I didn't have a job. I gave them plenty of notice and trained a person to take my place. But I'm not there anymore. Now I'm at this place, making more than I was, in a contract temporary job, which is what I wanted because I will start back school in August.

NATALIE: That is so awesome!

MARIE: I'm really amazed at how everything worked out.

NATALIE: Would you say that your confidence has grown in the last year compared to where you were a year ago? I think that is key.

MARIE: Yes. A hundred percent. The reason... We can all relate to this. If we step out of our fear and do something anyway, which a lot of times we will always be scared. When I took on the project in this sunroom, I thought, "How am I going to get the furniture out?" Well, I did. I'm resourceful. I had to turn some of the furniture upside down and stand it up, but I did it. When we do something and make the goal, it builds our confidence. Even if we mess up during it, we are still learning something. My confidence in who I am and even that I am in this job is amazing. The confidence that I had to even do the interview. The confidence that someone could fill in for an assistant controller, I thought, "I've never been an assistant controller." They started asking me a series of questions, and I said, "I've never done that, but I can. I can learn."



NATALIE: Yeah, that's great. That is self-confidence. You are confident in who you are. You are maybe not confident in that job because you've never done it before, but you are confident that you can do whatever is put in front of you to do.

MARIE: I can learn it. That's what I told them. I said, "I've never used that software, but I'm pretty good at learning any software." I think it was that. I was shocked when the next day they told me they wanted me. A recruiter contacted me and put me in this temporary contract job until September. But I'm doing it. I've been there four weeks now, and it's great. That makes me even more confident about the next thing.

NATALIE: Yes, exactly. You build momentum in your life, and it builds a completely different life. I want to tell those of you listen who are thinking, "How in the world do I get into these programs?" In the last month... I'm recording this in June, and you will hear this in August. In June, I decided to go with an application process so people who want to get into the programs can get in on a regular basis. We will open it more frequently instead of every six months, but you must apply to get in. The reason we are requiring an application process now is because I want to make it a little more difficult to get in. Here's why. There are a lot of people who will come in, will pay the money, but they won't do the work. Again, you don't have to do all the work like Marie did. I think she's the exception to the rule. But you must do something. Otherwise you are just... It's like taking your money and flushing it down the toilet. I really don't want anybody to do that. My goal is that people would come in and get transformed. It starts with transforming the way you think about yourself, the way you think about God, and the way you think about your marriage, about life, and about all the things. So we do that systematically, and I do that. I take you by the hand and walk you through all the steps little by little. I'll get you there. One year from now, you could be like Marie. A year from now is coming. It's coming regardless of what you decide to do. Who do you want to be a year from now? Do you want to be the same version of yourself that you are today, or do you want to be a different version of yourself? Marie, do you have any regrets about this last year?

MARIE: No.

NATALIE: Probably not. If you are interested in joining Flying Free, go to joinflyingfree.com and there will be a link. There will be an application at the bottom. Fill out that application and you'll be put on a temporary hold. I'll send you some emails to encourage you in some things you can do while you are waiting. If your application shows us you are ready to do this work and that you really... Notice how Marie was champing at the bit in both cases—champing at the bit to get into Flying Free and



champing at the bit to get into Flying Higher. Those are the people who will come in and do that work. That's when you are going to change. That's what I want to see for you guys. I want you to be champing at the bit a little so that when you get in, you are hungry for it and can get those paradigm shifts in your life. It's joinflyingfree.com to find the application for Flying Free, and it's joinflyinghigher.com to find the application for Flying Higher. Marie, before we go, tell us... I know you have a blog too. Tell us about where people can find you if they want to connect. Did you write a series on your blog about spiritual abuse?

MARIE: I did. It's called "Why I Left Giant Church Incorporated."

NATALIE: What church?

MARIE: "Why I Left Giant Church Incorporated."

NATALIE: Great title.

MARIE: Livelikeitmatters.net

NATALIE: I love that too. Livelikeitmatters.net. You will find Marie and her writings. If you've had any kind of spiritual abuse, or if you are wondering if that's going on in your church, check out her series, "Why I Left Giant Church Incorporated." Is there a link to easily find that on your blog?

MARIE: Yes. If you go to the home page, there's a tab that says Giant Church Incorporated. All the posts are there. I want to say something else, Natalie, just in case people think on the other side of this it looks like, "Well, she's doing great." When New Year's Eve 2018 was turning into 2019, I did not want to be on this earth anymore. I was at my darkest. I was sitting at my dining room table all alone because my husband and I were separated then, and I asked the Lord to take me home because I couldn't foresee. I said, "It cannot keep going like this. I can't do it." I was in a very dark place, but I slowly got out of the pit—one very small step at a time. That may have been... I can't remember if I was already going to counseling then, but that was part of it too. I had to have somebody to talk me off the ledge. It was really bad.

NATALIE: I can relate to that, and so many women can.

MARIE: I went from the dark into the light literally. So it is possible. If we look at the story of the Bible, God is a God of liberation and flourishing. That's what He wants for us. If you



just look at the story of the Israelites, that is what He did with them. In a land flowing with milk and honey—that is where He wanted them to be. That's not just for later. That is for later in eternity, but it's now too.

NATALIE: Yes. He didn't intend for us to be heaps and puddles on the floor for the rest of our lives.

MARIE: No. He does not intend for us to enable people to continue to sin against us. That is not glorifying to Him.

NATALIE: Right. Marie is a beautiful example of this process. If you've been listening to the podcast, there are several other survivor stories we did in 2020. We also have dozens of what we call Butterfly Stories in the Flying Free Sisterhood. We have dozens of stories from women. They share their story for about an hour in a video format, so you get to see them instead of just hearing them. They tell their stories, and they are all different. They all have different experiences of abuse, different backgrounds, different ways of responding, different ways of getting out. They are fascinating. I'm so glad there are so many of them and in such variety because it shows that this is not a cookie cutter process and that women are not cookie cutter people. Each one of you is special and unique, and your process is going to look different. We don't try to just put you on this conveyor belt and run you through... Well, we don't actually do anything. You will never ever hear me tell you what to do—ever! But I will teach you to make good choices for yourself, and you get to decide. Then we get to have the privilege and honor of supporting you in whatever you decide for your life, whether you decide to stay, leave, stay and leave and then stay again, or leave 500 times. We just love you and want to support you in whatever your journey looks like. Marie, thank you so much for being willing to come onto the podcast and share.

MARIE: Thank you. I can't believe it. I listened to all those podcasts, and now I got to be on one.

NATALIE: I know. I think it is so much fun. I just love that so much.

MARIE: I do too.

NATALIE: For those of you who listened today, thank you so much for listening. Until next time, fly free!

