

DOING DEEP INTERNAL HEALING THROUGH SPIRITUAL PROCESS GROUPS

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 144 of the Flying Free podcast! Today, our guest is Megan Owen, and you may know her as the founder of Give Her Wings. She has moved on from that and she is doing other things now, and that's why we brought her back on. You can actually hear her interview in Episode 40 of the Flying Free podcast. In that episode, she talks about how the church can actually help victims instead of re-victimizing them, like it often does, and she also introduces everyone to the Give Her Wings Academy, which has been running now for how many years?

MEGAN: Is it two, maybe two years?

NATALIE: Yeah? About two years? She talks about the Give Her Wings Academy, and that is a place where leaders and counselors can get certified training on how to help abuse victims. Today, she is going to talk about her new adventure that she is doing. Welcome to the podcast, Megan!

MEGAN: Natalie, I am so glad to be here, and I'm glad to talk with you again. It's an honor. Thanks for having me.

NATALIE: I just want to say too, I can still hear a clicking noise, but we're just going to say "Hey everybody, there's a clicking noise that Megan and I cannot get rid of in this recording, and we've restarted and restarted and restarted and we can't get rid of it, so we are just going to record this. If you hate clicking noises, you can click out, because this episode is going to be very clicky. Otherwise, listen, because there is going to be some great stuff in this episode, and Megan has some really great things to share." So first of all, why don't you tell us about your journey since you left Give Her Wings, and why don't you tell us what Give Her Wings is, first of all for people who don't know, and then just tell us all the things, Megan.

MEGAN: Well, I would love to tell you all the things, Natalie. You can probably hear the smile on my face because I'm so happy to be connected to you in this way. I've really enjoyed our friendship and it has been amazing observing Flying Free and watching the heights to which it has flown. I hear all the time from people how much they appreciate what you do, Natalie, and how helpful everything has been to them. I'm

very excited about this journey because I have learned so much. You know, I started Give Her Wings in 2012 because there was a gap. And that's what I think founders do and starters do. We look around and we say, "There's a deep need here and I would like to be part of whatever God is doing to fill that need." And I really do believe that's a big part of what you do as a Christian. You look around and say, "What is happening in the world, in my country, in my state, in my community, and where do I find my place in the center of this storm?" At the time in 2012, there was a deep need for support for Christian women who were leaving abuse. The church was falling short. We all know that's a big problem within the church walls.

So we started Give Her Wings because we wanted to be the church to women who were being ostracized, who were being harassed, who didn't have the support that they needed. We wanted to come alongside single mothers in particular and help them with resources and just love them. I did that for seven years, Natalie, and then was so pleased to be able to step back and hand the ministry over to much more capable hands. Well, not much more capable, but younger, more millennial hands so that they could take Give Her Wings to places I never could. That's been a joy to watch that take off in different ways. At the time, I was very attuned to the Holy Spirit and I am still. We're close. I felt a really strong sense that I needed to go into chaplaincy. I already had my Master's in counseling and several certifications in crisis response, and I went and did the clinical pastoral education as an intern at the hospital. After that, I was hired by a few different hospitals and I found myself smack dab in the middle of the onset of a pandemic. Natalie, I knew exactly what I was supposed to do. I was there. I was the only chaplain who could go into Covid rooms, who could go into ICU rooms. I was connecting families with patients. I was working around the clock. And I did that for six months. It was a temporary job, and then it was over.

Then I took a couple more weeks and I felt God very clearly saying to me, "It's time to circle the wagons with all of the resources that I've given you Megan, and help women heal." So I started this new journey and opened my own private practice and I am now certified in EMDR, which I know is very near and dear to your heart, Natalie, as well as mine, and I went through the DNMS training and got certified in suicidology, and now I work with clients one-on-one. I have a very full practice. I have a waiting list and I do trauma. I work with helping mostly women, but I do also have about five or six men, former pastors, to heal trauma from all the different kinds of abuse. It's incredibly rewarding. I love it. I love my clients. After that, I looked around again and saw the need for companioning those who are deconstructing and haven't really been able to find their place. I know that your listeners understand this feeling of finding yourself outside of the walls of a church, unable to go to church without feeling extremely triggered, and yet they don't want to give up on their faith.

So I started spiritual process groups, which are very small, intimate, confidential groups of two to three women plus a moderator, either myself or Casey Chapel, and we listen to stories and we have several units. We have units one, two, and three. Each is twelve to fifteen weeks with little final projects at the end and certificates. We help each other process through different topics and our own stories. We mirror; we learn to reflect; we learn the art of reflection, they have a reading and a video by yours truly, and we go through these different topics such as grief, which we spend a couple of weeks on at the very beginning. We touch on table fellowship, alternative community, mysticism and contemplation, and that's unit one. Unit two has things like sex and purity culture, death and sin, and beauty. And then we have unit three, which goes even deeper. My perspective is that in order to heal from spiritual abuse and be able to safely deconstruct, we have to have an incredibly safe space with people that we trust, and then we must go deeper.

There's a really great book called "The Very Good Gospel" by Lisa Sharon Harper, and she talks about thin theology versus thick theology. She may have borrowed that term from Walter Brueggemann. When we have that thin theology, it doesn't make it through the hard stuff. When I say that, I'm talking about the spoon-fed things that we hear at church that just don't carry. They don't fit into every category. In my opinion, the remedy for that is to go deeper into that thicker theology and learn to hear God's voice on our own apart from voices we've heard in our past, our inner critic, preachers or abusive husbands, and then really learn to discern God's voice into our own spiritual course health.

NATALIE: I love that. That is a good book. So, this has three units.

MEGAN: It does.

NATALIE: It sounds like the whole thing takes maybe half a year or so?

MEGAN: Well, if you want. We've been through this cycle a couple times now, and the first unit may have five to seven groups, and then the second unit is optional. This is all optional. Then we may have about half the people go to unit two and then even half of that for unit three because it just gets a little bit more scholastic and it does take a little bit of time as you get toward unit three. But the bonds that are built are just healing. Just those relationships can be healing.

NATALIE: It sounds amazing.

MEGAN: Yeah. We don't go through a book, but we have several readings that we may

do throughout the week in preparation, and then we talk about how that affected us, what came up for us, what may be different, or an “aha” moment. Then each woman talks for ten minutes or so, and then we each reflect back to her what we sensed and what we saw and what we heard as she spoke. It’s really an unusual process. We love it. We all love it. Can’t get enough of it.

NATALIE: So, practically speaking, do you meet once a week? And for how long?

MEGAN: We meet once a week for an hour a week. It’s very confidential, very intimate, and very, very healing. We practice this art of reflection because it’s hard to listen. It’s very difficult to listen and also very difficult not to bring in our own experiences to that person, the speaker, because we want to connect, and that’s one of our ways of connecting. Lots of new skills developed within these groups, and really great, tight relationships. I also do a relationship process group, Natalie, and that’s new. I’ve started with two pilot groups a few weeks ago, and those relational process groups are for people who may have been diagnosed with CPTSD or with Borderline Personality Disorder. When you have been in an abusive situation for so long, it’s very difficult to re-learn (or just learn if you don’t have a baseline) how to have healthy relationships, even eye contact, or having self-compassion and compassion for others. These are skills that I teach in the relational process groups. So far those are pretty fantastic as well. Lots of breakthrough moments there.

NATALIE: Is this all local, or can people online sign up for these groups? How does that work?

MEGAN: Right. It is not local. I mean, it can be, but it is all online. All of the trauma therapy that I do is online. Well, almost all of it. About 95% is online. I work with a platform that is HIPPA-compliant. It’s like Zoom, and we get on there and we do our thing. It’s really pretty fabulous.

NATALIE: My brain is just exploding right now, because I’m thinking of people that I know that would love this, and plus the listeners too. It’s like you’ve done this unique thing and you’ve married therapy with spiritual deconstruction and rebuilding.

MEGAN: Exactly, Natalie. That was a perfect way to explain what’s going on here. I feel really blessed to be able to look inside and say, “What have I got, and how can this be put together and what can I offer?” And what’s come out is just a really unique flavor of healing. It’s very exciting. I don’t know anybody else who does this kind of therapy. Some of the people who are in the spiritual process groups or the relational process groups are also one-on-one clients with me and they may be doing EMDR, they may be

doing DNMS or talk therapy, and it all goes hand in glove really beautifully.

NATALIE: I don't know what DNMS is, can you tell me more about that?

MEGAN: Absolutely. It's not well-known. DNMS stands for "Developmental Needs Meeting Strategy." It is very multi-dimensional and comprehensive client-centered ego-state therapy. It was developed by Shirley Jean Schmidt. It's informed by ego-state theory. I incorporate a lot of internal family systems theory into it. I also incorporate a lot of somatic psychology into it. It is a re-parenting strategy. Natalie, we know about EMDR. That is really a kind of emotionally life-saving therapy to where you bring forward a traumatic memory and it's reprocessed and you grieve all of it in like, one hour. You're exhausted, and then it's incorporated into your emotional life, it takes its rightful place in your memories, it helps to heal triggers, and it's great for PTSD. It's great for people who have suffered from one traumatic event or several.

DNMS uses that alternating bilateral stimulation just like EMDR does, but that's pretty much where the similarities end. DNMS works with whole ego-states that are wounded. Say you have a childhood that is entirely traumatic. Your whole childhood is traumatic. There's no baseline. You can't really do a million little EMDR sessions because it's that child part that's wounded. DNMS can work with a whole part of our sub-personalities that we all have and bring understanding and correct misunderstandings and bring healing to a stuck part of ourselves because we all have these sub-personalities, right? We have wounded parts, we have attachment wounded parts, we have child parts that feel hurt and powerless alone, and we have parts of us that were abused in our marriages or our churches, and those parts of us need to have healing brought to them. We kind of work with other parts of ourselves to re-parent any one of those parts to help people manage painful emotions and troubling behaviors like withdrawing or drinking or overeating or eating disorders. And then we just meet those parts where they are and bring them forward into the present day to show them that they are not in that wounding environment anymore.

NATALIE: That sounds incredible.

MEGAN: It really is.

NATALIE: I did some IFS work just skirting the high level stuff with the Flying Free Sisterhood group, and then in Flying Higher. We have a coach, her name is Barb Spanier. Do you know Barb Spanier?

MEGAN: I know that name.

NATALIE: Okay. Well, she's been certified in the IFS coaching world, but this takes it even a step further and I just think it's incredible. I just can't believe how God has fit together all of your experiences and not just your personal experiences, but even your work experiences and your training and the things that you've followed the Holy Spirit where He's leading you and guiding you like, "Oh, we're gonna do this," and, "Oh, we're gonna do this," and then He's woven together this incredible talent-cluster that you have that really truly is very unique. And then you're not just keeping it to yourself. You're developing these programs that can actually help people in a multi-dimensional way. I think it's incredible.

MEGAN: Well, I don't want to sound braggadocious, but I have seen amazing results, and I have gotten some beautiful letters from clients saying, "You know, I went to two or three different therapists who couldn't help me, and I am so grateful that I found you and that you do the DNMS therapy." It's unique because the healing comes from the person. If we grow up in a fundamental or very abusive or maybe an evangelical church that tells us that we can't trust ourselves, we feel very lost at sea. We're told that we are desperately wicked. We are told that our hearts are wicked, that nobody can know them. Don't trust yourself. And that is very splintering to a person's psyche. I have some DID clients, Natalie, that I work with, to help bring these parts together, and just fix the polarization that's created by really poor theology. And I do bring in a lot of the spiritual, and what that will look like is, "Listen, God breathed His life, His breath into you. You have the breath of life. God created you and said, 'You are very good.' God gave you a soul, and that part of you is eternal. Why in the world would we turn our backs on all of that and not trust what God has put inside of us?"

So a lot of that DNMS therapy is connecting us to the parts of ourselves that we've completely rejected because we were told they were wicked. So rather than turning our backs on that part of us that has an eating disorder or that part of us that we don't even like, we work to turn our nurturing adult self toward those parts and we become, along with God, the fountain of healing within ourselves rather than looking for affirmation everywhere else. I'm really glad you said that Natalie, about my being willing to share it all. I want to share it all. That has been my calling for so many years to say, "God, what are you doing and now, how can I share that with your people, and how can we teach people to do this on their own?" A lot of what I do is say, "Here are skills for you to bring healing to yourself also." And that's very, very empowering.

NATALIE: Yes. I often say to people, "You are destined to be your own rescuer," because Christian women have been programmed to believe that rescue or good feelings or being taken care of or safety is from something outside of themselves, and they're always trying to search for that. This is why patriarchy has such a hold on women,

because we're looking to someone else or something else to give us our value or worth. And it's all inside of us. God put it there. God put it inside of us, so you're just taking that concept and you're teaching people, "Here's how you can heal yourself. Here's what God already gave you. All of this stuff is already inside of you." I say this in the Flying Free group a lot: It's like Dorothy with the red slippers on her feet. She has the power all along to go back home to Kansas, but she doesn't know it. She has no idea. She has to learn about that power and then use that power in order to get her back to Kansas. This is a little bit different, but God gave us all a pair of red slippers inside of us, and Megan, in the story of the Wizard of Oz, you're like Glinda. Is it Glenda? Glinda?

MEGAN: I knew you were going to say that. I have friends who tease me and tell me I'm a middle-aged Disney princess, and it's so true!

NATALIE: It's totally true. You guys, if you don't know Megan, you have to follow her, because you will realize. You are absolutely a middle-aged Disney princess. Oh my gosh, I love that. Anyway, Megan comes along and teaches you to use that power that you already have inside of you. I think it's such a beautiful thing. All right, your waiting list is going to get longer now, because I want you to tell people how they can get on your waiting list or how they can find you or access any of these things.

MEGAN: Absolutely, and we're growing. This is my style: we're going to start with this concept and we're going to run with it. I love what you just said and I know we need to wrap up soon, but thank you for bringing up the ruby slippers. That's exactly it and I just have to say, those good feelings are kind of like an island. You find an island where you can experience those good feelings within yourself. That's when we use the alternating bilateral stimulation, Natalie. Let's tap that in, let's seal that good feeling in. You did this. You did not need anybody else to insert this into you. It came from you. It's so powerful to watch a woman experience that.

NATALIE: So this is like the other side of what EMDR can do. Instead of processing through a traumatic event, is this waking up the brain to possibility and then rewiring the brain to that using that bilateral stimulation?

MEGAN: Yes, that's a great way to put it, and I would also add that it's making the connections with your own resources that you have within you. A woman may be in session and she has her own resources. These are part of herself. It may be spiritual, it might be Jesus, it might be the Holy Spirit, it might be a grandmother who was always affirming, never judgemental, and these are her resources. These are the things that have been given to her soul, or her spiritual core self. She's there. And so we connect her with what is already inside of her, and that is the awakening. And then turning her

toward the parts of herself that have been isolated and bringing those parts in. And then it's processed with the ABS, the alternating bilateral stimulation. It's really, really healing — incredibly healing.

NATALIE: This is fascinating. This is so fascinating. My mind is just exploding right now. I'm thinking of a couple of my kids. How old do they have to be to do this?

MEGAN: Right. I knew you would love this, Natalie. I don't take children myself. But, I could connect you with people who do. So, to sign off, all you need to do is go to mountaincitychristiancounseling.com. You can send an email, but if you scroll down, you can go ahead and fill out just a little box at the bottom of the website that says, "Schedule an intake with Megan." Don't be afraid to do this even though I have a waiting list. I have a waiting list for one-on-one therapy, but not a waiting list for this spiritual process group. We're doing cycles of three, and we keep them all going. Right now, we have a couple for unit two, and a couple for unit three. We have several for unit one, and we just keep starting them over. Don't be afraid or turned away by the waiting list, because we're making it work. We're going to make it work. It's so vital.

NATALIE: Okay, say the website again?

MEGAN: It is mountaincitychristiancounseling.com.

NATALIE: All right. Well, this has been eye-opening for me. We scheduled this interview and both of us are running around like chickens with our heads cut off with everything going on in our lives. So we collided this morning and put our heads together and were like, "Okay. What are we going to say? How are we going to do this?" And then there was this clicking noise that I don't think I hardly ever heard, so it ended up being okay. And here we are. It ended up being this totally eye-opening session for me. I didn't know half of this stuff and I'm so, so excited to know it now. And now I'm just thinking, "How can I incorporate this and how can I make sure that my people know about this?" So I'm really glad that you came on the podcast and that you shared it with the listeners here.

MEGAN: It's just an honor, Natalie. I just love being part of your ministry. I love what you do. Always have. Thank you for having me.

NATALIE: You're so welcome. And those of you listening, thank you for joining us for this episode and until next time, fly free.