

HOW NOT TO BE AN ASS: INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR ANDREW BAUMAN

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 164 of the Flying Free Podcast. Before we begin this episode, I need to give a disclaimer. We will be using the word "ass" in this podcast episode possibly quite a bit, because our guest Sir Andrew Bauman of Sherwood Forest has a brand-new book out called "How Not To Be an *SS," and we're going to be talking about that today among other things.

So if you have kids, you may want to listen to this when they aren't around, and if you're a member of the church police, just turn around and go home, because there's nothing to see here. Just a couple of terrible Christians having a totally rebellious conversation using some naughty words found in the Bible, strangely enough, and there's nothing you can do about it. "Oh stuffin-fluff," as Winnie the Pooh would say. For the rest of you, are you guys ready to have some rebellious fun? Let's welcome our guest, Andrew Bauman, to the podcast.

ANDREW: Thank you so much for having me. I'm so glad to be here.

NATALIE: I'm glad to have you here. Say, I just want to let everyone know that Sir Andrew Bauman of Sherwood Forest does have cred behind him. And I think he will tell you that he is fully capable of being an ass, which I'm sure we're going to get to later, right?

ANDREW: Oh yes.

NATALIE: But he also has some solid credentials behind him. He's the founder and director of the Christian Counseling Center for sexual health and trauma, and he's a licensed mental health counselor with a master of arts in counseling, psychology from the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. That is a mouthful, good grief!

ANDREW: It is, it is.

NATALIE: He's also the author of lots of books. I didn't even realize until I read the list. He's the author of his newest book, "How Not to Be an *SS," "The Sexually Healthy Man," "Floating Away," "Stumbling Toward Wholeness," "The Psychology of Porn," and

he co-authored a book with his wife, Dr. Christie Bauman. I love being able to say that. It's called "A Brave Lament," and it was a book and an award-winning film.

ANDREW: Thank you.

NATALIE: I want to talk about your naughty new book, and we're going to get to that in a bit. But first of all, a couple of the women in my program had some questions specifically for you, and apparently you're a popular figure over there and they want to know all the things from Andrew.

ANDREW: Let's do it.

NATALIE: This first question is a follow-up to our interview, which we did in 2019, and for those of you who are listening, if you want to go back and listen to that one, it's Episode 41. It's called "The Intersection Between Abuse and Pornography." So she heard that interview and wanted to do a follow-up question. And actually, that's kind of what spurred this on, but also your book happened to come out at the same time and it was like, "Yes, this is a must."

So she wanted to know how you would advise a woman who discovers that her husband is using pornography and then she confronts him with it, and then he retaliates against her and even gets other spiritual leaders or family members to defend him against her confrontation, almost like she's the bad person because she's making a big deal out of it or something. What should she do next?

ANDREW: Sadly, that is an all-too-common story that I'm sure you hear as well, but I hear it all the time. And that's just part of the gaslighting. That's part of the man defending himself so he can continue to act out. And my advice, my counsel would be to trust your body. Trust your gut. If something feels off, something about his presence, it's most likely correct. God resides in your body, so trust your body.

So if he starts gaslighting and bringing in, sadly, pastors and most likely other men who want to justify their pornographic style of relating, you need to find voices like yours, like mine, others who understand this dynamic more fully to say, "That's not okay. Porn is not okay," even though it's normalized, yes. Even though it's common, yes. All of this is true. And many men struggle with pornography, and they can get help from quality resources that are dealing with the core issues, the core brokenness, the core wounding, rather than just talking about behavior modification and just skimming the surface. Porn is a much deeper issue, and you gotta find the correct help.

My first thing would be to trust your body, trust your gut. Have those firm boundaries in place around your own body, your own sexuality, because it's not okay. They're having an affair or they're literally getting off and using other women and then trying to justify that. It's not okay.

NATALIE: Yeah. And I think it's important for women to also understand that there's nothing they can do about... Once you've confronted them and given them an opportunity to get help or get change, beyond that, you've done your part. There's nothing really more that you can do.

ANDREW: Exactly.

NATALIE: Then, looking at your own life and deciding, "Okay, this is who I'm living with now, this is the kind of person I'm living with. Now what kind of person am I? What choices do I have in front of me? What can I do? Where is my control and power?" It's obviously not going to be over him; it's going to be in your own life.

ANDREW: Exactly.

NATALIE: So on that note though, do you see... I know you work with men who actually do want help. What kind of success do you see, and do these women have help?

ANDREW: Yeah, it really depends on how much they want to suffer. People pay me a lot of money to help them bleed and to suffer. Basically to fillet them like a fish and then create this deep humility, this deep brokenness that then says, "I am becoming a safe and a good man who can actually be a good lover." But if they're unwilling to suffer, if they're unwilling to enter the crucifixion, there's no hope for resurrection. There's no hope for change.

NATALIE: That is so, so good. Even with the women that I work with, I tell them right up front, "Going through this is going to be hell. If you're up for it, let's go through hell together," and that's how the transformation takes place.

ANDREW: Exactly. And that's literally the only way to trust a man who has betrayed. I truly believe men can change, but the only way to do it is if it's actually a bloody transformation. Cheap forgiveness or cheap change is not actually helpful. Just giving lip service, just giving a bunch of Bible verses, is not helpful to genuine change. There has to be blood, there has to be death, unfortunately.

NATALIE: Yes. That reminds me, I saw in the private forum that I'm a part of that

someone had posted a picture. Their husband had made his bed... they're separated. They're in-house separated, so they're separated but in the same house. She opened his bedroom door and peeked inside after he had gone to work. His bed was perfectly made and on his bed was an open Bible.

ANDREW: Oh, wow! I bet she should trust him immediately.

NATALIE: Exactly!

ANDREW: That right there, that is a perfect example of the exact opposite of what would be trustworthy.

NATALIE: Yeah. It's like, "Here's how I've changed: I make my bed now, and I leave an open Bible on top of it."

ANDREW: That's all about performance. That's completely the opposite, whereas genuine repentance — genuine change — is not about show. It's not about words. It's literally about a lived humility that you walk in. And it's this daily, really non-sexy, kind of boring change that is consistent and stable over a long period of time.

NATALIE: Yes. Okay, so another woman wrote in and she had a question. She said, "I would love to know if Andrew thinks that the marriage intensives that he and his wife conduct are effective for emotionally abusive men as well. I know he really gets these types of guys unlike many counselors who offer intensives," (of which I have plenty of experience with, by the way) "so I would really appreciate hearing his thoughts, experiences, and perspective on this."

ANDREW: I say this all the time: We have to screen everybody that comes in. Anybody who has an active addiction, any male who's an active abuser, don't come. It's not going to be helpful. They're not going to pass our screening process. Now, if the man is doing what I just described, and he's on this journey and he's sober and he's owning his depravity and his wife feels safe emotionally, safe enough, then yeah. You might stay in different locations, you might have boundaries within, but yeah. We're going to dive in deep. We're going to get to it. But there's a baseline.

It's not helpful if this dude is just... He's going to make it about ten minutes, and then I'm going to piss him off so much he's going to leave. It's not helpful. But there's no refunds, right? I'll take your money, but you're gone. It's not okay. You have to have a baseline of health to even do this type of work in a relationship.

But when that happens, I think it's some of the most... The profound work, when there's this baseline of health when you do the recovery together, eye to eye, face to face, and there's that genuine eye-to-eye repentance, genuine brokenness, when you can hold your spouse's face and you can hold and actually see for the first time the genuine harm that you've perpetrated, and the repentance can be so powerful and deep, and then it's done in this intimate and beautiful way... but there has to be prework before that. And we screen everybody, and for a lot of people we say "no."

NATALIE: Interesting. So, I'm just curious, what are some of the questions that you would ask the man that he would need to pass in order to get through?

ANDREW: The next step, so you know, intake or whatever, and then I'll set up, if the dude is kind of questionable or if we've gotta do more screening to make sure, then we do three phone sessions. We do a phone session package where then I, in a sense, counsel and consult with him over three sessions. And that's where "Hey, is this guy in a safe enough place, has he done enough work, or does he need more weekly work?" And then we have a whole affiliate program where there's counselors that I've trained with and trust. So we'll send him to one of our affiliates to do weekly work, to do story work, to dive into their sexuality, to read a bunch of books.

They gotta do the groundwork before they can even get to a place of safety, where couples work is helpful and beneficial.

NATALIE: Okay, that's good to know. That's really good to know. I've not seen that, at least with the one I was a part of.

ANDREW: So many are just kind of a general couples therapy without... If you don't have a domestic violence framework to couples work, it can actually be the exact opposite. You're actually just giving them — the perpetrator — more language to be more defensive. And you're actually just training them to be better at hiding, rather than the exact opposite of what we're trying to do here, which is actually build safety, intimacy, connection, and actually robust, beautiful, pleasurable, mutual sexuality. These are the things that we're actually trying to do.

NATALIE: That's so good. Okay, let's talk about your book. It just came out. I got a copy. I read it. It's wonderful. And it's not just for guys.

ANDREW: No.

NATALIE: It's a great book for women to read, and tell us why.

ANDREW: I'm finding a lot of women are really connecting with it just because, in a sense, they already knew this, but they haven't necessarily experienced... Maybe they experienced a bunch of gaslighting and not a man, in a sense, affirming, "No, this is actually true what you're experiencing. And here's some language to help define what you're experiencing."

And I know it because of myself. I know it because I was a porn addict for thirteen years. I know it because that long-term addiction helped cause me to look at women as "less than." My theological training, becoming a pastor, being deep in the Southern Baptist church, "Oh, women are less than," I'm internalizing this patriarchal theology and thus then treating, not necessarily because I'm a bad dude, but it's because I was trained, but then porn trained me. And I have all these messages from church, from porn, that helps cement my superior status and women's less-than status.

So that created in me both an overt abuse but also a covert abuse that I'm perpetrating, right? So it takes years, fifteen years of my own work and my own therapy to begin to undo, and I'm trying to put language to that. All these books that I write are all basically selfish, because I'm trying to make sense of my own journey, and I need a place to put that.

NATALIE: Yeah.

ANDREW: And then people are connecting with the material, and then women are finding more freedom, and it is well.

NATALIE: Yeah. I want to just say too, for those who aren't familiar with it, this book was written to give more Christian men resources on how to engage their own violence, and it's a guide on becoming a good and safe man. But it also gives women the language of betrayal trauma and emboldens them to step into their power. That's why it was written.

I want to go back to one little thing that you said about the theology, you know, the idea of patriarchy and men being better than women. And they would never say that. People in those circles would never say "Men are better than women," but that is the mentality.

ANDREW: Yes: "Equal but different, equal but whatever."

NATALIE: Exactly.

ANDREW: And really, it's just cloaked in patriarchy.

NATALIE: Right. Do you think that that actually contributes to Christian men justifying pornography, even?

ANDREW: Completely, completely. Yes, they're all intertwined. And if fifty percent or a little less than fifty percent of pastors are using pornography or at least have some type of history of pornography, that is ingrained deep in the theology, you cannot untangle those two. It's so entwining. And how you're going to view scripture, right, and how you're going to look at certain verses and certain contexts and leave out certain parts and pick and choose and proof-text. You're going to look at scripture through the lens of your privilege, through the lens of your misogyny. And so, so much of that work has to be undone for you to become a good and safe man.

NATALIE: Yeah. So I love the title. I love the title. I was recently criticized for using the words "badass" in my... I don't even know where it was. I thought that was kind of funny. Anyway. I love the title of your book, but you're writing to Christians. Were you worried that it might turn off some Christians?

ANDREW: Well, I've definitely heard some feedback. And I'm just like, I'm so tired of the game, right? I'm so tired of... I curse, and I love Jesus. I'm just tired of pretending. Pretending is partly what got me addicted. And part of my liberation is I'm going to be fully authentic. I'm a gruff dude, and yet I'm just going to be me, and I can be a bit of an ass, and I'm just going to own that. And the sooner I can own that, I think, the sooner my healing comes. That's the hope for my readers as well. Like, okay, the quicker we can get over this, it's like, I don't want to just sit here and talk about your violence. But dude, let's admit it so we can heal it and move on. Let's get on with it. There's a lot to do.

NATALIE: Right. I have to say, the other day I swore. I don't even remember what I said, but I have two little boys, ten and almost twelve. And my almost twelve-year-old acted shocked. He goes to this little Baptist Christian school, and his dad is very pious and whatever. So he acted shocked. He had an overreaction to the word.

See, I want to normalize that a little bit. Because I don't want them to grow up and be pompous assholes. I really don't want them to be like that. And I don't want them to look down on and think, "Well, I'm better than you because I don't say the word 'ass.'" Right? I would rather have the heart of my child be all in on the heart of other people and say the word "ass" than to have him be thinking that he is an amazeballs person while everyone else is ridiculous because he doesn't say that word.

ANDREW: For sure. Well said. And for me, a lot of it is about truth, and it's like, some words actually encompass truth much more fully than other words. And I could write, "Don't be a butthead," "Don't be a jerk," and it's just not as potent. I want something potent. I want something that actually lingers and you actually have to reckon with it. That's what I'm interested in. So I want to use language that's potent and can actually lead to change.

NATALIE: Yeah. So what kind of feedback have you gotten on the book so far?

ANDREW: Yeah, mostly good. Definitely some stuffy folks. I think I got one really bad review from a pastoral counselor who said how unbiblical my book was, but besides that, most of the feedback from actual people on the ground, actual women who are harmed by betrayal trauma and then the men who are doing the harming have been wildly complimentary.

NATALIE: Oh good. Good. So, why did you decide to write this book in the first place? Because you've already got some great resources out there. What is different about this one?

ANDREW: Yeah, because of kind of accidentally falling in to... I started my private practice just as a real generalist, right? And over the years of dealing with my own shame and kind of accidentally falling into the sexuality piece and then starting to write about porn and starting to write about sexuality, and then realizing more and more I was kind of falling into this category of this group of people around betrayal trauma and this whole tribe of people, it was kind of an accident. I didn't really want to be a part of that group but like, "Oh. I need resources around abuse, more language, not just around sexuality, even though there is so much intersection. I need to continue to write about this particular portion."

And even though I feel a bit of a unicorn as a man in this space, it's like, I'm called to this. I need to write about this. And so I just spent the last year writing about these essays and just wanted to put that together as a quick resource for people.

NATALIE: Is that what you did, you just wrote essays?

ANDREW: Yeah!

NATALIE: That is so cool. I love that idea.

ANDREW: My writing goal is kind of just stagger, independently self-publish these little

essays and continue to do that, but then stagger with larger books. So my “Stumbling Towards Wholeness” this was a large book with Nat Press, and then my next big project, I interviewed 2,800 women who have worked in churches and who have experienced sexism, so I’ve got all that data and so that’s my next big project that I’ll publish with a large publisher.

NATALIE: Oh my gosh, that sounds amazing. I’m meeting with someone tomorrow, I’m meeting with a filmmaker group. I want to do a documentary on abuse in the church.

ANDREW: Nice.

NATALIE: I know. But that book or that information, that’s the kind of thing I want, so they’re going to have to interview you for this documentary. You’ll have to get interviewed.

ANDREW: Sounds good.

NATALIE: Because that sounds like an amazing study.

ANDREW: So I’ve got so many stories. So basically, it’s not me and my own voice, but “Let’s hear the voice of women who are on the ground who have twenty years of experience.” What are their stories about serving in these churches and how do we change? And then it’s going to be rooted more in the theological underpinning of the fact that Jesus actually showed us examples of how to engage women and how to bring women’s voices up to the forefront to co-lead together.

NATALIE: Wow. So when are you hoping to have that done by?

ANDREW: It’s actually my dissertation. So I’m currently doing my whole dissertation, and that’s hopefully going to finish up in the next six months and that will turn into the next book.

NATALIE: Oh my gosh. I love it that you can do a dissertation and also make a book at the same time. Practical!

ANDREW: Exactly. That’s why, yes.

NATALIE: So does it have a title yet, or can you not give that away?

ANDREW: There’s a rough title called “The Elephant in the Church: A Woman’s

Experience of Sexism.”

NATALIE: Oh my gosh, I love it! I love it. Oh, I cannot wait to read that. That is so exciting.

ANDREW: Yes, I’m pumped.

NATALIE: You’re making me want to go do that. No, I don’t really want to do that. Not do “that,” but go do some kind of project like that.

ANDREW: Sure.

NATALIE: Okay, so the women that I work with are emotional and spiritual abuse survivors. I don’t really do a lot with the sexual abuse, although there are tons of people in my program that are dealing with that too, because I feel like they all kind of go hand in hand.

ANDREW: They all overlap in a lot of ways.

NATALIE: Yeah. So when people ask me, “What do I do about sexual betrayal trauma?” I just pass them on, because I’m like, “I don’t know.”

ANDREW: Right.

NATALIE: Go look at his resources. There’s some other people that talk about it too. Sheila talks about the whole sex thing as far as from the women’s perspective, and there are some other resources out there too. Do you know of any off the top of your head?

ANDREW: Yeah. Sarah McDugal talks a lot about that. Jay Stringer, his book “Unwanted” is one of the best resources for men with unwanted sexual behaviors. As far as particular betrayal trauma, those are probably the best that I can think of off the top of my head.

NATALIE: Is the one “Unwanted” for women specifically, or is it for men?

ANDREW: It is not. Well, it’s both, but it’s mostly for men or people with unwanted sexual behaviors.

NATALIE: Gotcha, okay.

ANDREW: It's not necessary sexual betrayal trauma recovery resources, per se. But yeah, there's not many, sadly.

NATALIE: Yeah. Well, I'm glad you're in that space for sure. I feel like we need more, and people have said this, too: We need more men, even men that are able to help male victims of abuse. Because sadly, there are a lot of them out there.

ANDREW: Totally. There really are, and that's not my speciality, and yet I get requested a lot and it's just like, that's not my thing. And yet there are so many, it's true.

NATALIE: Yeah, there are. That is not my specialty either. Someone just emailed me and said, "Can I be in your group? I know I'm a male..." I'm like, that would be a hard "no." But I will say, if there are any guys listening, there is a good website called shrink4men.com. It's a woman who runs that blog, but it's got great articles for guys who are dealing with emotionally abusive women.

ANDREW: Nice. That's good to know.

NATALIE: Is there anything else that you'd like to share about your book?

ANDREW: Yeah, I think it would be good to clarify, "What is the difference between a good and safe man versus an ass?" What are some categories that especially your listeners can really look for? So there's just a few categories here that I want to talk about, and we can just go back and forth.

The first one is a good and safe man seeks to serve versus an ass seeks to be served. And I think that's a really good distinction between a humble spirit, one who seeks to serve, versus, "It's all about me." There's that entitlement of, "You are supposed to serve me as the woman. You are supposed to cook and clean."

NATALIE: "You're supposed to make me sammichs." Did you see that joke out there?

ANDREW: I did.

NATALIE: Actually, it wasn't a joke. It was Doug Wilson.

ANDREW: It was Doug Wilson, yeah.

NATALIE: There's another blogger out there, oh gosh, what is... Something Homemaker. What is her name? I think she was the one that first put that out there that, "If your

husband wakes you up in the middle of the night and wants a sammich, you're supposed to get up and make it for him."

ANDREW: Unreal.

NATALIE: That just means that your husband's an ass, plain and simple.

ANDREW: Right? And the whole sex on demand and the pornographic view of sex. It's just like, "You as a woman are there to serve me completely." And it's so absurd and just the opposite of everything good and holy. Like, no. A partnership, a mutuality, now yeah. I'm barfing my brains out in the middle of the night and have Covid and I wake my wife up to get me a blanket, that's very different. "Hey babe, can you help me? I need help," versus just this weird, "I am the king and you serve me at my beck and call." So that's the first category.

The second is a good and safe man is reflective versus reactive. So my wife can criticize me or say something and I immediately feel that rising up. What do I do in that moment, right? I probably need a time-out. What can I self-reflect? "Babe, I'm feeling defensive. Can you ask that in a different way?" Or, "Can I sit with that for a moment and get back to you?" Am I going to, in a sense, be curious and reflect or am I immediately going to immediately react, defend, and fight back, which is very common and easy to do for all of us, right? To be reactive rather than reflective.

NATALIE: Yes.

ANDREW: The next category is a good and safe man is a humble man versus arrogant. And we touched on that a little bit. Right there is a sense of pride, this "I've got it all together" versus I think, truly, a good and safe man is a humble man who knows his wounds, he knows his darkness, he knows his depravity, and he knows his goodness. He knows both and he can hold both and that creates a humility that really makes him safe. Any other thoughts that you wanted to add to that?

NATALIE: I would say for sure, I noticed even in my past relationship that he had a wall that was like six feet thick between me and him to protect himself. And he didn't want to see that there was a bad side, that there could be any dark in him. The problem is not that we have darkness inside of us. Because I'm remarried, but my current husband gets that sometimes he's an ass. He would admit that to you.

ANDREW: Which makes you safe that you can be fully human in his presence.

NATALIE: Exactly. And then if I do bring up something or I say, "You know, I don't really like that," or I could even say it snarky to him, and he will of course do what all humans do and he might not say anything because he's taking a step back and gathering himself together, but he always comes back and says he's sorry. He always comes back and says, "You know what, you're right. I didn't respond well there or I didn't really behave well there and I'm really sorry about that. Will you please forgive me?"

ANDREW: And then he's going to do it differently in the future. He's not just going to say "sorry." He's actually going to live it differently in the future.

NATALIE: That is so true. We don't keep going in the same circles all the time. But again, it's because he's okay and he would readily say, "Yeah, this is where I kind of struggle in this area," whereas in my former relationship, he had to be perfect. It's so hard to be perfect. Nobody can be perfect.

ANDREW: Yep, it's impossible.

NATALIE: Right.

ANDREW: Which goes into the next point: a healthy and safe man is centered and secure versus the ass is insecure and unaware, right? So if you have any type of reflection, he's immediately going to take it personally. He's immediately going to "Blarghh!" and be defensive. If you're married to an insecure man who is completely unaware of his own story, where he comes from, his family of origin, how he relates to the world, that's a dangerous relationship to be in because he is not centered.

He does not know who he is. He does not know why he is, why he's here, his purpose. And until you've done that work, you're not secure in yourself. So if he's a little boy acting out and you're trying to just bring a normal complaint, whew! You're going to get that shamed little boy who's going to lash out.

NATALIE: Exactly. Can I say too, it has to be them recognizing and initiating that they want to become more aware of their story and they want to learn more about themselves. Because I see a lot of victims or survivors who will tell their husband, "You should go to counseling. You were molested as a child. Why aren't you going to counseling and getting help for that? Maybe that's why you're struggling so much."

They might go to counseling to appease her, to get her off their back, but if they're not going because they're intrinsically motivated for themselves for their own sake to understand their story, then nothing is going to happen. And to that point, I will say

this. My current husband that I'm married to, he was in therapy for years. I'm his first wife. But he was in therapy for years before he even met me. So it is possible for men to say, "You know what? I need help in this area. I want to learn more about who I am and how I tick. And I need outside help to get it. I'm going to invest in that part of my life."

ANDREW: And that's what adults do, by the way. Versus if you're married to an adolescent boy, he's going to say "Mommy, come help me. Get me a therapist. Call!" I ignore... I mean, I don't. My assistant takes care of it. But basically when women are emailing, "My husband needs... can we set up an appointment?" It's just like, "What? Is he five? Is he ten? He knows how to use email, right? Or my phone number is on my website. He can call. He can schedule something with my assistant."

NATALIE: Exactly.

ANDREW: It's so absurd. And then so many times women are overworking too because their husbands are under-functioning, and it's not helpful. You don't want to enable him to be a lazy ass. We actually want him to rise up, because I believe in men so deeply, that they're so capable and that they've just been pacified and pacified. And it's just not the way out. That's not the way to healing.

NATALIE: Women, you have to stop doing that, okay? You have to focus on your own healing and your own life. I tell the women in my program it's like you're married to a duck, just for an analogy. We're not saying that men are ducks. It's like you're married to a duck but you think that your duck should be a cat. And you are so confused why your duck keeps quacking. He should be meowing. And so you try to change him into a cat when he's a duck. He's always going to be a duck. And if he wants to turn into a cat or whatever... I guess this is where the analogy totally breaks down, but he would need to go and do that himself. You can't turn your pet duck into a cat. So once they accept that, then they can go, "Okay, well that's who he is. Now who am I going to be?" And then you focus on your own growth.

ANDREW: Exactly.

NATALIE: So what else?

ANDREW: So the next category is a good and safe man seeks mutuality and equality versus seeks power and control.

NATALIE: So complementarians are all asses? Is that what you're saying?

ANDREW: Well, that would be a longer conversation, but...

NATALIE: I probably shouldn't have said that. I'm going to get in really big trouble with the religious police now.

ANDREW: I won't go that far, and yet it's probably not that far off. But yes, do you seek power and control? Do you seek mutuality in your relationship, in your marriage, equality? And that actually means equality. Not just lip service. That actually means shared responsibilities. That actually means "Okay, you clean the kitchen on Mondays and Thursdays and I'll clean in on Wednesdays and Fridays. We're going to share responsibilities because we both hate it." Or, "You're really good at finances. I suck. Can you take the lead on that?" It's just like a team captain. And we go by skill set. We go by God-given abilities, not by roles because you have a vagina and I have a penis. That does not make any sense!

NATALIE: It doesn't!

ANDREW: "We're a team, and how do we make our team successful? Well, if you're more talented in this area, then you'll take the lead and I'm going to follow you, and vice versa." I'm better at x, y, z, my wife follows me. It's shared mutuality. And that's what makes the healthiest marriages.

NATALIE: Can you even imagine what the church would be like if they actually believed and lived all of that out? Or what this world would be like? And shouldn't we as Christians be leading in that sort of peaceful and God-centered... this is how He made us to be! And we've just taken the Word of God and twisted it into this crazy caricature of only God knows what. Pompous leaders?

ANDREW: Exactly. Right. And just fed into this patriarchal view of where now you can't even tease out what's patriarchy and what's Christianity. It's so intertwined you almost don't know which way is which.

NATALIE: Exactly.

ANDREW: So our final one is a good and safe man seeks to know and to be known versus isolated and alone. So this is not just accountability groups. This is actually genuine, deep, knowing self and being curious of the other versus just being isolated, being alone, not having those mutual, vulnerable relationships. So that's what we're looking for. It's not just an accountability group where you go and check off the boxes: "How many times did you masturbate?" or whatever. It's just like, no. That's absurd. It's

not about that. It's literally about sharing your life, letting go of your power and control, and being truly real with people.

This past week, I had a men's trip with my buddies to Mexico. And we all took an intentional time each dinner to, you know, you had twenty to thirty minutes where it was all about you. And you just got to share how we can support each other, how we can be with each other. During my time sharing... My wife and I just moved across the country full time and it's just been so hard. It's been so difficult. And I just shared and ended up crying with these men in the middle of some restaurant in Mexico and they just held me well and were curious and questioned... And it's just like, "These are my boys. These are my people. I do life with these men, and they're going to offer that vulnerability as well and it's a give and take. It's a mutuality."

And that creates me to have a healthier masculinity where I have a group of men that call me out on my stuff, that also will hold me in my own brokenness, and that's what we're talking about here. A desire to both know and to be known versus "I'm on my own."

But then you hear the buzz words of "community" and "accountability" and "church" all the time, and then you have this weird version of that and that's not what I'm talking about. I remember my first year of grad school and we did these therapy groups where you share your story, and it's my first year, and I share my testimony and I was like, "I'm going to kill it." Because I had already been a pastor and I, man... "Jesus saved me," wrap it up in a bow, "Sex, drugs, rock and roll..."

And I brought the whole sex, drugs, rock and roll, Jesus, and everybody kind of just opened their mouth and looked at me after I shared and was like, "Where are you?" And I was like, "Huh?" I was like, "I slayed this. I spoke so eloquently." Because I had been doing this as a pastor for so long, I knew how to work a room. I knew how to talk. And they didn't respond the way I was ready for them to take it. I already was way ahead of them. I knew how to control the room.

So my vulnerability was actually not vulnerability at all. I was honest, I told a story, but I wasn't vulnerable. And so how do you break down when the church has, in a sense, called honesty "vulnerability?" When I was doing all those sermons and I was slaying the room, I wasn't vulnerable at all, and yet I talked about vulnerable things. I was honest about my father and the brokenness of my family, all that, but I was in full control the entire time.

NATALIE: Yeah. Would you say that you, at that time in your life, were you not super

connected with who you actually were inside?

ANDREW: Yeah, definitely.

NATALIE: I think that people who are connected with themselves, with the good and the bad and accept themselves, those are the people that actually do have the greatest capacity to connect with other people on that deep level anyway.

ANDREW: Exactly. And we're not talking about hating on all pastors here. I'm sure some do it really well. But just my own story of using that kind of socialization of church culture, I was actually hiding there.

NATALIE: Yeah. And I think church culture actually promotes that hiding, because you are supposed to have it all together. If you are a good Christian, you aren't going to be making all these mistakes. You aren't going to be struggling in these ways. So everyone's pretending, to themselves, even, and that's why there's so little connection and true love and care for one another.

ANDREW: Totally. And working with pastors, it's such a lonely thing because if they're honest, they lose their jobs. It's just like, "Oh geez, wait a minute." We have to create something different. We have to create something where we're sojourners, where we're trying to understand God more fully together, and nobody's perfect. And not just lip service, but actually practicing authenticity in a real way.

NATALIE: That's right. Well, this has been a great interview. Thank you so much for giving us your time.

ANDREW: Yeah, you're welcome.

NATALIE: Where can people get your book?

ANDREW: You can just get it on Amazon. That's probably the easiest place. You can find our work at www.christiancc.org, and that's the organization that my wife and I run and our counseling and consulting practice, and then my writing's andrewjbauman.com.

NATALIE: Okay. And we'll have all those links in the show notes so people can quickly link over to those places. I think that's all we have for you today. Thank you so much for joining us, and until next time, fly free.