

CONFRONTING RELIGIOUS TRAUMA AND RECONSTRUCTING FAITH: INTERVIEW WITH DR. TIFFANY YECKE BROOKS

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 192 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I have with me Dr. Tiffany... I should have asked you before we started. Is it Yecke?

TIFFANY: Yeck-i. It's like the Abominable Snowman but with a "K." Yes.

NATALIE: So it's Dr. Tiffany Yecke Brooks. It kind of almost sounds like "yucky." Do you ever get that?

TIFFANY: I did when I was younger, but for the most part now, you say "Yeti" and then people just kind of go that route.

NATALIE: Yes. I can totally see that being a problem in grade school.

TIFFANY: Yes.

NATALIE: Anyways, Dr. Tiffany Yecke Brooks is the author of numerous books, including New York Times bestsellers. She's also been a professor of literature and writing at Abilene Christian University, McMurray University, and the University of South Carolina - Beaufort. Welcome, Tiffany!

TIFFANY: Thank you, thank you.

NATALIE: So the reason why I wanted to have Tiffany on here is because she has written a brand new book that was just released this year, which I read and love. For people who are watching the video, I'm going to show what it looks like. Also, you can see the cover on the back of Tiffany's Zoom there. "Gaslighted by God." This is an amazing book. I have so many pages, the corners turned over, and so many highlights in this book, so I'm super excited to interview you about this book and introduce this book to my listeners. So why don't you tell us a little bit about this book and why you wrote it?

TIFFANY: Yeah, absolutely. So for years when I was teaching writing and even literature, I'd often have students say, "Why isn't there a book about X," and I'd say, "Well, maybe

because you haven't written it yet." And that was kind of my go-to answer, and I didn't really think anything of it until I started going through probably about, maybe about twelve years ago now, the beginnings of a lot of questioning about this deep spiritual anxiety I'd had and always had and never really knew what to do with it. I didn't have a vocabulary yet. Terms like "deconstruction" weren't really being thrown around just then.

And everything I looked for with Christian resources all boiled down to, "Well, you just need to pray more. Have a little more faith in Jesus." And it didn't matter how much I was fasting and praying and doing all the prescribed things — situations weren't improving in my life. My faith was not feeling reassured. I was feeling so disillusioned by the faith I had been taught by inconsistencies I was seeing and toxicity I was seeing. But I was afraid to say anything, because you do that, and then you're "that" person.

NATALIE: Yeah.

TIFFANY: You know, you're the one questioning, you're the one pushing back, you're the one who is not following the nice Christian girl model, the prescribed way of following. It's like, "If you just did what the Bible says, this would all clear up for you." And I remember one time driving up Highway 39 in Meridian, Mississippi where we were living at the time, and there was this church across the street from the Winn-Dixie that had a marquee that said, "If God feels distant, who do you think moved?" and I just started screaming in my car at a church marquee. So I'm going to go ahead and admit that this was not maybe one of my finer moments. Like, I'm at the stoplight and these people are just looking at the crazy lady screaming in the car. But it just felt like the most, almost mean-spirited, willfully ignorant statement. And I was like, how dare you boil down the relationship with the God of the universe to a zinger? And I felt like that's what so much of Christianity had become, were these easy, pat answers.

So finally in February of 2019, I was talking with someone, actually my therapist, and I blurted out the line, "I feel like I've been gaslighted by God." There was this long pause — it was right at the end of the session — there was this long pause, and then she was like, "Pick this up next week," but I said, "I think that's the name of a book," and she said, "I think you're right." That was the moment this book was born, and I realized that I needed to take that advice that I had been giving to my students for so long of saying, "Maybe the book doesn't exist because you haven't written it yet," and I realized I needed to take that to heart and I needed to maybe write the book that people who were struggling with legalism and the impact of this spiritual abuse and toxicity in their faith but weren't ready to let go of their faith or walk away from the church altogether — maybe I needed to put that story into words.

And maybe I was the only one, but I imagined there were other people like that, and it's been just incredible the response I've gotten so far, people saying, "This is everything I've been thinking or talking about or praying about or struggling with, and I thought I was the only one who felt that way." So it's just been wonderful to see people respond and to know that if this is the way you're feeling, you're not alone.

NATALIE: Yeah. That title — I love the title. It's a genius title, because it gets people very curious. So I was sharing some quotes. When I was in the middle of reading it, I shared some quotes on social media, and I would say, "This is from the book, 'Gaslighted by God.'" And a couple of people were like, "Well, is this book saying that God gaslights us?" But it's not.

TIFFANY: Right, correct.

NATALIE: It's the opposite. What would you say to someone who's asking that about the title of your book?

TIFFANY: The problem isn't God. It's the narrative that we've been instructed around God that utilizes language of abuse or manipulation.

NATALIE: Yeah.

TIFFANY: I think especially in Protestantism, we've relied on so much language of, "For such a worm as I," and "You'll never be enough on your own — you're nothing without God." This is all language that if someone we were in a relationship said this, we'd say, "Get out of that relationship. That's problematic." So we've rooted so much theology in the language of abuse that it's terrifying to think what that's doing to people's sense of self, to their relationship with God, to the way they relate to people, to what they think their worth is, to what they think their responsibility is in terms of self-care and self-protection.

Like I said, it was a line I blurted out and thought, but that really kind of encapsulates where I was, because I could not stomach the thought of picking up one more book that said, "Basically, if you just squeeze a little more Jesus on the situation, it's going to get better." And that's not right. There are some situations where that's just not the case. And so I really wanted to write a book that somebody who was so soul-tired and spiritually burned out would be willing to pick up, because it wasn't promising BFF Jesus, who, if you just pray a little more, is going to fix everything.

NATALIE: Yes. The thing that I love about this book is that the whole point of it is that

you're separating God from the gaslighting.

TIFFANY: Yes, exactly. Exactly.

NATALIE: If we really do love and respect God, honestly, the way that people present Him, it's blasphemous that we're applying our own abusive behaviors and thoughts and thinking onto the Creator of the universe. It's blasphemous.

TIFFANY: Absolutely.

NATALIE: And it ruins people's lives — ruins their lives and destroys their faith. So this book separating God from that gaslighting is so important. Okay, so you open your book with a story about a space chimp. So tell us about that.

TIFFANY: Yeah. In 1961, NASA was employing space chimps, these primates, to study the effects of zero gravity on mental cognition in space, in zero gravity. So they had this series of chimps that they had trained to carry out certain exercises so that they could, as they're kind of moving that space program forward, to really understand how the primate brain operates. Is blood reaching the brain in zero gravity? How is this going to be impacted?

So there was one chimp named Enos who was part of the Mercury Atlas Space Program, and he was launched into space on November 29th of 1961. And he had been trained for 1,250 hours in something called avoidance conditioning exercises, which is where there would be a series of... The job was to pull a lever for the one that did not match. And so then he would do this a series of times so they would see that, as he was in zero gravity, to see how he was able to carry that out, if the results were consistent with what they had observed on earth.

So Enos goes up into space and the avoidance conditioning exercise comes up, and he pulls the lever as he was trained to do for the item that's out of place in the sequence. And it was supposed to be that if he got it right, it would move to the next one, but if he got it wrong, he would get a shock to his foot.

Something had been miswired. There was a glitch in the system, and even though Enos pulled the correct lever, he still got a shock. And in fact, he got thirty-three consecutive shocks in a row, but he continued pulling the correct lever. When that exercise ended, they went on to a few other ones, and then it cycled back around and he came to the avoidance conditioning exercise again, and this time, he received forty-one consecutive shocks. But he still continued pulling that correct lever despite that. He was supposed to go through three complete cycles, but because of the glitch, NASA actually brought

him back early. But because of that, he landed miles off target.

So he's in this cramped, overheated pod bobbing around in the Caribbean sea, and it took the U.S.S. Stormes three and a half hours to locate him and find him. And by the time they did, the NASA report says that he had ripped off the belly panel and actually pulled out the catheter still inflated, and that he had basically reverted from being this tremendously, highly trained lab animal almost back to this wild creature screeching at his rescuers.

And the first time I read that story probably a decade ago, I burst into tears, because it was the closest thing I had ever read to how my faith experience felt. And I was trying to do the right thing over and over and over again, and every time I did, I received this shock. But I persisted because that's what I had been trained to do. That's what I was told was my mission. And at some point, you revert back to the wild animal. There's a point where you gotta say, "I did everything that was asked of me, and this wasn't what I was promised. This wasn't what the deal was. This wasn't what this was supposed to be." And I just remember reading that and feeling just the deep, tremendous, overwhelming empathy with this space chimp and feeling like, "That's it. That's the feeling that I've been trying to capture about what is this disconnect between what I've been taught about God and what my experience has been."

NATALIE: Yeah. That is a profound analogy. It really is. I can relate as well.

TIFFANY: I think a lot of us can, unfortunately.

NATALIE: Yeah. So in the book, "Gaslighted by God," you talk about how Christians who are facing this deconstruction of their faith are also similar to shell-shocked soldiers in World War I. So tell us a little bit about that.

TIFFANY: Absolutely, yeah. So one of the areas that I teach with literature is literature between the wars, but really kind of starting World War I. And it's fascinating because it's considered the first modern war. You have machine guns, you have airplanes being used, you've got tanks — you've got this modern, mechanized warfare going on. But you also had this generation of young men who shipped off to war — there's this quote that said, "We went to war with Homer in our pockets" — that they had grown up, even in the little rural country schools of England, with stories of the classics — Greece and Rome and this golden past. Again, you've got the golden age of the British empire and that "Every generation has their war, and this is your shining chance to go honor God and country."

And these young men went to the trenches, and it was like nothing they had ever seen or experienced because it was a completely different war than anyone had ever known before. And so many of them came back with what was then called “shell-shock,” but we now recognize it as PTSD. But some of them were labeled “social deviants.” I mean, there were a number of men executed for cowardice because the PTSD was so dramatic that they couldn’t force themselves out of that trench. It was heartbreaking how they were treated, and so we understand then that whole lost generation that you hear from the 1920s. So many people left to go find something else because when they came back, nobody wanted to hear their stories of what trench warfare had actually been like because it didn’t match the golden narrative that had been sold, that they had sold to the public. And so they felt so alienated and shell-shocked because what they had been taught didn’t match with the experience, and no one wanted to hear about it.

And that to me was again this important metaphor for, I think, where so many of us are in the church: that we were sent to war with “I Kissed Dating Goodbye” or “The Prayer of Jabez” or some of these things in our pockets — that this was the theology that we were brought up on, especially Gen X women, millennial women. I think a lot of us had this purity culture and lady-in-waiting and so many of these books that we were told, “You have to read this. This is what Christian womanhood is about.”

And you go out in the world and it’s not like that. And you are woefully unprepared for the reality of what to do when your Christian walk isn’t what you were promised it would be if you ticked all the right boxes. And you come back to your church and you share about that and you are labeled a backslider or some godless liberal or this heathen who just wants to throw out the rules because “Oh, you just want to do what you want and not have any consequences for sin.” And you know, we’re sometimes basically put in front of the firing squad for cowardice, for trying to tell people, “What you prepared us for is not the reality out there, and it doesn’t match the golden narrative that they’ve been pitching.”

And again, it was a really significant metaphor for me in understanding again, why that lost generation kind of went out and did their thing, and how so many of us, I think, are like that lost generation in that we are searching and we want to put something back together with faith, but it’s not going to be that. It’s not going to be the old promises that we were sold that didn’t hold up in the reality of the trench warfare of life.

NATALIE: Yeah. And even taking that a step further, a lot of my listeners are in emotionally abusive and spiritually abusive marriages, and I know in my experience, even trying to go to the church and tell people about what was going on, that was my personal, behind the scenes warfare in my own home, they didn’t believe me because

that didn't fit their narrative. "There must be something wrong with me if that's what I'm experiencing."

TIFFANY: Exactly.

NATALIE: And then for women who end up getting divorced out of these relationships to get into a safe place, I mean, I was excommunicated. A lot of other women get excommunicated from their churches. So that analogy perfectly describes that as well. And so many of the women who are going through this in their marriages, they are then extrapolating that out into their faith. They're seeing how their faith actually set them up to be in an abusive relationship and to stay for so many years, which goes back to the whole monkey idea too: "I'm just going to stay. I know this will work. If I just keep trying harder, it will eventually work, right? Because that's what I've been trained to believe." So in addition to writing about spiritual abuse and religious trauma in "Gaslighted by God," you also write about spiritual anxiety. So tell us what that is, and how does that impact the development of a person's faith?

TIFFANY: So spiritual anxiety is really just the unhealthy obsession or fear of damnation, of displeasing God, of not feeling worthy of God. It can manifest in a number of different ways. And what I think is important to note is that that doesn't develop in a vacuum. You don't wake up one morning and just suddenly have this crushing fear of hell. That has to come from somewhere. And people are being conditioned into having this crushing fear of not being worthy of God. When you're told constantly, "You can't trust your feelings because that's the flesh trying to take control," you throw out your intuition. Intuition is a God-given gift, and especially with women, we talk about the female intuition. But when you're told not to trust yourself because that's the flesh taking control, then you throw out this faith-guard that God has provided us for protecting ourselves, and you no longer trust yourself.

And then it creates a state of dependence on, "Well, if I can't trust myself, I have to trust what these higher-ups are telling me, what these people in power are telling me." And so often, far too often, they're going to tell you what keeps them in power, what reinforces a patriarchal narrative, what reinforces the view that is comfortable for them, because, as you said, and again, we talk about this in the book too, the idea of, "Well, if your experience doesn't line up with the Christian life, then something is wrong with you." And that's classic gaslighting. That's exactly what it is. So you're being told, "Submit more. If you have a problem in your marriage, it's because you aren't submitting more, because you are not offering sex enough." Whatever that is, it's your fault.

And that's shameful and it's heartbreaking, because it feeds into this spiritual anxiety, this sense of, "My personal relationships almost directly reflect my relationship with God, and so if I have a divorce, if I walk away from this abusive situation, that's the same as me walking away from God." We've set this up as an equivalency because we talk about the church as the bride of Christ, so we've drawn all these false equivalencies. Those are metaphors — they are not meant to be taken literally. And it's heartbreaking to see the damage that's done.

In addition to that, the more you sort of buy into those narratives, the more you are praised. And so then as you are praised for this behavior, it reinforces it, and it's sort of that turn of the screw that then you're saying, "Well, if I'm getting praised, I must be doing the right thing," which makes you screw into this anxiety deeper and deeper and harder until suddenly you have no sense of what's real, what you can trust, if you can trust yourself. "Is that the Holy Spirit or is that the devil whispering in my ear?" I mean, that's heartbreaking. And I think too many people, and especially women, find themselves in this situation.

The Catholic church actually has a term for this called "scrupulosity." And they actually have some priests who are specifically trained in working with people with scrupulosity. A lot of times it can take the form of obsessive compulsive disorder, but it doesn't have to. There's actually this wonderful book by a priest named Thomas Santa called "Understanding Scrupulosity." Blanket recommendation. It's phenomenal. If you're somebody who struggles with these issues, please check that book out: "Understanding Scrupulosity" by Thomas Santa. And he literally directly talks about this issue in a spiritual context. The book is probably fifteen years old, but it was the first time I had ever seen this issue addressed head-on. And it's not something we're talking about enough, because we love to dismiss it and say, "Oh, well, if you're spiritually anxious, it's because..." We respond in one of two ways. Either we say, "Oh, well, your fears are irrational because God has unshakable mercy," so that then denies lived experience and makes a person feel worse for feeling it, or we chastise them for talking about the sin of doubt and then they feel worse because they feel, "I failed God because I doubted." So it's a no-win situation.

NATALIE: It is. Oh my gosh. Yeah. Talk about making you go crazy.

TIFFANY: Yes.

NATALIE: Okay, right now I feel like there are a lot of books being released on the topic of deconstruction, which makes me really happy. I feel like I see it on social media all the time now. So people are addressing this. It's amazing. But a lot of them are looking

at it through a political lens, which, you know, there's a part of me that kind of likes that. But tell us why your book actually tries to avoid that, avoid political discussions.

TIFFANY: Yeah, I mean, we do talk about certain things. We touch on nationalism and some of these other issues, but really, I wanted to write a book that you could read and maybe highlight and then give to someone and say, 'I need you to read this and understand where I'm coming from. This is what I've been experiencing.' And so many times, especially in the United States, we have melded politics and religion so deeply that if you attack one, the person's convinced you're attacking the other. If you try to deconstruct one, they're like, "Well, you're just saying this because you don't like the way I vote," and it's like, "No, I'm saying this because I don't like the way you treat me" or "I don't like the way you act" or "I think you need to understand this." And so I really tried to avoid politics so that you could give this book to your grandma or to your dad or to whoever it is, and it doesn't matter which way they vote, what their party affiliation is, because these are truths that are separate from the American political scene.

Now, certainly some of these concepts have grown up because of certain political ideologies that have taken root and really taken hold and permeated our culture, but the book itself I wanted to be politically neutral so that that would not be a stumbling block for somebody who needs to hear this and understand. One of the most touching texts I've gotten I think since the book came out was from a dear friend of mine who is very theologically more conservative than I am. And she sent a message and said, "I need to apologize." And I was like, "You know, you're a lovely person, okay." But she said, "No. Reading your book, I realize I do these things, and I had no idea how harmful they were and how tone-deaf they were and how hurtful I was being. I had the best of intentions, but I realize now how prideful the response was, and I am so sorry and I want to change that."

And I was blown away by that, because she was someone I was afraid was going to read the book and feel very offended and put me on her prayer list. Like, very sweet, kind, wonderful woman, but for her to read that and send me this beautifully humble text that said, "This opened my eyes to behaviors that I need to change about myself," was one of the most... It was so hope-filled for me that maybe this isn't just a book for the people who have been on the receiving end of this, but that it's going to reach people who have been perpetrating some of these ideas and maybe make them recognize, sometimes the intended consequences, but very often the unintended consequences of their actions. And I didn't want politics to get in the way of that.

NATALIE: Yeah, I love that. So a lot of Christians who are in the process of

deconstructing their faith are taking a look at how their beliefs were rooted in legalism. So tell us what legalism is and why and how you address that in your book.

TIFFANY: So legalism is ultimately a form of control. It's an attempt to control the behavior of others by restricting their choices or causing them to live in fear of making a wrong move. It's control of yourself. Sometimes you have sort of this voluntary, internalized legalism, and that goes along with spiritual anxiety a lot. But it's also an attempt to control God, because you are trying to put God in a position of acknowledging the extra effort. And I think once you put it in those terms — that you realize that legalism is creating an obligation for God to have to reward you in a certain way — it makes legalism seem much more problematic for somebody who maybe didn't see it as a huge problem before.

Something I talk about is that legalism is expanding the definitions of things and adding on to it. And Jesus actually expanded the definition of several sins, but when He did so, it was always to protect the other person rather than to elevate the individual. So when He said, "Just being angry with someone is akin to murder," He wasn't doing that to add to the burden of... "Oh gosh, I felt angry, and now I might as well have just gone out and killed a bunch of..." No. The point was that He was trying to stop people from carrying grudges that might lead to violence, that might lead them to harm someone else.

He sought to honor women by acknowledging that men were responsible for their own lustful thoughts by saying, "If you have a lustful thought, that's akin to adultery." Again, He's putting the burden on someone else. He's putting the burden on the man who's protecting the woman. He did it again with His limitation of divorce. It wasn't trying to hem people in. There's a woman's story that we share in the book named Beth (or, that's the name that we use in the book) that I think many of your readers may see parallels to, where she felt trapped by all of these legalistic definitions of divorce. But Jesus' point wasn't to keep women trapped in unsafe situations, but to restrict men from divorcing them for just any reason, and then in the highly patriarchal society, leaving them without protection or shelter or a means of living. And so every time Jesus expanded a definition, He did it to protect the vulnerable and not to add burden to the vulnerable. And we have flipped that around so much.

I think the legalism chapter is actually one of my favorite chapters in the book because I look at this story — it's this weird obscure story in the Old Testament about Saul making this declaration about, "If any of my warriors eat anything before the end of the day, then everybody's under a curse" — anyway. And then his son Jonathan finds some honey and eats it and encourages the warriors to eat it, and it says that they do and they are revived in spirit. And then Saul freaks out and says, "I'm going to kill whoever

did..." But I break that story down in terms of looking at it as an illustration of legalism of Saul making this rash vow, but it puts the burden on someone else. It puts the burden on his men. He says, "I'm going to please God by making this vow," but the people who suffer are the people who served under him who are now going hungry. And it's very interesting, because in that story, there's a note that says, "This was the first altar Saul erected to God." And I think that's interesting too, because it's like, Saul was certainly not sinless, yet after the men break his vow and eat that honey, Saul erects an altar on their behalf. He's willing to say, "Ya'll need to repent," and not look at himself.

So I go through that story and that chapter and really break it down as a great illustration of how legalism really works in the church in passing that burden on to other people. I would like to remind readers that when you find yourself encountered with legalism, remember that it's an effort to control God, and that when Jesus expanded definitions, He was always doing it to tell His followers that that weight of forgiveness and self-control and temperance and fidelity, all of that burden should be held by the individual and not passing that on to other people like so many religious leaders have done now.

NATALIE: Right. It's the whole idea of law versus love.

TIFFANY: Yeah.

NATALIE: Jesus came to fulfill the law by showing that love is the fulfillment of the law. So we always filter everything through the filter of love. If a law is actually destroying people, that's not love.

TIFFANY: Absolutely. Well, and then there's another chapter in the book where we talk about this Hebrew concept called "pikuach nefesh," which is the idea of saving a life. And the idea is that — it's a concept in Judaism — that if a law needs to be broken, that it should be done so in order to save a life, and that the person who is considered the more spiritually mature or pious is supposed to have the honor of being the person to break that law.

NATALIE: Wow.

TIFFANY: So for example, on a high holy day for fasting, you need to continue to take medicine, and if that medicine means that you need to have food with it, then you take that with a reasonable amount of food, and that is not considered breaking the law. If someone has a heart attack on the Sabbath, you can call 911 even though normally

making a phone call would be forbidden on the Sabbath.

And we see the idea of pikuach nefesh played out in the New Testament even with Jesus saying, "Isn't it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? And if your son or an ox fell into a pit, wouldn't you pull them out on the Sabbath?" So we see that that idea of pikuach nefesh, of saving a life, is present in the New Testament. This is not unbiblical. And I talk in that chapter that it's fascinating when you look in Genesis when Sarah dies. It says, "Abraham traveled to her," which means that at some point, Abraham and Sarah separated. Sarah left Abraham, because he has to travel to go and bury her. And the idea with pikuach nefesh is that you do whatever action is necessary to save a life. And to me it's really interesting, because that story of Sarah's death comes immediately on the heels of the story of the almost-sacrifice of Isaac.

And so it's speculation, but you see, here's a woman who was pulled up from her home land. Her husband basically tried to sell her, or, under false pretenses, gave her to other men twice, has a child with another woman, goes to basically kill their son... At some point, she left. At some point, there was a separation between the two, and again, it's speculation, but it's in the text. You gotta ask why. And you see elsewhere in Genesis that when Lot and Abraham are disagreeing and there are too many sheep in the land and they're not getting along, the shepherds are fighting, they split. And that's God-sanctioned. And that sometimes that separation is necessary to save a life. And I think it is a beautiful but often overlooked biblical example of taking the necessary steps to remove yourself from a harmful situation, to remove yourself from a situation that is not life-giving.

NATALIE: Yeah. So good. Okay, so besides some of your own personal stories, your book has about two dozen interviews with other people who shared their experiences. So tell us a little bit about these people and their stories and how you decided whose stories to include.

TIFFANY: Yeah. I interviewed probably close to thirty people, and unfortunately I wasn't able to include all of the stories, but I was so grateful for people who shared them, because it takes a lot of courage to share your story and to be willing to put into words that feeling of, "My Christian walk/my Christian life is not what I was told it would be. This is something different, and this is why I have an issue with it." And what was fascinating was while I did these interviews, they started within my own circle of people I knew, and then those people would say, "I have a friend you need to talk to, because this person went through this." And then I would talk to that person, and they would say, "I have this other person you need to talk to." A couple of the stories come from online forums where I reached out to the person afterward and said, "Do you mind if I

share this, because what you are saying I think really encapsulates where a lot of people are.”

And something that interested me so much was the wide range of ages. I had people from the baby boomer generation, I had young, early twenty-somethings, maybe late millennial/early Gen Z. It really ran the spectrum of age, socio-economic group, racial and cultural backgrounds — I mean, it was really wildly diverse in a way that was both encouraging, you know, that lots of people are telling... But also heartbreaking to see just how extensive this issue really is.

Something that I experienced afterwards, my church invited me to actually come and speak to the senior citizen Sunday School class about the book earlier this spring. And I was kind of nervous, because I didn't know how this older generation would respond to maybe some of these less traditional ideas. And I finished, and this woman raised her hand and she said — so this is in January that we did this — she said, “I'm going to be ninety-two next month, and I have waited my entire life for a book like this.”

NATALIE: Oh, that is heartbreaking.

TIFFANY: Right? I couldn't believe that. And she said it with such just the sense of like, “I have waited my whole life to hear someone say these things, because I could never say them out loud. I've thought about them, I've felt them, and I couldn't express them.” I was so grateful to the people who were willing to share their stories and so amazed by how universal the experiences were.

NATALIE: Wow. Well, this has been awesome. I hope everyone goes and gets this book. I can't imagine that everyone's not going to go get this book. It's a fabulous book. You can get it on Amazon. We'll include the links to the book in the show notes.

TIFFANY: Okay.

NATALIE: Is there anything else that you want to share before we close that you can think of?

TIFFANY: Yeah. Actually, we just launched a promotion through the end of the year that if any book club or small group or Sunday School class, if you purchase a minimum of six copies of the book, I will actually do a free Zoom video call with your group to discuss it and do a Q&A.

NATALIE: Wow!

TIFFANY: So you can reach out through my website, which is tiffanyyeckebrooks.com, or Facebook. You can find me at Facebook: Tiffany Yecke Brooks, PhD — I'm on Facebook. If you can reach out through there and then we can coordinate that. Again, through the end of the year, just six copies or more, I'll come and do a Zoom chat with your group, do a Q&A. We can have a discussion. I just want to make sure that the people who need to hear this message are getting it, and I think it helps so much to have community as you go through it. There are discussion questions in the back of the book for each chapter so that you can do guided discussions. But it helps to have community sometimes when you're going through something like this. So that's why I really want to encourage book groups to do it so that you can be talking with other people who are experiencing these same things and you're not feeling isolated, you're not feeling like you've lost your faith tribe by speaking some of these thoughts and feelings out loud.

NATALIE: Right. Well, I already know right now, I have a group called Flying Higher. It's for divorced Christian women. And we were just having a panel discussion a couple weeks ago and talking about what we want to do for 2023. And a lot of us decided that we would like to go through a book each month, and so we're totally doing... One of those months next year, 2023, we'll do this book. And we'd love to have you come on and do a discussion with us. That would be so awesome.

TIFFANY: I would be very happy to, yes. Just let me know.

NATALIE: Okay, well, for those of you who are listening, thank you so much for joining us today with this interview with Dr. Tiffany Yecke Brooks. And if you enjoyed this podcast episode, be sure to leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. That's what helps. Apple Podcasts will show our podcast to other people if they see that people are liking it. So that's how we can spread the word. And thank you so much for listening, and until next time, fly free.