

## 200TH EPISODE CELEBRATION: THE STATE OF THE CHRISTIAN SURVIVOR AND ADVOCATE COMMUNITY

*Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of [FlyingFreeNow.com](http://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 200 of the Flying Free Podcast! You guys, it is Episode 200! We are celebrating today, and I am super excited to be celebrating with two of my favorite fellow advocates, Sarah McDugal and... Oh my gosh, I'm going to say it wrong. Ngina?

NGINA: Ngina.

NATALIE: Ngina.

NGINA: Yes.

NATALIE: Is it Otiende?

NGINA: Absolutely. You got it.

NATALIE: Oh my gosh. I know we've talked about this in the past, but I never have been able to practice it with you in person. So Ngina Otiende. All right.

NGINA: You got it perfectly.

NATALIE: So let me just explain to everyone how we know each other. We have this Facebook group. What do you call it? It's on Messenger?

SARAH: Yeah, it's just a Facebook Messenger group chat.

NATALIE: Yes. It's just a group chat, okay? So it's not like this official Facebook group or anything, and I don't even know how people have gotten in over time, but it's like a little conglomeration of advocates, and we just chat about things that are bugging us or questions we might have, or we get advice from each other sometimes. Or sometimes we just are like, "Oh my gosh, this amazing thing just happened," and we celebrate.

SARAH: Or "My day just really sucked. I need some pick-me-up from people who understand."

NATALIE: Exactly. Exactly. Like sometimes we'll get attacked by nasty people and then we just want to come in and download, but we've actually gotten together in person as well a couple of times. So that's been a lot of fun. Not everyone can come each time, but it's kind of developed into this thing. I don't know — has it been three years now, Sarah?

SARAH: The first time we got together was the winter of 2019, so yeah.

NATALIE: Okay, so before Covid. Oh my gosh, it's been years.

SARAH: It was just before Covid, because I don't know if you remember, but I remember I was limping around everywhere and I was in so much pain, but I had not yet discovered that I had cancer — bone cancer — in my leg. And that was November. And it was three or four weeks after that trip that I got the diagnosis. And then January 2020 was like cancer, Covid, everything. Chemo started in February. So that was like the last slide down before life went and hit the fan.

NATALIE: Unbelievable. So she went from having super long, gorgeous hair, then she went bald from cancer — chemo treatment — and now look at you.

SARAH: I'm having so much fun. I curled it a couple of days ago. Okay, I'm just going to be a complete girly girl for a second. I can actually twist it up and do this clippy thingy and have my hair up. I haven't been able to do that since the end of 2019.

NATALIE: Oh wow. Awesome. Congratulations.

NGINA: That's awesome. And you're rocking it.

NATALIE: She can look like a rock star now with her hair all over the place.

NGINA: Beautiful.

NATALIE: Some of you might remember Sarah. We actually did a podcast episode. This is Episode 200, but Sarah came on on Episode 19 — we were just talking about this before we got on here — and that episode is called "Is Self-Care Selfish, or Is It a Sacred Duty?" And she came on and did a little talk about that. So if you guys want to hit that episode up after you're done with this one...

SARAH: You gotta go vintage for that. When was that? Like 2018?

NATALIE: I think so.

NGINA: Oh my gosh. That's a while.

SARAH: Yeah. I was doing really good on the self-care there, totally not taking myself to the doctor while I was hurting like crazy. It took me another year to get to the doctor. So I'm just going to out myself on not being great with this self-care personally.

NATALIE: So that's a truth bomb right there. If you're having physical problems, go to the doctor.

SARAH: Get yourself to the doctor. Your kids need you alive. Get yourself to the doctor.

NATALIE: Oh my gosh. Yes. Okay, so Sarah, I actually went to your website and looked on your About page. Can I just read what you say about yourself on your About page?

SARAH: I guess!

NATALIE: So for people who don't know Sarah... a lot of people do. Some people kind of follow the group of us. But if you don't, you need to know Sarah, because she has a special, unique way of communicating. She's the co-founder of Wilderness to Wild — and we'll put links in the show notes too for everybody — and the TraumaMAMAs mobile app, which is amazing. So she says, "I'm a mama as well as an author, coach, and survivor." Now, this is so fascinating to me. She says, "As a neurodivergent woman on the autism spectrum and a survivor of domestic violence and child sexual assault, my hyperfocus is developing evidence-based, gospel-aligned resources for women after abuse."

Now, I want you to know something about Sarah. She is a communicator extraordinaire. I mean, I am totally flabbergasted by your communication style. She is so clear and articulate. She articulates concepts that are hard to understand in very clear, easy-to-understand ways with passion. And you just bring a huge gift to the survivor community, 100%, Sarah. So she also has books. One of her books is called "He Chose Porn Over Me: Women Harmed by Men Who Use Porn." Another book is "Myths We Believe: Predators We Trust." Good names for your books. Do you have someone to help you?

SARAH: I actually didn't pick either of those names. I did pick the "One Face" name.

NATALIE: Oh yeah, so say that. Tell them what that book is called.

SARAH: So that one is “One Face: Shed the Mask, Own Your Values, and Lead Wisely.” That was my first book. “He Chose Porn” and “The Myths We Believe” are both co-writes. So “He Chose Porn,” I’m one of a number of contributing authors, and that one was published just this year in Australia. The editor of that book is Melinda Tankard Reist, and she’s the founder of Collective Shout, which is an anti-porn, anti-sexual exploitation organization in Australia. Now, just a little fun plug: She and I are planning a speaking book tour in August and September of ‘23 here in the US.

NATALIE: Do you know where you’re going to be yet?

SARAH: We are working on a number of options, different churches, organizations, universities, community things, but we have not locked in all the things. So we are open if there are other people who want to be...

NATALIE: Well, keep me posted, because we do this Butterfly Bootcamp thing for Flying Free. It would be so fun to have you guys come in if you happen to be in the Twin Cities. Twin Cities — we’re a big place. There’s a lot of people here. And the Mall of America’s here and right next to the international airport.

SARAH: We should just do it in the Mall of America at all the people who are walking by.

NATALIE: Exactly, like those street corner preachers.

SARAH: This brings preachers to a whole different level.

NGINA: More preachers.

NATALIE: Oh my goodness. I actually kind of like that idea, although it would scare me. I don’t think it would scare you though, would it, Sarah. Would it scare you?

SARAH: I’m not a big fan of the street preacher thing. I don’t like having to stand there and listen even if I were to agree with what someone was saying — which, that usually is like the radical elements, and I’m probably not going to be on board with a lot of that — but even if I were to totally agree, I feel so awkward. I’m an introvert. I will riff with you guys because it’s us, right?

NATALIE: Yeah. Well, and think about it too: Street preaching, it’s such a violation of people’s boundaries when you think about it. It really is.

SARAH: Yeah. I think that Jesus was all about the relational connection, not yelling at

people through a bullhorn and waving placards around. I get it's free speech. People are free to do that, but I want to cross the street and go the other way. I'll go out of the way to avoid it. And I feel awkward for the person doing it because of what everyone else is thinking of them.

NGINA: You would enjoy it and love it in Kenya, because we are like the melting pot of street evangelism and open-air crusades.

NATALIE: Oh, fascinating.

SARAH: Now see, I've done the open-air crusade.

NGINA: Yeah, I hear you. Me too. But yeah, I get what you're saying, because that's where I am as well right now. I've grown to a place where it's like, "Oh my gosh." But I get more relational, get the wild side of things and just connect with people, you know?

SARAH: Yeah. There's not one instance in scripture where Jesus stood on a corner and just stood around yelling at people to do what He said. He sat down at dinner with people nobody else would touch.

NATALIE: Yep. And when He was speaking to crowds, He was away from the cities and He was out. People had to come to him.

SARAH: So they wanted to be there.

NATALIE: Exactly.

SARAH: There was consent involved.

NATALIE: But I'm wondering if some cultures are maybe more open to that kind of thing, and it's more of like a, "Yes, this is what we do and this makes life interesting to go over here," and you just know that you're going to be hearing lots of different people sharing their opinions.

NGINA: Yeah, there's that. There's that where people actually show up for these meetings and then there's the yell on the street and then in the buses. There's that where it's like you can expect that if you go to church, you're going to hear preachings. So if you go to a crusade, you're going to hear preachings — like, crusade is open-air meetings. So people can do that, but sometimes it's not organized. It can be messy.

NATALIE: Okay. Let's talk about you, Ngina. You are a certified marriage coach, and I guess I didn't really realize that you do marriage coaching. And you're an author and a blogger. Tell us about your book.

NGINA: I'm a certified coach, a marriage coach, yes. But this year I did my big switch from regular marriage stuff and I re-thought everything. So what that involved was I had to take down all my books and courses and I stopped coaching. Because for me, I went through this season and this period and finally made this decision that I have to change everything, because I changed within my belief system just over a period of time, finally came to a head, and I was like, "Things need to change." And this is not the small changes that you go to a book or a course and just a minor updates here and there. It is a shift in the way I approach things as a marriage coach. So that was going to take a lot of editing. I mean, it was good. It's big — it's just a big overhaul of my resources. So I took everything down. I took down all my books, my courses. So they're not to date, they're not available for sale, and I stopped coaching, because first and foremost, I wanted to heal physically.

I have this thing that I... Well, it comes out as chronic pain, so I think I've been running for such a while — I've been doing this for ten plus years and dealing with stuff, you know. So anyway, I needed to kind of move back from everything, take care of myself, my physical body, but as well as go through this process without it being in a rush. So this year, I haven't been doing any type of coaching because I'm focused on healing and I'm focused on learning, you know? So that's why I'm in this place. I'm in a better place. I'm feeling way more peaceful, because now I can look at products, I can decide if it's going to go back on sale again, or I'm going to script it all together. I'm working on a new course. I have some courses already that have been taken down, but the good thing is when you start to reevaluate things, God gives you new ideas — your eyes open up. So I'm working on something that I hope will be out before the end of the year — I'm not sure. So right now, no products, no services, just my blog.

SARAH: I beg to differ. Right now, your products and services are the plethora of really great content that you are continually putting out. You're writing articles and blog posts. You're observing and critically analyzing and thinking in a very deeply assessing kind of way, and the memes and the quotes and the things that you put out — I think it is a service.

NATALIE: Oh, 100%. I was going to tell people, they need to know where to find you on Facebook and Instagram too, because your memes... Every day you've got something that's on fire. So what is your Instagram handle?

NGINA: And I meant the product and the service, and thank you Sarah. I need affirmation.

SARAH: I know you mean like paid products and stuff, but.

NGINA: Yeah, exactly. But yeah, this is the switch because of the kind of world I'm coming from, like regular married stuff, conservative Christian. Anyway, it's been quite a challenge for people to accept that and to see what I'm doing as something that the body of Christ needs. You guys have a whole... That's your background, that people just come at you because of what you do. They don't think it's something the body of Christ needs. So for me, I'm the newbie in this space and it's like, "Oh gosh — Christians, we are so ugly." We can be so ugly. But anyway, Natalie, my Instagram is nginaotiende. That's Instagram. And then on Facebook, it's Intentional Today. And that's my website too: [intentionaltoday.com](http://intentionaltoday.com).

NATALIE: Okay.

RACHEL: Hey, Natalie, it's Rachel, your sidekick from some of those early episodes of the podcast. And here you are celebrating 200. And I can just say "congratulations" from myself and for all the women who listen to this podcast, because you are a gift to us. You have changed lives in such a direct and meaningful way, and we are so thankful for you, Natalie.

So as we are celebrating this two hundredth episode, thank you for the chance to offer a few reflections on the state of Christendom, and I think what God is doing with His church. And I don't have a full-time platform — I don't have a platform at all, really — but I have a few ways that I minister to people in my life, and I can see what God is doing in those areas. And I want to share a few things that I think will be an encouragement.

So one is that I am a youth leader at our church, and I've been doing that for about five years now. And it has been such a blessing to me, because youth group was really instrumental in my formation. It wasn't always positive, but it was a really strong presence in my life. And it's such a gift to me to be able to give back in that way and to connect with some of the young women in youth group. And what I see in them is so encouraging, because they understand mental health matters. The new generation that God is raising up is so much more emotionally intelligent and aware of the impact of trauma, of emotion, of the importance of bringing to God all of yourself instead of just acting like your emotions don't matter to your spirituality.



And I think that is so encouraging, because that's not a lesson that I remember being taught very often. We talked a lot about obedience and what that looked like, and I just am so encouraged by these young women and so thankful for them. And I think it's a lesson that the broader church needs to see and to open themselves up to, that God calls us to worship Him with all of our being — our emotions, our mind, our intellect and our bodies. And we can't separate any of those things and say that somehow God doesn't want those things. We can submit our emotions to God, and God made us with emotions for a reason. And so when someone else comes in and hurts us in a way that affects our emotions, that matters to God. And that's such an important insight for teaching the church about the destruction of emotional abuse. And that is so encouraging for me that this younger generation is also seeing that importance.

So another thing that I get to do is I'm involved with a restoration house for female survivors of sex trafficking. And this house is faith-based and it was started by just some very, what you might think of as “standard church people.” But they're standard church people who are really following God in obedience. And they asked me to do grant writing for them. And so here I am. I don't know anything about grant writing. I am a writer, but I don't write grants, and that's a very specific skill. So for the last year I've been learning how to write grants. And what's amazing to me is that, in establishing this restoration house — so it's a place for women who've been sex trafficked to come and find new life and to experience the love of God, to get vocational training, to just stabilize themselves after having been through traumatic situations — and what's amazing to me is that through this, the staff of the restoration house and the leaders are learning about trauma. And they may not have understood what trauma meant before — how it impacts us, what it looks like, how it manifests itself in people's lives — but through sex trafficking, what they are learning about trauma and complex trauma.

And so what I see is these very standard church people understanding the effects of trauma and of power and control. And I think that through the awareness of human trafficking, God is making more people aware of how power and control can be used in marriage. And some people are trafficked by their own family, including their husbands. All of these things are interwoven. And I really do think that God is using the experiences of people in sex trafficking to open the eyes of people in church. And I think we can continue to pray that God will use that door for open hearts and for humble hearts that are able to see the reality of evil and how pervasive it is even in the church.

But God is calling the church to compassion. And too often, standard Christian people are very shut down in the way that they think about God and the way that they approach other people. Instead of allowing the compassion that God has for them to



overflow to others, they're very stingy with it. They're stingy with it in themselves, and they're stingy with it for others. And I would love to see God open up hearts so that people can understand that God does not call us to start ignoring the way that we feel. Our emotions may not always be telling us the truth about the situation in front of us, but they are telling us the truth about something, whether it's something in our past, something we need to deal with or something, okay?

And so when we say that your emotions lie to you and your heart is deceitful above all things, we don't understand the way God designed us as humans, and we aren't respecting the image that we bear of God. And so I think that's where I'm looking for God to continue to move, is just a revival of that openness, of that worship with God, of all of our hearts. And what God can do with that is amazing. So Natalie, congratulations again. I love you, I'm thankful for you, and I'm so glad for the impact that you are having in all of these women's lives. Keep it up.

NATALIE: All right. Well, thank you so much for being here. We're going to have a discussion now. I would love to just have a discussion with both of you about what you're seeing in the world of advocacy or in your own work with people, conversations that you have online or with, Sarah, with your members, women of faith who might be in destructive relationships. Sometimes they don't know really if they are or not, but sometimes they definitely know.

Because ten years ago, we did not have books and blogs and podcasts that were talking about this for Christian women, and those of us who were actually living in abusive relationships, we kind of had to just gut it out and then eventually, if we wanted to get out, we had to do it alone. We didn't have anyone cheering us on or walking us through it or helping us in any way. And honestly, I think very few people can do it alone, because it's a hellish journey. It's almost unthinkable to face this journey, and the idea of doing it by yourself with actually so much oppression and so much discouragement... Not just discouragement, but criticism and really downright hate coming from your Christian community — it just makes it really undoable in many ways. But here we are ten years later, and there are all kinds of books and websites and podcasts and ministries and online support resources that are going to educate Christian women, walk alongside them, cheer them on in their healing journey, in any step, in any part of the journey that they're on.

And also, what I love seeing is there's an openness to just allowing women to make their own decisions about this and take it at their own pace. Not always. I have heard stories. Sometimes you might get in with someone who's like, "You have to get out and you have to do it now, and if you don't, then you're ruining your children." And that is

just kind of swinging the pendulum to the other direction, right? We're not really empowering women to decide — we're shaming them in the opposite way. But I think for the most part, what we see in the advocacy world is just a lot of love and just, "Let's walk alongside you and let's educate you and then get you to the place." I think in the back of our minds, we're thinking, "We've got to get them strong — strong internally so that they can make good choices for themselves and do those hard things."

But anyway, to celebrate 200 episodes, I thought we could just celebrate where we're at in the survivor community and in the advocacy world. So I know you can just kind of share from your own perspective, but what's coming up for you when I bring this up?

SARAH: Do you want to go, Ngina?

NGINA: Yeah, sure. And so first, congratulations, Natalie. This is amazing. Two hundred episodes out there. And I've heard from friends who discovered you online, and they're like, "There's this lady. What's her name? She has something like Flying... Flying..." And I'm like, "Flying Free? I don't know, Natalie?" She's like, "Yes." So people are listening to you all over, and just congratulations for the amazing work that you're doing. So fun fact, I am a product of your advocacy. You, Sarah, Sheila, Helena... I think Helena Knowlton? I think she's one of your founding members?

NATALIE: Yeah.

NGINA: So I'm sitting here talking to you, chatting, looking at your beautiful faces, as a fruit of your labor in the advocacy world. Because I made the switch back in February, but it had been long in coming. People think I just changed everything overnight, but it's been years of study, of my own personal experiences, of being in community with people in horribly destructive marriages.

And finally all that came to a head and I was reading. I was not public, but I was reading your stuff, Natalie, and Sarah, and Sheila — I've known her for a long time — and Helena. I was studying and reading, and my mind was like, "Oh my gosh." Because I was coaching women, and women typically would come to me when they have problems. People don't go for coaching because everything is great. They come for marriage coaching because, "I need to figure this thing out." And so things were connecting to me that there were people who were coming to me for... That their marriage, it wasn't a relationship problem to begin with, but they thought it was a marriage problem. Meanwhile, it was an individual problem.

So anyway, I'm sitting here as a fruit of the work you've been doing, the studies you've

done, this content that you have out there. And I am just so excited that I'm here on your 200th episode to celebrate. And here I am — I'm sure you have thousands across the world — but here is one person that can tell you who's still in the space of teaching, that you are making a huge difference not just to the women themselves, but to people who are in places of influence and teaching and all that. So that's exciting to me.

So when I made that switch and the way I talk and teach and approach marriage, one of the things that I heard is from the many women who are still reading my stuff, watching my stuff, coming to me for support and all that, saying, "Oh gosh, finally you get it. Finally we feel heard — we feel like you are actually getting it." Because they want the marriage stuff. It has an audience when you're approaching things healthily.

But it's like one part of the room was feeling heard and taken care of and the other part was like, "There's a lot missing," or "What you're saying isn't really helpful for my marriage." Because a lot of people who come to me are not in what we'd call outrightly, what the layperson would say, "Oh yeah, that's abuse." Because there's no black eye, there's no bruises, there's nothing. So when I started saying things... And there was already a ready audience who already listened to me, and that's why I'm so passionate about marriage teachers getting it right, is because there's a slew of individuals already listening to them, already watching their stuff.

Because another thing I've discovered is that individuals, women in really destructive marriages, will not automatically, like, run to Sarah, like, "Oh yeah, I know exactly what is going on" or to Natalie. They will not reach out to Gretchen because it's like, "Life-saving divorce? No, I don't want it." They just think, "We are having trouble." So they'll keep on consuming regular marriage content just thinking, "We are having normal issues." So when the person who is teaching this stuff is not clear, it does not help them have clarity to like, "Oops, I don't think this falls within the normal marriage issue spectrum."

SARAH: Well, I'm just thinking, just inserting into what you're saying, when the best-selling marriage books that you would find on the Christian bookstore shelf tend to use abusive, destructive illustrations as their case study stories for normal marriage problems, but they're actually talking about rage, marital rape, lack of consent, stonewalling, psychological abuse, manipulation, gaslighting, and they're talking about all of these as, "These are just normal — you just need to communicate a little better." So everyone who's having these issues goes to those books and they're like, "Well, this is just marriage teaching, right? I just need a few tweaks for my marriage to get better," and they just come up empty handed.

NATALIE: Abuse is normalized in most of those marriage books.

SARAH: Exactly. And the biggest authors are normalizing it.

NGINA: Yeah. And then they'll say, "Oh, this stuff is not for... I didn't mean it for you guys. I'm not saying abuse is okay." Some will even say, "Abuse is wrong."

SARAH: But their examples are of abuse.

NGINA: Exactly. The illustrations, the way they talk about how to deal with it... And I'm coming from a place where I was naïve as well, so it's like, I know what I'm talking about, but the way I agitate a point and the way I'm talking... Because women came to me during my coaching. I wasn't helping everybody. You know, as a coach, you know when to refer out. Like, "Okay, I think things are more than what I can help you with. So here's the recommendations of the next step." But the thing is, those illustrations, Sarah, or the way that we approach issues and even the silence is like the deafening silence about, "Okay, so what if he never changes?" It's always, "Do this. Have you tried this? Okay." Then you're given another thing that you need to do. How about when a person never changes?

We don't talk about what does the end of the line, so to speak... It's like, "Oh, there's always hope. There's always hope. We are in Jesus. We all love the Lord." But it's like, yeah, you can love the Lord and be a horrible spouse, you know — that kind of thing. It's like it doesn't matter what you say — it's what you do that matters. But in our regular marriage stuff, which you say is a regular marriage, but we don't talk about the worst case scenarios. We don't go there.

So all our books, all our illustrations are all about, "Let us figure out how to make it work even if the other person... You're saying the other person doesn't want to make it work." So the person who's being advised just becomes Jesus, basically, because they have to keep on trying to save something and working and they are slaving themselves out there just trying to get things... So I don't know where I was, but that's where I am. That's where I am right now.

NATALIE: So I have a question for you. So you pulled your books, but just clarify for me, are you planning on putting... Because we need good marriage books out there, but that don't do what these other marriage books are doing and kind of gaslight everyone to think that marriage is supposed to be abusive or that that's somehow normal. Are you planning to kind of revamp your books and then put them out there as an alternative to some of these other marriage books?

NGINA: Absolutely. That's what I've been doing. That's what I'm doing. That's what I'm doing right now.

NATALIE: Good.

NGINA: You know how you have a book and you had an angle? Like, there's a book I wrote like what, six, seven years ago? And I've kept updating it, but I've been looking at it and thinking, "Now this book needs a whole different approach to it." So there's some books that I'm wondering, "Do I update it or do I rewrite?" But then others are like courses and all that. So I'm definitely going to put them back out, because there are still people to date who don't believe their marriages are abusive because they don't know how to kind of tell between those dynamics.

So it's like if, when you are writing a regular marriage book, but you also go really broad, it's kind of like a seed into, as you, Natalie and Sarah, usually say: You cannot force somebody to take a step that they're not ready for. But there can be so many seeds along the route that eventually they start to bear fruit in their lives. They're like, "Okay," you know? So, yes, long story short, I am planning to get them out, and I'm super excited to have something that people can actually pick... Because you know, you get a lot of questions and they're like, "Okay, now at least I can go back to referring people to a book or resources where they can find bigger help."

NATALIE: Yeah. So are you ever going to get back to coaching again? And if so, what kind of coaching do you want to do?

NGINA: Yeah, I want to go back to... I still get so many emails, you know — people wanting to have appointments and all that. To be honest, I don't know when because of my health, my own health. So I don't know when, but I had tapped out for 2022. That's what's on my website — I'm not taking any clients for 2022. So I'm trying to see what 2023 comes up with. But I know that since that's my area of certification and all that, I don't know if I'll go to regular marriage coaching, but I might, because people who come to me are in basically problematic situations. So that's an opportunity to offer clarity, but now in a so much better way. So I do want to get my certification in other areas — in trauma and abuse and all that — but I'll likely go back, I just don't know when. Because I'm just playing it by how my mind feels and how my body feels.

NATALIE: Yeah. Because I just got an email this morning from someone who said, they listened to today's podcast, the one that came out today. And they were like, "You know, in my marriage, I feel like my husband and I both pick on each other and we both fight with each other and we both kind of..." I don't think she thinks her relationship is

abusive other than... When I read it, I was like, "Okay, that might be two people who just need to mature a little bit more or just need to learn skills of communication." That person would benefit from someone like you, and I actually think there's some people in my program too that are, they're not necessarily in abusive relationships, but they have problems in their relationships. It could be if they came together with someone... But then that leads me to another question: Do you do coaching with couples then, or do you just coach women? How does that work?

NGINA: I coach women. I had thought of doing couples, and my husband and I in the past have done couples like man to man, women to... Well, the four of us. But I personally just coach women. I haven't had the bandwidth to include the dudes in coaching. I just stick to the women.

NATALIE: Well, I think when a woman, if she's not in an abusive relationship but just a problematic one, if she changes her dance, he will come along, you know? That's how you know, actually, that the relationship is abusive or not. You change your dance, and then their reaction will let you know who they are, what they're made of.

NGINA: Yeah, exactly. And since when it's coaching, as, you know, one-on-one coaching, you do it over a couple of months and weeks, so you have time to observe, get feedback, figure out what's going on. So that was really clarifying for me when I was coaching back in the day to figure out, "What kind of a man is he?" Because she'll come back and tell me the results they're getting or not getting and it's like, "Okay, clarity is coming to her as well and to myself about the kind of relationship they have." Because I don't have direct access to him, but she's able to... So you're right. So once you change the dance, the person either changes with you or they leave.

SARAH: Or they escalate.

NATALIE: Yeah, or they escalate. Exactly.

SARAH: Those are the ones that I get.

NGINA: The escalators. Oh my goodness. Yeah.

SARAH: They're like, "Ah!"

NATALIE: Thank you so much for sharing that. I learned some things. You said you knew Sheila for a while. How did you guys connect? And we're talking about Sheila Wray Greigoire, just for people who don't know.



NGINA: I met Sheila when... Quick one. My husband and I have been in the US for eleven years. We are not born and raised in the US. We are Kenyans. We grew up in Kenya and we got married fourteen years ago. So we got married fourteen years ago, been in the US eleven years. So when I was a newlywed still in Kenya, my husband and I had a lot of newlywed adjustments. We were not doing good as a newlywed couple. Anyway, lots of details there. But I was online looking for help for our communication, because I was like, "Nah, this isn't working. We've tried all the counseling, we've tried all the mentorship, and something is missing."

And then I went online... Actually I was reading a guy blog because I was trying to understand my guy. I read a guy blog, and then the guy blog linked to an article of Sheila's. That's way back. I think I was a year or so married. And then I followed the link and I found her website and my mind was blown. She is the first person who I ever heard talk about boundaries, because I was coming from a super African, Christian, conservative culture of, "The husband leads. If he doesn't want to talk, you leave him alone. Wife go under," you know? So I had never heard of the concept of boundaries. I can tell my husband, "1, 2, 3," hold my space, make expectations. Expectations are like, "Wow, you can have expectations and hold on to them?" So anyway, that's how I came to know Sheila, through her blog post in Kenya way back

Then I moved to the US. I started... Because I had started kind of blogging when I was in Kenya. Then I came to the US, started blogging for real, and then now connected that way — reached out to her. So I've known her for quite a while. And we have actually met once. She was doing a tour. She does a tour in North America. So she came near when we lived on the East Coast, she came near where we were, and I went out and met them and it was great.

NATALIE: Oh fun. Well, helping me with that connection. That's interesting.

GRETCHEN: This is Gretchen Baskerville, and you had asked a group of advocates to tell you whether or not we are optimistic and feel we've moved the needle in the advocacy world where it comes to divorce for abuse, or just in general, speaking up for marital abuse victims and holding their abusers responsible and really calling out the church to do better. And I would say absolutely. We have made wonderful strides, especially in the last two years.

For example, I see more and more pastors feeling empowered because we are naming names, we are bringing up situations, we are holding their feet to the fire, but we're doing more than that. We're also giving them the factual information they need. For example, the scientific data they need to change their mind and go a different direction.



I've got a whole list of pastors on my website who are conservative pastors, but they have changed their minds on the topic of divorce for abuse. One of the things that's most powerful is finding the data that shows that divorce saves lives.

What they discovered after no-fault divorce started passing into law in the states, one state at a time — as you know, there is no federal divorce law, so it's state by state — what they discovered was that the suicide rate for wives dropped by 8% to 16%. The domestic violence rate dropped 30% and the homicide rate against wives dropped 10%. Divorce is saving lives. There is absolutely no doubt about that. I've also seen two denominations revise their public statement on divorce. They have made it clear that abuse is or may be grounds for divorce, and they had never said that before.

Then, I am seeing more and more myths being overturned, especially the myths that are being propagated in churches from the pulpit and from Focus on the Family. For example, you know, this myth that the divorce rate is spiraling upward and it's now a huge crisis, when in reality, the divorce rate is lower than it's been in fifty years, despite no-fault divorce coming into law. Also, there's this myth that says that there aren't any Bible verses that condone divorce for abuse, when in reality there are actually two Bible verses that command divorce for abuse, and people just aren't aware of that. And for anybody who's interested in knowing more about that, just come to my website, [lifesavingdivorce.com](http://lifesavingdivorce.com).

Finally, we are attacking Focus on the Family's completely fraudulent articles on kids in divorce. They have articles where they quote scientists, and they actually leave out words to make it sound like the scientists agree with them, when in reality they don't. I actually contacted one of the sociologists they referenced and I said, "This is what they say about your beliefs." And he says, "They're absolutely bananas." So holding Focus on the Family's feet to the fire when their articles are rubbish most of the time on anything having to do with children in divorce. And I've got a lot about Focus on the Family. If you want to see my claim-by-claim analysis of about at least three or four of their key articles, just look at, when you go to my website, the [lifesavingdivorce.com](http://lifesavingdivorce.com), just look on the right hand side and you'll see all of my articles on Focus on the Family.

Anyway, I see pastors being willing to speak out more than they ever had in their lives on the topic of divorce for abuse. And I've got a whole list of pastors who are conservative pastors on my website, and people can go search for that. It's one of my most popular blog posts. It's [lifesavingdivorce.com/pastors](http://lifesavingdivorce.com/pastors). And you can see a number of conservative pastors and their podcasts or their sermons on the topic. Anyway, I am fired up and I'm excited about what we advocates have done and what we will continue to do. I really expect that in the next five to ten years, we will have completely changed

the tide and the discussion on this topic. All right. Thank you so much for everything you do, Natalie. Bye.

NATALIE: Okay, Sarah, you're in the hot seat next. Tell us all the things.

SARAH: I have a few thoughts running around in my head. I'm sorry — that is like the understatement of the century. I have some key points that I want to directly answer your question with, but I kind of also wanted to jump on the bandwagon that Ngina started, and I wanted to say, first of all, Ngina, somebody sent me your post in January when you pulled your blogs. And I had senior stuff on Facebook a little bit, but I'll be honest, I thought it was just another generic marriage thing, and that's really not my shtick. I'm full up to here for life with generic marriage stuff. So I didn't know you personally yet, and somebody sent me your announcement post, and I was like, "Holy crap, this woman is going to get hell or it's very likely that she's going to, and she needs some back-up." And that was when I messaged you and I was like, "This is seriously the most courageous thing I have seen in God knows how long." And I was in awe of your openness and vulnerability and bluntness. I like blunt. I mean, just shoot straight already.

NGINA: Me too.

SARAH: And Natalie, I remember your blog and Sheila's blogs from so far back, before any of us ever flipped the switch on this stuff — like the "Happy Wife, Happy Life," "Bake 16 Loaves of Bread," kind of blogs — and when you revamped, I honestly didn't know it was you for a while, but your book, "Is It Me?" is required reading on the professional coaches training that I'm launching next year. I have a bunch of people already getting through.

NATALIE: Oh wow. Thank you!

SARAH: I have distilled down to twenty-five books that... I mean, there's like, fifty that I think everyone should read, but I have twenty-four or twenty-five that are like, if you want to do this course, you have to have done a book report on these books, because they are pivotal. And your book is on that list. And Ngina, get your books out, girl. I want more books to be able to refer people to. But I wanted you both to know that. I think both of you are pivotal voices.

The people who are listening are getting all turned off by the mush and the props fest here. Okay, so to answer your question, I love the contrast of the last decade that you painted a few minutes ago, Natalie, just, like, ten years ago. I mean, ten years ago for

me, there was nothing like I needed. That's why we do what we do, right? Because when I needed it it wasn't there, so I'm going to make sure that anyone that is in this circle of influence that I may be given has what I wish I had. I'm going to do my best to turn that pain into purpose so that someone else doesn't have to scabble in the dark. At the same time, I think among those who are not really abuse informed, there's this sense all of a sudden that in the last ten years, "Things have gotten so bad."

NATALIE: Yes, it's true. They're just panicking.

SARAH: And these pastors, they're getting busted. They're just like, "What's going on? The evangelical world is just ripping apart at the seams," and of us who realize it, we're like, "Oh no, honey, we just pulled back the veil. This has always been there. It's always been like this. This is the tip of the iceberg, and the Titanic has run aground, and get off the ship like running little rats," you know? So I think there's this perspective among some that abuse has gotten so much worse and we need to do something to make the abuse go away or at least the reports of it go away, because they've had more than they can stomach. My perspective on that assumption is that Jesus likes to bring things into the light. There's not one place in scripture where Jesus says, "Ooh, take that dirty little secret and hide it in a closet someplace please. Stuff that back in the dark." No. He says, "Have no fellowship with the fruitless works of evil and abuse and darkness. Instead, expose it. Bring it into the light." Natalie, you've got nine kids. I've got two, and you are a superwoman. Ngina, I don't know if you have kids. You don't have kids?

NGINA: No, I don't have kids.

SARAH: Don't have kids, okay. But I know there's a bunch of homeschool mamas in your audience, Natalie, that are probably watching, and you've probably done Petri dish experiments with your kids. When you are growing mold spores and making fuzzy green and blue stuff, where do you put it? You put it someplace warm and damp in the dark. You do not set it on the kitchen window sill in direct sunlight because it kills the mold spores, right? So when we take all of these dark, dirty secrets and we shove them with the molding, dirty laundry in the back, they never get hung on the line. And then people are like, "Why are you hanging out your dirty laundry on the line?"

Well, nobody that I ever knew growing up... And when I was little, there was a season where we did not have a dryer. We hung our laundry on the line, but never once did we hang dirty laundry on the line. You only hang laundry out after you've washed it, right? That's where the clean laundry goes. So airing the laundry means it's not molding in a pile in the back of the cellar corner in the dark. It means it's been washed. It tells the world, "We do the laundry." We're not wearing stinky clothes and covering up, walking

around in a cloud of Axe deodorant to try to mask the smell of the moldy BO. So there's a smelly word picture my thirteen-year-old would love.

NATALIE: That was good. That was good. I like that analogy.

NGINA: That was really good.

SARAH: But, I think that while yes, there are some who are just panicking at the level of abuse that seems to be coming out into the light, if we look at it as, "Hey, this has always been there and now we can clean house," this is a good thing. It's kind of like pressure washing the mold off the side of the house. You get covered in spray, you have to go take a shower afterward, but once you get to what's underneath, then it's clean again. I mean, we live in a sinful world. We live in an evil world. This is not heaven, so it's never going to be purely clean here, but we can do the best we can to not hand down our crap to our children, a generational legacy of evil and secrets and normalized exploitation. And I think that that purging is kind of what's going on.

What I love is when I get... And people do it to you guys too — I see it happening, so it's not just about me. But when there are people who have platforms that post something toxic and destructive... Now, this would never even happen three years ago — maybe even two years ago. But now people who speak out against that get tagged. Because there are those who want pushback. They may not be feeling courageous enough or articulate enough, or they may not be safe to write all the answers themselves, but they'll tag you or you or me or Sheila or Gretchen or somebody. They start tagging people. There was a sermon a couple of months ago by, I think it was Craig Groeschel, on marriage, and it was really kind of haphazard. I don't think he was overtly endorsing abuse, but he said things like, "If my wife thinks I'm being too controlling, she needs to deal with her heart."

NATALIE: Oh my gosh. Really?

NGINA: Wow.

SARAH: That was like a direct quote. And then he also said... This was a meme that they put on the church's website, and it's a megachurch, right? Reaches tens of thousands of people. And there was a meme they put on that's like, "Getting out of your marriage because you ran out of love is like abandoning your car because you ran out of gas."

NATALIE: I remember seeing that. Yeah.

SARAH: Okay. So this was the same sermon. And there were hundreds of comments correcting that fallacy.

NATALIE: Good.

SARAH: They pulled the meme — they did not pull the sermon off of their YouTube channel — but they pulled the meme because it was just pages of scrolling, pages and pages of comments underneath if you were to print them out of people saying, “This is not acceptable — this is endorsing abuse. People don't just quit being married because they just don't love each other anymore. There's stuff that happens. This is glossing over huge issues.” And you know what? A year ago, three years ago, five years ago, ten years ago, people would've just said, “Oh, Craig said it. Okay. Must be true.”

NATALIE: Exactly.

NGINA: Exactly, yeah.

SARAH: So I love where the last decade has gotten. Yes, there's a lot more conflict. Yes, there's a lot more exposure. Yes, there are some people who are running scared of their extracurricular activities getting pulled out into the open — “I don't know, maybe I shouldn't have done that in the dark” — but... I can be snarky too.

But when these subtler things are being posted that would never have gotten a second blink before, now we have a growing tidal wave. I actually made a t-shirt that says “The tidal wave is rising.” We have this growing tidal wave of increasingly courageous voices who are willing just from their little corner of the internet, just from their little corner of conversation, to say, “No. No, that's not okay. That idea is flawed. That endorses, even unwittingly, abusive, destructive behavior. You may not mean for it to – I'm not saying you're an evil person — but the concept itself isn't safe.”

So we have this growing wave of critical thinkers, and I think that's our biggest role as advocates, not getting people out. They have to choose to do that for themselves. Not telling people, “Don't date him.” They still have to choose to do that for themselves, but saying, “Hey, don't swallow everything hook, line and sinker. Research, analyze, think, critique. Use the brain God gave you for such good things.”

NATALIE: Yes. The prevention of brainwashing and gaslighting to not get hooked into that.

SARAH: Just empowering our generation and definitely the next generation to be

analytical thinkers. And to not be so desperate for affirmation from a partner that they're willing to put up with concentration camp level conditions, you know? Just for crumbs.

NATALIE: Yeah. So this reminds me, we were, even in our little Facebook group it came up that sometimes the big megachurch people or the, what do you call them? The theology bros.

SARAH: Theo Bros.

NATALIE: Theo Bros, yeah. The Theo Bros. They don't like that there are women like us with platforms that are changing the whole...

SARAH: To the colonialist society.

NATALIE: Yeah. So they're kind of critical of that. So that came up, which, I was like, "Awesome! This is so cool that we're making enough of a splash that it's actually interfering. We're putting some static in their radio show. And they do not like that."

NGINA: No, they don't, they don't. They don't like the fact that it's a woman talking to them. I think there's a special kind of hatred when it's a woman versus if it's a man calling them out. It's like, "If it's a man, yeah, we're good. You're a bro." When it's a woman, there's a special type of way they feel, which reveals the misogyny and their corrosive ideas about... It's so revealing. Because I've had men come at me and be like, "Really? And you're a brat." It's the mockery, just that tone dripping in just, ugh. I'm like, "You cannot talk to me like a human being, right? You don't, and you don't agree with me, but can you talk to me without talking down at me?" So I think the fact that it's women. And I think some women... Like, I've had a Theo Girl, you know, constantly at my case, and the women were like, "Oh my goodness, I follow you, but the way you are behaving here right now, it's just so un-Christlike." I'm like, "Yeah, you brought that on yourself, and people now can see what kind of a person you are." So I agree with you, Natalie.

SARH: You know what I think they're scared of, Natalie?

NATALIE: What?

SARAH: I think they're scared that their wives will discover that they have the right to think for themselves, and it will topple their little tiny dominions. Because when you're living in a world... I gave my child this historical social studies example just last night,

and I was saying, "Look, why do the people in power never start a civil movement? Why is a civil war always started by the underdog?" And he started kind of thinking it through. I was like, "Okay, well, one-hundred and fifty years ago in the United States, were the slave owners the ones who were fighting for slaves freedom?" He's like, "No." I was like, "But why? Because this system benefited them. Because the free labor, the freedom to control, the freedom for arrogance and to be a kingpin, the freedom for unchecked entitlement — they believed it was their biblical, sacred right, and it was their racial or genetic right. They believed it was their gender right to have dominion and control and dictatorial authority over those they perceived to be lesser than themselves. And so a civil war, a battle for rights, a battle for equality, a battle for justice is never initiated by those who benefit from the inequalities in the system, because it works for them."

NATALIE: That's right. Can I just interject this too?

SARAH: Yeah.

NATALIE: Because that is true about divorce too. A lot of times women will be like, "Well, I don't want to be the one to initiate the divorce, because if I'm the one to initiate the divorce, then I'm the one that's going to get excommunicated or turned away. I'm the rebellious one." But it's the same thing. Take the husband. He's the one who's the abusive husband. He's the one who's benefiting from the relationship. That's why he's not going to file for divorce, typically speaking, okay?

SARAH: Typically. But if he does, there's other things going on. When we're talking about the whole Theo Bro kind of thing... And there's, you guys know, especially on Twitter — oh my word, especially on Twitter — it's like this certain slice of the population pie, and they have a very unique way of speaking that does not recognize the image of God in anyone except those whom they see as like themselves or those who are propping up the platform and the pedestal upon which they place themselves. And instead of saying, "Let's treat each other more Christlike — let's treat each other more as fellow, autonomous humans. Let's raise the level of respect and honor between men and women, from parents to children and children to parents," it's all about that kingdom building in a dictatorship, tyrannical kind of way, and then it's baptized and sanctified in these scriptural terms to silence anyone who might also think for themselves. And basically when you have guys like Dale Partridge who post those... You fixed it right, Ngina, and it went wild?

NGINA: Yeah, I did.



SARAH: "Read to your wife, teach your wife, need your wife." And you were like, "Why can't you just love your wife?" And honestly, that had such throwback to me of, again, that whole civil war kind of idea, like, "We won't let our slaves learn to read." Why? "If you're teaching them to read, they will learn to think for themselves. If they can think for themselves, they will no longer mindlessly and blindly do our bidding with full submission and lack of personhood. And so we ultimately destroy their personhood by removing their right to education." We see this — I'm referring to the United States — but we see this in other cultures where there's a dominating, oppressive culture and removing the rights to education. We see it in the Middle East where women are not allowed to learn to read. Girls are not allowed to go to school in some countries. Same thing.

So when guys like Dale Partridge are saying, "Read to your wife, teach your wife," what he's saying is that he has infantilized his wife to the point that she does not have the human right to read, learn, study, and think for herself. He may not think he's saying that, but that's how it plays out. And every guy who reads that or looks at it or listens to that and walks away feeling more entitled in his own kingpin, pedestal status is walking away more like Lucifer. More of, "I will be like the most high. I will stand on the top of the mountain. You will be here to serve me." And it's the opposite of Jesus who got down on His knees and said, "Let me wash your dirty feet. Let me heal your leprosy. Let me touch you where no one will give you a hug in twenty years because you're unclean. Let me wrap you up in care and tenderness at the risk to myself."

NATALIE: I just want to say something. I think that the tide is changing. Christian women are rising up. They're seeing the truth. It's going to reach a tipping point. I really believe that one day that this discussion will be a thing of the past, because it will just be a common thing that men and women respect one another. I don't know if it's going to be around the corner, but I think that that's coming, because I really believe that that's the work that God's doing in the world. But sometimes it takes a rising up and throwing off of chains, and that takes energy, some anger. Because we can't rise up if we're... There has to be energy, and people will vilify that energy. They'll say, "That's not Christian to have that kind of..." But that's what it is going to take.

But I think on the other side of that, we have women and hopefully men and young boys who grow up to be men who are in a place where now we've got safety and security and where love can flourish, love and honor of one another regardless of where we come from, who we are, what our gender is, how much money we have — love and honor for one another. I truly believe that is where God is taking us, and I love being part of that movement with you guys. We'll probably die and not see a whole lot of it, but I think we're already seeing a lot of it that's encouraging enough to me to give

me a lot of joy.

So we're going to wrap up now because it's been a little over an hour. But this is a special episode. I just want to thank you guys for celebrating with us, with my community and me, for celebrating two-hundred episodes. We did also reach, we're a little over a million downloads on Apple Podcasts.

NGINA: Congratulations.

NATALIE: And that's also just a huge, huge milestone for us right here in 2022. So thank you to both of you for coming. And I want to thank all of the listeners, too, for listening and for supporting this program and for sharing it with other women who need to hear it. And that's all I have for you for this week. Until next time, fly free.