

RISING ABOVE NARCISSISTIC ABUSE

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 228 of the Flying Free Podcast. I am really excited about this episode because we get to meet not just one guest, but how many of you are there? There are one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight — eight guests, and all of these women are contributors to an anthology of stories about women who have suffered for years in narcissistically abusive relationships and then have gotten out. This book is called “Rising Above Narcissistic Abuse,” and the women that were chosen to tell their stories in this book come from all over the world and include professional leaders, womenpreneurs, trauma life coaches, mental health professionals, ministry leaders, and military women because narcissistic abuse can happen to anyone. So first of all, welcome, all of you.

CHYNA: Thank you very much for having us.

NATALIE: Let's talk about your book, first of all. I'd like to know how you guys came together to write this book and why you believe a book like this is important. I believe a book like this is important. Tell me why you guys did.

INA: Last year at some point, God put this on my heart to... A project that He wanted me to do. It wasn't until this year that He gave me the go. You know, a lot of times God gives you the intent, then the command of execution. So He gave me the go, and as I put it out — a lot of these women I knew from before, but there were a lot of the other women that I didn't know — I put out the call and they answered, and they said “yes” to what God put on their heart. So that's how the anthology was birthed, and I'm grateful to all these ladies for doing that.

NATALIE: That's amazing. Were all of you super excited to do this, or was it difficult for any of you to write about your stories? Do you all talk about your stories in other places? How comfortable are you with this project?

SHANNON: I'll say I'm comfortable with this project. I talk about narcissist abuse every day, so it's something that God has put on my heart to do. So when Ina put out the call, it was like, “Okay, we've got to sign up.” So for me, it's easy to talk about. It's become my life's mission. So it was easy to write the chapter, but when you write, you know things

are going to come up. So that's the only thing you've got to deal with because you go through different layers of healing, but for me it was easy.

NATALIE: Yeah, okay. Tell us a little bit about yourself. It's Shannon, right?

SHANNON: Yes.

NATALIE: What do you do?

SHANNON: I'm a narcissist abuse recovery coach and I also work in deliverance. So when the women go through narcissist abuse and they come out of it, they need outlets, they need validation, all the things that I didn't have. So all the things that I didn't have coming out of this, God kind of had me to create it. So when I was researching you, I was like, "Oh my goodness, she gets it — Natalie gets it." When you wrote your article on how to leave an emotionally abusive relationship in ten steps, I was like, "Check, check, check." So I'm taking notes from you and teaching that to the women that I coach as well. So thank you.

NATALIE: That's awesome. And then Ina, tell us a little bit about yourself. Ina, she's the one who talked at the very beginning and coordinated this whole thing just for people who don't have a visual, because some people are going to be listening, and I want them to meet you too.

INA: Okay. My name is Ina. So I'm a twenty-four-year retired army combat veteran, and dealing with military sexual trauma, dealing with narcissistic abuse, I have PTSD. Actually, that was one of the things that kind of saved me in dealing with the abuse because it was like, I already had my own issues. "I can't carry yours right now." So that is actually something that I would say saved me to not spiral down as far as I could have.

But like I said, this is what we do. This is what the ladies are here to talk about, and I'm just excited for your listeners to hear their story and to get the book and everybody celebrate the wind, the rising above it. Because like I said, pain is inevitable, but to get out of that, that long suffering from all that pain is optional, and we don't want the women to stay in that pain. So that's why books like this, your platform, is to help women move, acknowledge that pain, and move through it, move past it. God gave us a lot of sunshine. Go get it.

NATALIE: Yeah, totally. And when people can see so many other women that have done this, gone before and paved the way, it gives them hope that it's possible for them as

well.

INA: Absolutely.

NATALIE: Okay, so when you talk, if it's the first time that you're speaking out, go ahead and introduce yourself. Say your name, a little bit about what you do, and then that way we'll be able to get to know each one of you.

So the first question is, what were some of the red flags that you ignored at the beginning of your relationship? And I love this question because there are so many women who, I don't know what it is, but we tend to ignore red flags. It's like we want to believe the best about people. I think that's just what it is. We just are gracious and we just want to believe the best about people. And then these little, tiny, imperceptible things start happening and for some reason we dismiss them. Why is that, and what are some of those things that happened to you?

CHYNA: Okay, I'll go. I'm Chyna from the United Kingdom, and I'm really, really excited to be here. I will just touch a little bit on the question that you... Actually, before I do, I'll introduce myself. I'm Chyna, and what do I do? I'm a speaker as well as a live coach for women. What I do: I help women to transition from pain to purpose, because a lot of these women have gone through abandonment, through rejection, and basically those are, in particular, the symptoms of a narcissistic abusive relationship.

You asked the question initially, and Shannon did answer it. Were we excited to go into this project? And the answer to that question was "no." I was the one that was on the floor crying, snot coming out, tears. And I now know I wanted to quit a million times. The ladies were so awesome. They prayed for me because it was hard. It was basically unraveling the things that I've been through in my relationship. And I was in this for twenty years, and that's no joke. I have known him to date for twenty-five years. So he picked me young. He knew what he was doing. I was groomed without being aware that I was groomed.

And you talked about the red flags. What were the red flags that I ignored? He was quite charismatic. He was very popular. He had a lot of female friends, but he put that under the banner, "They were my clients," all to do with business. And because he was out there, I thought, "Okay, he is making money for the family, so why should I make a fuss about it as well?" He was not answerable to anybody and he told me, "I'm not answerable to your father, to your mother, or to any pastors." Those were red flags. He wasn't teachable.

And don't get me wrong — he was much older than me, and there are things that I might know that he might not actually be aware of, and when I say, “Okay, can I share this with you?” “Oh, what do you know? You're too young. You're a woman,” and I'm thinking, “But you have women in your business, but when it comes to me at home, you minimize everything I do. You're not willing to listen.” When it came to money, he asked me, while we were dating, “Oh, how much do you have in your account?” But because I was so naïve, I thought, “His money, my money, it's our joint money,” not realizing his money was his money and my money was his money.

Those are just some of the red flags, and in terms of the way he treated others around him as well, he was quite domineering. But I just thought, “Because he's a leader. That's how they operate,” and I chose not to listen to those things. And when he came to attending church initially, he didn't really want to go unless I made sure that we went. So those were the red flags. Don't get me wrong: He's very active in church and now everyone loves him and now he's teaching. And now he's teaching women to move from pain to purpose. Isn't that ironic?

NATALIE: Very, very. But also not surprising, because I feel like that's... I mean, what more genius way to hide, right?

CHYNA: Yeah. But there were so many red flags. I thought I would play the role without being aware, the role of the Holy Spirit, by praying for him. I prayed more for him than I prayed for myself. And in hindsight, I thought, “Chyna, what were you doing?” There were a lot of red flags — so many red flags. I would just let other women have their say.

NATALIE: Thank you so much. Anybody else? Red flags.

SHARON: Hello everyone. My name is Sharon, and actually, my perspective is coming from being a licensed psychotherapist, and I have worked with many individuals that have been exposed to this narcissistic abuse. The first thing I notice is where the person begins to devalue themselves and to feel like they're stuck and to begin to second guess themselves because a person with the narcissistic abuse is pretty much treating them in a manner where they feel like... They begin to lose themselves and not to believe in themselves. And they'll ask, “Am I losing my mind?” or “He did this.” And then it sets up this cycle of violence, just like in domestic violence, where a person will be nice, and then there's this escalation, and then there's an incident, and then it starts all over again. So it puts the person on a hamster wheel where it's just going around and around and around.

And then you may walk out. Some of the examples I've been given is that you walk out.

Your husband or whoever your partner is is in the kitchen, and all of a sudden you feel this coldness that whatever you say is going to be the wrong thing and anything you say is the wrong thing. And so it is this whole emotional type of control where you do not feel comfortable in your environment and you begin not to even feel comfortable in your body. And so those are some of the things that I have learned from people.

NATALIE: Yeah, I'm glad you brought those up because there are more things like that you can notice in your own self, in your own body. Sometimes we can't always define what is happening around us, but we do know how it makes us feel, and I think it's important to be aware of that. Patricia?

PATRICIA: Okay. My name is Patricia, and I am an evangelist and the CEO of a nonprofit organization called Faith in God Ministries. And at the time that I was in my relationships, because there's been more than one, I didn't realize a title to the abuse that was going on. So until Ina brought this to my attention and I did the research on it, I was able to understand what was happening then. And I recognized the red flags, I recognized the manipulation, the abuse. I could put a title to that. One of the things I thought about, even putting a title to it, something like that, even if I had recognized it back then, would that person be receptive to it? Would they see themselves as that type of a person? And I realize I know now what I didn't know then, so I know how to move past the red flags that I've learned and things that I've gone through.

And I was so appreciative that Ina even asked me to do this because I had written a book, and I was really ashamed of the book that I wrote because it was my bio. But then doing this book, there were things that I put in this chapter that I didn't share in my original book. And it made me a little nervous, but it was okay. It was a okay nervousness because I've already gotten the freedom that I needed from those relationships and moved past it.

And now those red flags, I can make that a part of my life and not receive it and know what's going on before I enter into another relationship. So I'm really grateful for the opportunity to be able to share even what I didn't know then and what I know now.

NATALIE: That's amazing. I appreciate all of you being brave enough, because you are putting yourselves out there sharing your story and it is very vulnerable, and it takes a lot of emotional energy to relive some of those things.

Can you tell me or share with the listeners, what are some strategies that you've learned as far as setting healthy boundaries with a narcissist, whether you're still living with them — because a lot of our listeners are still in their relationships, and some of

them don't want to leave yet. They're not ready to leave or they can't leave because of children or finances or they have other constraints on them. And then others have already left, are either separated or divorced, but their narcissist is still in their life because they share children and they still have to be concerned about having healthy boundaries around that person. So tell me, what are some of your strategies?

PATRICIA: The main thing that helped me through each one of my relationships, because some of them were very devastating to me, and the thing that really helped me is my relationship with the Lord. I drew closer to the Lord, and that's what continued to help me. And as I continued to grow and develop that relationship, that intimacy with the Lord, I was able to handle anything that came my way. So nothing now is too difficult for me to handle. I'm ready. I have that discernment where I can pretty much discern somebody.

I'm not saying I'm perfect and I'm not going to make any mistakes in the decisions that I make, but now I have a relationship, I have a Father that will help me to get past anything that's difficult for me and to challenge anything — anything that I consider as a challenge is just that: It's a challenge. It's not something that I can't move past or get through because I'm strong enough now where I feel like there's nothing I can't get past. The red flags are going to be there, I'm going to notice them immediately, and I know how to back up and walk away and not get myself involved in situations that are not healthy.

NATALIE: That's beautiful. What about the rest of you? Do you have any strategies that you'd like to share about setting boundaries?

JOCELYN: Yes. I'm Jocelyn Swanson. I'm the author of a book "If I Had Known..." and I have a nonprofit called If I Had Known also. I was elated when Ina asked me to do this, but like most of the rest, I was a little afraid because I had carried that weight of being ashamed and not wanting anyone to know. But this gave me a freedom. I must admit I did have some migraines behind it, but now I feel free.

And the boundaries that I set, just like Patricia, are my faith and just knowing that I can do anything with the help of Christ because I can't even be here without Him. But with Him, I can do anything. And just like all of these ladies on here, these awesome ladies, they have come through a storm, but now they're under a rainbow because they had the help of Christ to walk through the storm with them. So mine is just have your faith and just believe in God.

NATALIE: Thank you.

DR. C: And I will concur with Jocelyn on that. It is still a challenge periodically. You know, you live and you learn and you implement on a daily basis those skills that will help you sustain and maintain your boundaries because you run across narcissistic people all the time. I know I do. And so you learn how to address certain situations with them. It's something that I come from.

I'm Dr. C. I am a professional international therapist and program director, and my program, we deal with women from various walks of life. And so you learn your own core beliefs because you begin to live this life with this man, and everything seems so hunky-dory, sweet, and kind. And after time goes on, you begin to observe — you see those red flags and you are working to try to build some boundaries with that individual, and they are constantly crossing the boundaries.

So when you come out, you have to connect yourself with a power that's greater than yourself, a power that's greater than that individual. And I found for me, I found that power to be the power of God. I have to activate and operate with the measure of faith that we all have been given. I had faith and belief in my first husband, and after him, a guy that I was seeing. And I come to realize that you can't put your all-in-all into an individual.

And this is my core belief. It's my core belief, and this is what I stand on, and this is why I have to concur with Jocelyn because activating my faith on a daily, but in spite of what comes my way, in spite of what comes my way. And I do my daily active affirmations. Because today is Triumphant Tuesday. And no matter what comes my way today, it's going to be a triumphant day for me. I'm going to get through it, I'm going to celebrate it, because the oxygen is still flowing through my body. I'm still able to think. My cognitive thinking abilities are kind of on point. Are they always on point? No, they're not always on point. But for the most part, I can activate my measure of faith and think a little clearer for today — just for today.

And so that's what I kind of hold on to, and my boundaries are set within that. I come to the understanding and the realization today that I can't control you, and I'm not going to allow you to control me. That's over. That's over for me. My belief and my faith have taught me that the power of God, the One who created me, the One who turns the oxygen on in me each and every morning, is my controller. And it is my heart's desire that I operate in His guidance on a daily basis. So when I go home from work each evening, I can go home in peace and I can receive a pillar of peace and rise the next morning restored in my soul so I can go forth the next day.

I'm not going to cross my boundaries with you, and I'm truly — not today, not today —

I'm truly not going to allow you to cross your boundaries with me. Why? Because I know who I am today. I know who I'm today. And so that's kind of where I land with that whole piece. And even today, red flags pop up today, even in the workplace. I see so many red flags in the workplace. But I've learned to work and operate around, "You are who you are and I am who I am." If I can accept you, then it's your choice whether or not you accept me, but what you see is what you get. And that's just kind of where I'm at.

NATALIE: Yeah, I love that. Tisha?

TISHA: I feel as though it was a Holy Ghost setup. I came across this on social media, Facebook, this opportunity, this privilege. It was about ten years ago where most of the majority of my story that I wrote about took place. I feel totally healed from that, and I am a mental health advocate in my community. I was a former preschool teacher. I am a student in my senior year receiving my bachelor's in December, prayerfully, in sociology. And I feel so free.

I had actually put out on Facebook because I know some publishers and some people who had written books about how to start that process, and I knew I was going to write about my experience with a narcissist one day, but I actually was planning on writing much more happier things that have happened since then. And I will be meeting with a publisher this month in regards to those more happier things.

As far as boundaries, I put a quote that came from me personally. With some people, you have to have boundaries, but then with these narcissists, you need to have borders. And in my situation, fortunately, I was able to create a border almost ten years ago upon divorce. And that came from him literally calling me one day. I guess I had filed four years prior to that date. And usually if you don't continue the actions they close the case. But I guess he wanted to divorce me so he could start his new relationship and remarry, I guess. But he didn't remarry after all.

But anyways, he was very forcibly just demanding on the phone. And I said, "Okay, as soon as I can do this, I will do it." I wasn't aware that it would still... If I would've known that, I would've done it myself. Anyways, I just explained to him and he kept interfering in the conversation and I said, "Okay, when we divorce, we divorce. There will be no contact, there will be no friendship. There will be no relationship."

And so in the book I explained that, because I really believe that these people have controlled us enough. And if you can, I would highly suggest just having no contact. I didn't have any children, fortunately, or unfortunately — I don't really know how to look

at that today — but that's how I saved myself. And I did have contact with him over a year ago, and I won't disclose why — I want you to read the book.

But God is faithful. That's what I can say through it all. God is faithful. He made a way out and He makes a way out and it's all in His timing, and you are able to be restored because God is close to the brokenhearted. And I was a woman who not only had a broken heart, but I had a sick heart because the Bible says that hope deferred makes a heart sick. My ex-husband, he suffered with alcoholism. Two years into our marriage, he relapsed. And he actually went into the sin of nightclub life, which I had been delivered from thirteen years prior. Anyways, to make a long story shorter, God healed me from that sick heart.

I love and am passionate for the down and outer. And actually, one project that I do want to do in my community is overdose awareness. And I even went to school after separation from my ex, and I went back to school for addictive disorder studies. That is one of my hearts and my passions as well as domestic abuse. And if you are in that situation, I pray that you know, even if you don't feel it now, you know your worth and your value in Christ and your identity in Christ because He is there for you and He sees every tear and He sees your pain. Amen.

NATALIE: Amen. Thank you. Can a few of you share about the breaking point that you had that caused you to say, "You know what, I can't do this anymore. I need to get out of this relationship"?

DR. C: This is Dr. C. I know for me, it got to the point where the guy that I was dating after I had gotten my divorce, the abuse went towards my daughter. And that was a breaking point. "Oh, no, we are not going to have this." And my daughter had grabbed a knife, and it was an ugly scene. And so I knew that this is it. No coming back, no conversation about change. The only change that took place was, "You're out of my life at this point. You're out of my life." And I, of course, I had to have therapy. I was much, much younger and I went through therapy.

It just was not good. It was not good after being in the military and experiencing the narcissistic abuse there by some of the male officers and coming home and falling right into a marriage and relationship. But when I saw that transition to my daughter, the calling of names and wanting to physically abuse, I said, "Oh, no, no — this is it. This is it right here." So that was my breaking point right there.

NATALIE: Thanks for sharing that. It's very fascinating that we will tend to throw ourselves under the bus or think we can hack it, we can put up with it, we can make it

for whatever reason, but then when it comes to seeing someone that we love go through that, then we're like, "No." Then we see it for what it is. You know, there are women that I've talked to that, sometimes I'll try to reframe what they're telling me and I'll say, "Let's pretend that this, what you just told me is happening to you, let's pretend that this was happening to your twelve-year-old daughter. What would you think about that?" Because they'll come down on themselves almost like, "I deserve this because I reacted this way or because I didn't do this or I whatever," for whatever reason.

"Would you say that about that little girl? You are just as important and precious as and valuable as that child is. And you are your responsibility. Just as you're responsible for that child, you are responsible for the woman who has your name, for the person that lives inside of this body that God gave to you. That is your sacred responsibility." Little light bulbs will kind of go on then, and they'll be like, "Oh, yeah," which I think is so important. So I'm glad your story brought up that point.

CHYNA: Mine was layers. You know, when you know when you don't want to look yourself in the mirror and tell yourself the truth. And that happened for years because mom and dad were married, until my mom passed, for almost sixty years. I wanted to carry over that mantle. So I thought, and this was a bit of arrogance as well, "Oh gosh. I was married to one man. I had children with him alone. So I'm going to carry this mantle," and it's a pride thing. You know, when you go through your journey, you realize it was a pride thing. So I knew things were amiss, but I thought, "Nah." As I said earlier on, you pray it away.

And one of the reasons, the second reason as well, that shook me, because I went to the doctors just for a general checkup and they said, "Um, we're going to refer you to the hospital," and generally I'm fit and I'm healthy. And I thought, "What's going on?" I thought it was just a minor blood test. Got to the hospital straight away. The doctor did an internal. I was in shock. I thought, "Why is he doing that?" And he said, "It seems you might have bowel cancer." I almost passed out. I walked out of that room in a daze.

And when it was time to go for the endoscopy and laparoscopy — I think that's what it is; sometimes your brain shuts things down — I was meant to go with my husband at the time and he refused. You get to know who they are when you were ill, when you were going through things. He did not show up. My brother had to travel miles, not living in the same city, to come with me. And they thought he was my husband. And I said, "No, that's my brother." And you could see how they sniggered, not in a horrible way, that they were shocked because they saw on the form that I had a husband. That was the first instance.

And the final straw — there are multiples — the final straw, and this is a new word that I just learned, when a member of the family was “unalived,” and that was it. And she was in an abusive situation for over a decade. She would not talk about it. She would not discuss it with her sister, she would not discuss it with her mother. She lost her job, she became an alcoholic, and it was really terrible. And her only daughter had to live with I think her stepdad — not stepdad, her own dad, because this lady had remarried. And when I got that phone call... You read about it in the book. That was it. I knew if I didn't make a move, who knows? And that was the final straw.

So yes, my situation might not look as dire as the people listening to this podcast when they get to read about this story in the book. However, no one knows what will transpire in a year, five years down the line. The Lord told me to leave the first time around about ten years before I left and I didn't listen to it. I chose not to. So when that situation occurred, I knew it was time to get up and leave.

NATALIE: Okay, I am fascinated by something, and I guess this is kind of deviating a little bit from where we wanted to go, but I'm wondering: For a lot of the listeners — this is a Christian podcast and so the listeners are Christian women — and a lot of them feel like they can't get... I'm hearing a lot of you talking about how God led you to get out, God was with you every step of the way. Some of these women feel like if they get out that God's going to abandon them. That's what's actually going through their minds. So do you guys want to talk about that?

ISA: I'd like to speak to that. Hello, my name is Isa Farrington Nichols. Hi Natalie, it's a pleasure to be here on this podcast as well as the rest of my fellow co-author sisters. It's good to see you all again. I want to add a thing. I was married for twenty-six years. I'm a survivor of the DC sniper shootings that occurred about twenty years ago. John Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo appeared at my front door looking for me, and they shot my twenty-one-year-old niece that was living with me.

Now I want to shift the focus on “When is it time to move on?” I had been going through a very, very horrible relationship in the marriage. I was married for twenty-six years, and that question, Natalie, that you bring up, “When is it time to move on? When do we go? Should I stay?” I remember my daughter who's thirty-five years old, she was the one at the age of fourteen who found her cousin, my niece, on the floor in our living room, who had been shot in the face, at fourteen. One day we were having this discussion and she said, “Mommy, why did you stay?” And I looked at her, I gave her a glance. I swallowed like I'm doing now. “Why did I stay?” I repeated it. “Why did I stay?” I did not have an answer at that time.

Finally, the Lord revealed to me I didn't have the courage. The reason most of us stay in these relationships longer than we do... Because we know God will fix it. We've prayed, He's answered, but I lack the courage. And it took me a while to find the word "courage" and what it meant to end the abuse.

I've known Ina for about thirty years. I was a military spouse. We lived on the same street, and I did not know at all what to call my situation. I was just in a bad marriage. I did not understand narcissistic abuse until Ina's, her recent divorce and separation. And she was telling me she was writing a book. She finished the book, I got the book and read the book, and it was like, "Oh, my God." All of these years I had called my abuse anything but just that — abuse. But it's a particular type of abuse.

Now, why we stay — it could be a myriad of reasons. Courage covers a lot of things. I had young children — most of us do, some of us don't. We're in the church and we want to live up to these images. We want to live up to these expectations of being apostles. And some of us are in ministries, we're evangelists, we are prophetic. We're in all of these different offices and ministries and we are stuck in a rut. We don't know when we should leave, maybe we should stay, we just need to trust God — all of the sayings that go on.

But there comes the time, if you read in Exodus 3:14, "Then God said to Moses, 'I AM Who I AM.'" The Exodus was about movement — "It's time to move on." And so we have to plan our own exodus. And for many of us, we have to go on a journey. I love journeys. Journey from what? Journey from and to, or journey to and coming from, but journey from harm, first and foremost. And then from harm to forgiveness. Forgiveness of who? Yourself, mainly. Yeah, yourself. And then you can forgive and pour out to others and other things that have harmed or come in your way.

And then once you get to forgiveness the journey continues, because we're looking for healing. The next destination is, "How do I get healed from this?" So we're dealing with healing. And then once we enter a realm of healing, and healing is perpetual for many of us, we begin to focus on that journey of hope again. We build our lives back, we get it back from whatever it is that caused us to get to where we are before we lost our way, before we became victims, if you will, of narcissistic abuse.

I am sixty-three years old. I had never heard the term until Ina shared with me her relationship, and then I read her book and had an "aha" moment. I'm an author of two books: "Genesis: The Bullet Was Meant for Me D.C. Sniper Story Untold" and then my second book, "Restore." It's a guide for truth and reconciliation through traumatic experiences. Whatever your traumatic experience is, trauma is trauma and it can be

reconciled, and the journey is to reconciliation and getting where your life is before you lost your way.

NATALIE: Thank you for sharing. That was very powerful.

SHANNON: Natalie, can I say something real quick to your question? Because one of your listeners may be wrestling with this, and I'm going to be real quick. Isa made me think of this. Image will keep you in a relationship that God didn't ordain for you. Image, title, all this fluff, whatever it is, it will keep you in a relationship that God did not ordain for you. So you have to break up with the fantasy. A lot of us stay in these relationships because we have not dealt with the soul realm. We're spirit. We can't spiritually bypass this thing. We talked a lot about Holy Spirit. We are Holy Spirit led, but you have to deal with the soul realm. We are mind, body — we have to deal with our mind, body, our will. We have to deal with that. So if you need therapy, if you need a coach, reach out. There are resources out here.

But God is a covenant-keeping God. He honors divorce, but He divorced Israel because of their disobedience. So you have to have a relationship with the Most High. It's relationship over religion. Relationship. Christ, Yeshua, came to set you free. The blood of Jesus will set you free. Religion will keep you in bondage, so you have to break up with religion in order to have a true relationship with the Most High. And He did.

God will never send you a narcissist, but the devil will. You have to know the difference between a covenant, a God-led relationship, and many people are fighting for relationships that are sent from the demonic realm to destroy them. That goes against God's very nature of who He is. So you have people stuck in these situations, stuck in these relationships, because they don't understand covenant, they don't understand the spiritual realm and how it works. They're fighting to stay in relationships that God never ordained for them in the first place. God, Jesus Christ, will set you free.

NATALIE: I love it.

ISA: He will, He will, and she's absolutely right. And Shannon, thank you for saying that, because the listening body, if you reach just one person, if you get just one to have an “aha” moment and start reaching out to go and get... I came from a family where it was told, “Oh, just go pray about it,” No one told me to go see a therapist. No one told me to go get anything for me. I didn't go to see a therapist for a long time when I should have been in there, definitely after a violent murder that occurred in my home.

When I did finally go and get a therapist, I realized I was caught up in religion, because

that's not where God wanted me to be. Jesus really does say I'm a living vessel of that, but we've got to get that help. We've got to go beyond. If you don't have any at your church, then you find yourself a therapist to go to. I'm a proponent of therapy, although I had family members who balked at the idea. I had a fourteen-year-old who found her cousin on the floor with a bullet in her face. And my narcissistic spouse actually said, "She doesn't need therapy. She'll be all right."

NATALIE: Wow.

ISA: So I said, "Well, that's exactly why we want to go, so that she'll be all right. Thank you for that." And this is just how I had to flip that conversation, to let him know that his daughter and I needed help. But his mindset was just not... You know, it was where it usually is.

And so, as I stated, one of the things we have to do is recognize that God is a restorer. He's a restorer first and foremost. Christ came to restore. That was the whole reason that He came, that God sent His Son to the world to be saved — not to condemn the world, but that through Him, the world might be saved. That's the most powerful scripture of why He came. No one should be in bondage. No one should be in traumatic experiences. It's not something that you deserve, it's not something that you ask for. It's something that you go through. "I go through the valley and the shadow of death." You go through them. You don't stop. You go through them.

So whatever it is you need to go through, we're hoping that this book, that this anthology, will give you the strength, the desire, to move forward, to rise up and go from healing and get your hope back, because God is the God of hope. Many of us have lost hope. I was there thinking everything was a hopeless situation, but God is the God of hope.

DR. C: If I may, Natalie, just touch base — my heart is so filled right here in my office. My heart is so filled. I appreciate so your sharing, you and Shannon, all the ladies, because you did say something that was very important, and Shannon elaborated on it, and I just wanted to add just a little bit to that for those women. That image piece, you have to step out of that. I'm an ordained pastor and I see it all the time where pastors and pastor's wives don't want to admit or come and talk about their trauma or how they're being mistreated by their husband and/or their wife, or they can't be seen going to therapy.

I am not ashamed. Yes, I get therapy still to this day. The pastor needs a pastor. The therapist needs a therapist. We need each other because we have to come... You just

said it. You have to go through in order to come out. If you don't go through, don't expect to come out. Recovery is painful. It's painful, but it's a good thing because when you come through that process, you know you are pivoting, and things are good when you can pivot. Things are really good.

So I appreciate you all sharing this afternoon because this is where we are. And being not ashamed of the gospel and telling who really helped us come up and out, letting it be known, not just to the body of Christ but to those of other faiths — letting it be known that you go through to come out.

This book, I know without a shadow of a doubt, it's going to minister to the hearts of men and women. Men and women. Every woman needs to get a copy of this book and to hear the stories and the freedom that we walk in today. I see a group of women that have committed themselves to freedom. And so that's kind of where I land with that. I thank you, Isa, for bringing that image piece to the forefront because a lot of us get stuck right there in that image piece. And Shannon with the religion as opposed to the relationship. Religion will keep you in bondage. That's no joke. Because when you're going through your deliverance process, you'll feel the weight, the shackles come up off of you. You'll feel it when you're going through that process. So this is so good. Thank you.

ISA: And you'll get your hope back. You've lost your hope, but hope is where your destination is, to go back to where you have forgiven yourself, you're healing yourself. And all of this stuff, all of the things that we are sharing, our experience, is perpetual. It's ongoing. It's not a one-stop, that's not a one-size-fits-all. Because I don't have any answers to anything or questions that you may ask me, but I can respond, and that's my promise.

CHYNA: Something that is so important and I forgot to mention regarding my case — before I left, a friend of a friend asked me this question. She said, “Chyna, you have children?” And I said, “Yes.” She said, “You leave because of your children. You don't stay because of your children.” When she said that, that was it. You leave because of your children — you don't stay because of them. A lot of women justify staying because of their children. No, you leave because of your children. What you are doing is perpetuating that cycle of abuse, especially if you have daughters.

PATRICIA: Yes, I agree with that.

CHYNA: And then touching on what Shannon and Dr. C said and Isa, in the sense that the church fails a lot of women, it failed me. I was retraumatized and re-abused by the

church. I love God and I love the church, but when I was going through it, I went to a lot of ministers because we had relationships with pastors, international pastors, and they turned a blind eye. I was re-abused — not once, not twice — until I had to say “Chyna, you either fight to leave or you stay and be totally dead,” and I made the decision to leave.

NATALIE: That’s amazing.

DR. C: And you know what, Chyna? The thing about it, even still to this day, a lot of faith leaders are not educated in these areas. In a lot of these areas, they're not educated. They know the word of God and they will pray for you and they can give you scripture to read. There are a lot of faith leaders, a lot of them don't believe in counseling. They don't believe in scientific counseling. But if you really study and understand the word and know that word, it's all in the Bible — Moses and Isaiah, mighty men and women of God, that had to get counsel. Moses was depressed, you know, and a lot of them are just learning how to address mental health.

There are some that have finally embraced counseling. You’ve got to understand cognitive behavior. You’ve got to understand that. You’ve got to really kind of know how the hippocampus and all of that stuff up in our brain is operating and moving our emotions. You’ve got to understand that. And so I know for years leaders in the faith community had not a clue about a woman stuck in domestic violence or substance use or narcissistic behavior. “Well, stick with your husband. Hold on to him. We’re going to pray for him.” I just wanted to touch base there with that.

INA: Absolutely. And Natalie, I truly thank you for this interview and for all these ladies being able to share their stories. So you know with this anthology, all the information that's in this book, that your readers will find value, will find maybe themselves in this, and to help give them the navigational journey to their freedom to finding that peace that God has for them.

God never made us for abuse. God always designed His children to feel love. He gives us the love, grace, mercy, and the kindness. He expects us to share that with other people. So when we don't choose that and when we don't have that, that's not of God. That is definitely of the devil.

And so this book, I think, is just a piece — this is maybe volume one — of being able to help nations and generations. Because as they said, when a woman is abused, it not only affects herself — when she's physically abused, you know, a broken bone, maybe it would just affect her — but the mental and the emotional, that affects the generations

upon the generations upon the generations of that woman. So that's why this anthology is so important because we need to all come together to be able to heal the generations and the nations so that as we move forward there's a sense of not being afraid of therapy, not being afraid of getting help, not being afraid of saying, "Something's not quite right. I need to talk to somebody."

So that's what this whole situation is, and I thank you for your voice with your listeners and putting this out there so that women of faith know that when God says, "I hate divorce," He wasn't talking about them. He wasn't talking about victims that were being abused. He was talking about the sin that happened as to why they're divorcing. No one divorces because they don't have anything else to do. They divorce because of sin, of abuse of something that's happening. And so when people use that to keep women in bondage or to keep people in bondage in general, they're not using that for their own good. They're using that to further their own agenda.

So your listeners, I think they're smart enough to know that when someone throws those three words, "God hates divorce," next time ask them, "What's the other thirty-six words in that verse?" Because there are about forty words in that whole verse, but people always throw out "God hates divorce."

NATALIE: Yeah. I'm so glad you brought that up. And I just want to thank all of you. It's been my honor and privilege to be able to hear your voices, and we didn't get all twelve of you here, but the ones that we got here, it's obvious that you have a lot of collective wisdom to offer. And those of you who are listening, you only got to hear a small, little taste of what you'll be able to access if you decide to get this book. It's twelve stories, these women's and then a few others that weren't able to be here, and their stories of how they got out. And I think, again, like I mentioned earlier, hearing other people, hearing their stories of how they got out, you not only get to hear what they experienced, but you also get to get all of the tidbits of truth and wisdom that they learned along the way. That's like a gift that a reader gets to have. And then you get to incorporate that... This is how all of us grow together. We all contribute our voices together, and that's how we get stronger together.

And I just want to make one last comment about the image on the front cover of the book. It's incredible. It exudes power and strength and triumph and victory. And honestly, that caught my eye when I got the first email. It caught my eye, and I thought, "What is this about? This looks amazing." So I'm very excited to be able to let people know about your book. And thank you so much, all of you, for contributing your time to this podcast. I hope that a lot of people will get to know you through your stories. And those of you who are listening, thank you so much for listening again this week, and

until next time, fly free.

Hey, beautiful butterfly. Thank you so much for listening. If you liked this episode, be sure to subscribe, and then consider leaving a rating and review so others can find us. To connect with me and get a free chapter of my book, head over to flyingfreenow.com, and until next time, fly free.