

UNTWISTING SCRIPTURES ABOUT BROKENNESS AND SUFFERING: INTERVIEW WITH REBECCA DAVIS

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 248 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we have someone who's been on the podcast in the past, and we've known each other for several years now. Her name is Rebecca Davis, and she is the author of the "Untwisting Scriptures" series of books designed to help those who have experienced spiritual abuse get to know the true heart of God, which I'm so grateful for because there is so much spiritual abuse and twisting of the Bible in order to manipulate people to really stay stuck in abusive environments and abusive relationships.

So Rebecca was on the podcast a couple of years ago, and if you like this one, you can hear her on Episode 110 where she talks about her book called "Untwisting Scriptures." The podcast episode is called "Untwisting the Bible on Authority and Patriarchy." First of all, welcome, Rebecca.

REBECCA: Thank you. It's good to be here.

NATALIE: All right, so this one is going to be about your newest book, but I think we missed a couple of books in there between the last episode that you came on and this one. Why don't you just tell us about the whole series of books so that they can know what that's all about?

REBECCA: I would be glad to. I think I had the privilege of being Natalie's very first Facebook Live, and we couldn't get our microphones to work, so we ended up being on the phone with each other...

NATALIE: Yes, I remember that!

REBECCA: ...back in 2017, and that was fun times. All right, so I have five books in the "Untwisting Scriptures" series now, and they address various topics about twisted scriptures in the Bible according to topic. And this most recent one that just came out in September of 2023 is addressing the topic of brokenness and suffering.

Number four addressed righteousness and wickedness, but it had a long subtitle that I can't remember about sin leveling and wolves and things like that. And then the third

one was about your words and your emotions. The second half that addresses the emotions, I think, I feel like that's one of the most important things I've written because of how people are told to shut down their emotions. So I really went deep into some of what we think of as negative emotions, fear especially. I spent several chapters on fear because there are different kinds of fear. And so I consider that one to be very important.

And number two, I talked with Natalie about patriarchy and authority. So important to people coming out of the patriarchal environment, and I specify — and you'll hear that on the other podcast — but I specify the biblical patriarchy movement — not just some general term, but that particular movement. It was like a subset of the homeschooling movement. And then the first one, of course, back in 2016, that addressed bitterness and rights and taking up offenses. So that's the whole set, working my way backwards from it.

NATALIE: Okay, so I'm curious: Do you have other ideas for future ones?

REBECCA: Always. My daughter said to me, “Mama, how many of these books are you going to write?”

NATALIE: It just never ends.

REBECCA: And I said, “I could probably do a dozen.” At that time I had written three, and I said I'll probably stop at five, but I have another one in my head already, so I might stop at seven. That seems like a good set, but we'll see. We'll just see how it goes.

NATALIE: Seven — that's kind of a biblical number, so maybe.

REBECCA: There you go.

NATALIE: So today, though, we're going to talk about “Untwisting Scriptures” on brokenness and suffering — is that right?

REBECCA: Yes, the full title is “Untwisting Scriptures to Find Freedom and Joy in Jesus Christ” with a subtitle, “Book 5 Brokenness & Suffering.” And there it is right there.

NATALIE: Okay, nice. Okay, so let's dig in and talk about this book. I hope that everyone is really excited about hearing more after we have discussed it. So tell us how the concept of brokenness is presented in today's version of Christianity, and how does that affect people who are in abusive relationships or even in abusive environments?

REBECCA: Well, years ago, Nancy Lee DeMoss preached a sermon — I don't think she would call it a sermon, but it looked like a sermon to me — on brokenness back in the 90s. And as far as I could tell, that's where this modern emphasis on brokenness started. Because I like to look and see, well, if there's a scripture that I believe is twisted, a teaching that I believe is twisted, where did it start? And that's where I think it started. And so one of the chapters is devoted to Nancy Lee DeMoss and her teaching on — she's Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth now — her teaching on brokenness.

So the bottom line of what people teach about it is that “We are all broken or we're all supposed to be broken, that brokenness and humility are the same thing, except brokenness is even better. So we're going to talk about brokenness more than we're going to talk about humility. And if you're not broken, that means you're proud.”

So the way that gets translated, and I'm sure everybody listening knows what I'm talking about — at least has a sense for it — the way that gets translated is, “If there is a person in my life who is breaking me down, possibly breaking me physically in the most normal sense of breaking bones or something...” but it's usually not even that. It's usually more like the physical breaking down is like the immune system breaks down, you are unable to stay present, you end up having all kinds of issues that correspond with PTSD. And also there's a spiritual breaking that ends up making a person feel very afraid of God, because God and the abuser seem to be one and the same.

So of course, one of my desires when I first started the “Untwisting Scriptures” series back in 2016 was God was being misrepresented, and I wanted people to know, who is God really? How is He really represented in the scriptures? What do the scriptures really mean, these scriptures that are being twisted? That's my heart. I want people to be helped, but I want them to see who God really is and how He is a God who is for them, He's a God of relationship, and He's not a God who wants to break His faithful people who love him.

So then, of course, I need to go to all the scriptures that are used to support the brokenness teaching, and I do that in the book. I look at all of them. There was one that I missed, and at the last minute, one of my beta readers or book launch readers wrote to me and said, “What about Hosea 6:1?” I think it is. And I said, “Oh stink, I missed that. I didn't think about that one.”

NATALIE: What was it?

REBECCA: “Let us return him to the Lord. For He has broken us and He will heal us” — something like that, or “He has crushed us and He will restore us.” And so I ended up

making a footnote for that one and writing it on my website because I didn't have room for another chapter in the book. So I did deal with it. I don't shy away from the scriptures that teach these things. I just want to look at them in truth. Like, what do they really mean? And that's what I did with bitterness way back in book one, and rights. And that's what I'm doing with the brokenness and suffering teachings in this book.

NATALIE: I remember when I was in my abusive relationship, I was asking for help from my church, it was almost like they wanted me to stay in that wounded place, and when I started healing and waking up and really doing some healing and setting healthy boundaries, it was viewed as rebellious. I was even told, "Now you're not looking at your own sin and being broken about your own sin." And it was like I had to stay in that place of "Everything is all my fault. I'm going to take responsibility for everything because somehow it all stems to my sin, right, everything in my marriage."

And when I started saying, "Well, maybe it's not all my fault. Maybe I take responsibility for me but I don't take responsibility for him. How about that?" And they were like, "Oh no, that's rebellious. Now you're rising up in rebellion instead of being broken over your sin." And that was extremely wounding to me. Basically, you are put in a cage and if you try to get out, they're going to slam the door in your face.

REBECCA: Yes, so that "Rebellion is a sin like witchcraft" one, which was really a really big tool of the Bill Gothard-type people, and I addressed that one in book two, so we probably talked about it in that previous episode, and that "You take all the sin upon yourself" — I talked about that one in book four. So that was the righteousness and wickedness one, and I used the term "sin-leveling," like, "His sin of abuse is just as bad as your sin of wanting to be safe" or whatever it might be, that I look at the sin-leveling teachings. And then this one is like, "If you're not in a place of brokenness, of continual, perpetual brokenness, then that means you're proud." That's the teaching that I look at head-on.

And even from the very beginning, I address how the songs that we sing in church, there are songs that we sing that talk, that say, "Break me God. I want you to break me. Crash in on me." I quote five or six or seven songs there at the very beginning that sound, if you step back from them, they sound abusive. They sound like, "Crash in on me like a hurricane." Well, hurricanes are only destructive.

And so I look at those and say, "Is this who God really is? Is this what He really does?" And I compare what He does to the wicked or the hard-hearted with what He does to His faithful people. And of course, when it comes to His faithful people, the ones who

love Him, the ones who just want to serve Him — maybe they're confused about how to serve Him best. Maybe they're confused about who He really is, but that is their heart. They have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. They really do want to follow Jesus as His disciples.

And of course, there's going to be confusion because of the spiritual abuse and other forms of abuse, but they are not the ones He's going to break. They're the ones He's going to heal. And He came to heal the brokenhearted. "A bruised reed He will not break." There are those things, and we can hold those at the same time that we hold some scriptures that say things like, "He will break the arms of the wicked" and things like that, which is why it's so important to understand that we who love God, we who want to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not the wicked.

So all of the books work together, and I make reference to my other books in this book. I don't reteach stuff I've taught in my other books. I just say, "Go read this book to get that information." It's so important to understand this concept of sin-leveling and how all sins are not equal, and then to understand that the ones He breaks are the hard-hearted and the wicked, and the ones He heals are the ones who love Him and want to follow Him and want to serve Him.

NATALIE: Yeah, that's beautiful. Maybe you kind of already answered this, but what did you find that the Bible does teach about brokenness? What is God actually trying to communicate to us about that? You kind of already touched on it.

REBECCA: Yes, I did. But let me just touch on that again, because one of the main scriptures people go to for this brokenness teaching is Psalm 51. Psalm 51 is a Psalm that David wrote after he had committed sin with Bathsheba, he had sexually assaulted Bathsheba, and Nathan came into him and told him, "You are the man. You are the one who committed this sin." Now, I would imagine most of your listeners are familiar with the story behind Psalm 51. But David then turned to the Lord, he repented of his sin, turned to the Lord, and he wrote Psalm 51. And in Psalm 51 he mentions broken bones, a broken heart, a broken spirit. And I say, "All right, let's look at that because those scriptures are applied to us, like, we're supposed to have a broken spirit all the time, and if we don't, then we're not humble like David."

And I walk through that story: David was hard-hearted. He had become very hard-hearted — not going out to war the way kings were supposed to do at the time, lusting after Bathsheba, bringing Bathsheba in, covering her pregnancy, committing murder of her husband, and then finally the Lord broke his heart over his sin. And his breaking wasn't this PTSD type of breaking — it was a breaking over his sin. He was broken over

the really blatant sin that Nathan was pointing out.

And I show how the people who pray, "Lord, break me," are the soft-hearted ones. They are not the ones who need to be broken. It's the people who would never pray, "Lord, break me," who are the ones who need to be broken. So that's one of the things I expound on or walk through in, I think it's chapter one.

NATALIE: Yes, okay. So in chapter three of your book, you compare what some Christians believe about suffering to karma. So tell us about that.

REBECCA: Yes, so somebody wrote to me a question – I often get questions from my readers — like, "I was taught to believe that the reason my child has..." I think it was some sort of physical issue the child had, "...is because of some sin in my past that I can't remember, and I need to keep searching my heart for it and begging God to show it to me so I can properly repent of it and get it clear." And I said, "Man, that sounds like karma."

That's what I wrote to her, and I then wrote about it, that Christians can take on this attitude like, "You'd better keep searching your heart, searching your heart. The reason something bad is happening is because..." Well, I kind of want to say "...because God is like a gumball machine, and if you put in the penny or the quarter, you're supposed to get out a gumball. And when it's not working, you must think, 'I must've put in something wrong. I must've put in a nickel instead of a quarter. I must've put in a slug coin.'" Or I told somebody the other day, "Well, somebody's coming to our Bible study because they think the gumball machine God isn't working very well, and they want to find something different."

NATALIE: That's funny. Thank goodness they're looking for the truth.

REBECCA: Yeah, so it's like, quarter in, quarter out. That karma works like, "If you did something bad in your past life, then something bad's going to happen in this life, and if other people see you suffering that bad thing in this life, well, it's just what you deserve from that past life." And I said, "Christians act the same way, except, of course, we don't believe in past lives, so it's all in this life. 'You must've done something bad in the past, so that must be why this is happening,' just like Job's friends." And that will squelch compassion in the Christian life, in the Christian church, if we don't explode that teaching and show how unbiblical and wrong it is.

NATALIE: Yeah, there was a situation even in the Gospels where they brought a blind person to Jesus – I think it was a blind person...

REBECCA: Yeah, that's in chapter three. That's in that chapter. The disciples must have believed in some sort of karma it sounded like: "Who sinned that this man is blind? Did he sin before he was born, or did his parents sin?" And Jesus said, "That's not what this is about at all. You are totally off the mark." And I think if we can come to others with compassion and say, "Some things in life just really stink," and we don't have to have an explanation for why it happened. You know, it can be because... I would use the term "broken" when I talk about our world. Our world is broken in a lot of ways and we are suffering because of that brokenness in the world. And we can still show love to each other and compassion for each other without telling you, "You'd better search your heart for the sin that you did to make this thing happen."

NATALIE: Yeah. I'm doing a Butterfly Boot Camp for some people in my program and I'm writing a talk for it, and one of the illustrations... By the time this is published, they will have already heard this, but one of the illustrations is, I think of a gauntlet. You know how people used to have to run through a gauntlet, and then they would probably be dead by the time they got to the other side because they'd get beaten or whatever? I said, "Life is kind of like a gauntlet. We think that life shouldn't be like that way. It should be, 'As long as I am doing everything right...' and so we're always on the search for all the right things that we have to do, '...then I should have a good life and everybody should stay healthy and we can somehow stop death from coming or somehow stop sickness or whatever.'"

And that's not the way — that's not the gig. The gig is that we have to run through this gauntlet of this world, and our challenge is how will we show up for our life while we're in the middle of that gauntlet? How, when we get to the end of it, how will we have changed the world in some small way, and by changing ourselves as we go through it? But as you walk through the gauntlet, you're going to experience all the horrible things, and Jesus promised that when you walk through those waters or when you walk through those fires, He's going to be with us. That's the promise."

REBECCA: I love that. Yes. Absolutely. That is so beautiful. Yes. This life is full of suffering, and that is something that I believe is really important for — I want to say the Western church — to understand because people in other countries, they know life is full of suffering. They don't have any question about it, but it's like, for some reason... Well, I'm sure the reason has been because of prosperity. Our culture has been a culture of prosperity. And so if people didn't prosper, then it must be their fault. And maybe sometimes people were lazy or something. But when there is suffering, it's like the church, the Western Church, especially, needs to get their minds into gear.

"There is suffering in this life. I need to show up for people," and that's actually what the

last chapter of this book is. It's called "An Invitation: The Lord Has a Greater Capacity Waiting for You," and I invite people to walk into suffering with others, to be the compassionate witness, to be the one to walk alongside them, to be the one to listen to them when their stories are just so difficult, when their stories cause them to experience secondary trauma, even. To be the one to just be there, to be there in their grief, to be there and believe them and validate them, and to help them in practical ways. There's just so much we can do for each other.

NATALIE: Yeah. Okay, well, let's go back a little bit now. That's a great ending. We could just end the podcast right there, but there are a couple more things we want to talk about. First of all, you wrote two chapters worth where you talked about the victim mentality, and that's something that... I love to talk about that. So tell me what your bottom line synopsis of that is.

REBECCA: Well, I've got to shout out for John MacArthur, because he was the focus of chapter 6 because of the really terrible things he said about victims and the word "victim," even. I have lots of John MacArthur quotes in there plus footnotes, so you can go listen to the sermons yourself and make sure I'm not taking them out of context.

But the definition of the word "victim..." It's a real word with a real definition. If a person has been robbed, they are a victim of robbery. That's how the word is used — that's how the word is appropriately used. For some reason it has become a no-no in the Christian world — like if you're a victim of rape, if you're a victim of abuse, you're not allowed to use that word because then you have "the victim mentality."

So chapter six is mainly walking through what does "victim" really mean, how John MacArthur is using what he's saying about victims and a response, a lengthy response, from a friend of mine who was a child sex trafficking survivor. And then chapter 7 addresses, "Is there a time when the term 'victim mentality' is legitimate?" So I walk through all of those and coming down to, yes, I do believe there is a time when it's legitimate, and it's when a person believes that everything that's going on in their lives right now is somebody else's fault. That is what I would say is a victim mentality that's unhealthy for that person, unhealthy for everybody around them, and it needs to change. They will not take responsibility for everything. Everything is someone else's fault. And we probably all know people like that.

NATALIE: Oh, I'm sure we do. Okay, I've heard that we're not supposed to have boundaries because Jesus didn't. (Jesus didn't have boundaries?) That's so not true, but whatever. Chapter 9 addresses that, so what did you say about that?

REBECCA: The first time I heard... I don't know, I may have heard it before. But the first time it really sank into my brain, somebody was saying, "Oh, the people I reach out to, they say they don't like the word 'boundaries' because they say Jesus didn't have boundaries," I said, "What?" and I immediately went and wrote a blog post about it and then I edited that blog post to go into the book. And the reason it fits in this book is because not having boundaries is like an invitation for abuse, an invitation for increased suffering, not just because of life, but at the hands of others.

And so I walk through the life of Jesus because when people say Jesus didn't have boundaries, what they're referring to is those last few days of His life when He allowed people to abuse Him and hang Him on a cross. And I said, "Okay, if we're going to say Jesus didn't have boundaries, we're going to have to look not just at those last few days, but at His entire life, or at least the life that we know about, and especially those three and a half years of ministry."

And so I did. I walked through all of that. And then I said, "So now that we've seen all these boundaries that Jesus had during those three and a half years, let's also look at those last few days and see, 'Oh, look at that. He didn't answer somebody who asked Him a question. That was a type of boundary right there.' He did allow people to beat Him, mock Him, hang Him on a cross, but the purpose was for our salvation. We are not the saviors. We cannot bring salvation to anyone. Jesus has to do all the saving. So for us, we can follow Jesus in the sense of we can set boundaries. And to specify, it doesn't mean telling somebody else what to do. It means saying, 'This is how I'm going to respond when you do whatever you're going to do.' Setting boundaries is about our response." So I gave examples from my own life and then from the lives of others, especially Jesus.

NATALIE: Well, it sounds like this is another book that's jam-packed... And I have noticed that they are kind of all intertwined. I think this is so important because abuse is very intertwined too, and it's complex. There are layers and layers. And as Christians looking at it, if we want to find out what God has to teach us about it and how to respond in these relationships, we're going to have to be able to understand what the Bible is actually saying and not all of the abusive twisting — I love that word — twisting of the Bible that's meant to keep people really in bondage and is an adversarial tactic. It is not from Jesus Christ.

REBECCA: Oh, absolutely. And it puts God way up there as a frowning and potentially abusive, angry deity that you can never please because you're never doing enough. You're never doing it right. And it's just horrible.

NATALIE: Yeah. And if you think about the adversary, what his main goal is, is to slander God. It's to say what is not true about God. "Is God really like that? Did God really..." He's trying to put that question into our minds and undermine who God is so that we are blinded and can't experience God and His love for what it is. And it is terrible. So your work is so important.

REBECCA: That's my passion. Let people know, "This is actually good news, my friends. You know, it's called the gospel. It is called good news." And for many people, they're saying, "Where's the good news again?" And I want to say, "Look, this is really, really good news. This thing that they've said forever that you just grew up believing, it was in the air you breathed, it really isn't true. It really isn't who God is. And you can walk into the freedom of who He really is and learn to love Him, not because you're forced to, which, of course, isn't really love, but because you're just so delighted in Him because you find, then, in Jesus Christ, He's delighted in you." It's just a beautiful, beautiful thing. Beautiful relationship. The more I study these things — it's five books by now — the more I see that relationship is at the core of all of it.

NATALIE: Yes. Okay, so on your website you have a free mini guide. This is for people who are like, "I can't read the Bible." I hear a lot of people say that. Women will say, "I can't read the Bible." I have felt like that and taken a break from the Bible, and I used to love the Bible. But you have a free mini guide on how to enjoy the Bible again. And tell us where they can get that download, first of all.

REBECCA: Yes, thank you. I have a lot of different offerings, and if you go to rebeccadavisinfo.com, you can go there to find the various offerings that I have. And the free mini-guide is right there. You can click on that and get it to download right to your email. It's called "How to Enjoy the Bible Again After Spiritual Abuse (without feeling guilty or getting triggered out of your mind)."

NATALIE: Oh, nice. Okay, so that's rebeccadavisinfo.com. So don't just go to rebeccadavis.com. You have to go to rebeccadavisinfo.com. Okay, where can they get your book and all your books?

REBECCA: My books are on Amazon, but if you go to that link, rebeccadavisinfo.com, that will lead you to my books as well as some other things that I do because I'm also a book coach for people who want to write their nonfiction book, and I would love to work with people who love Jesus and want to write a book to help others, so that information is there too.

NATALIE: And you've done a lot of that, so you have a lot of experience with it.

REBECCA: Yes, I've done a lot of books. I've written over twenty books and a lot of book coaching as well, yes.

NATALIE: Wow, that's amazing. All right, well, that's all we have for you. Thank you so much for joining us.

REBECCA: I am so glad to be here. Thank you so much, Natalie.

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.