

## EXCOMMUNICATION SERIES: VALERIE'S STORY

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 266 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we are doing our second interview in a series of episodes in which you will hear or are hearing from three Christian abuse survivors who were excommunicated from their churches for divorcing their abuser.

Thousands of women all over the world who have dared to escape abusive relationships by obtaining legal protection through divorce have been subsequently excommunicated by churches who claim to be representatives of our shepherd, Jesus Christ. Can you imagine the Shepherd kicking a lamb out of His presence for escaping a wolf? It's unthinkable. So let's meet our second guest in our excommunication series. Her name is Valerie. Welcome.

VALERIE: Thank you, Natalie, for having me.

NATALIE: Tell us what denomination were you excommunicated from and how many years were you a member?

VALERIE: The denomination is called Reformed Baptist and I attended the church my entire life. I'm a little over fifty and joined the church when I was nineteen. I only attended two different locations — New Jersey and Michigan — of that church, one for thirty years and one for about twenty-three.

NATALIE: Tell us what your church meant to you and what your involvement was. If you grew up there, your family probably all went there and friends. So tell us a little bit about that.

VALERIE: Family of origin: I have one sister and yes, my parents were charter members in that denomination, late sixties, and grew up there and it was pretty much everything. Church was considered family, which is not always bad. They are God's family, but especially when I got married and moved to Michigan, that was when it took on even a stronger sort of entrapping role in my life.

A lot of things were good, actually. The church out here was better, a little less harsh, than the church I grew up in, but it was where we spent most of our time and was very much a part of our lives. And through that denomination, that's how I met my husband.

NATALIE: Yeah, I was going to ask you, did you meet...

VALERIE: Yes.

NATALIE: And did he grow up in the same organization as well?

VALERIE: No, he was actually from a different Reformed denomination growing up, but his family got into the Reformed Baptist when he was about twenty. His mother took a bold move and left the Dutch Reformed background they were in, and I don't know how much people know about the baptism issue, but that's a big thing. With traditional Reformed, they often believe in babies being baptized, whereas Baptists believe in believer baptism. So that was a transitional moment for his family.

NATALIE: So when did things start to go wrong and why?

VALERIE: We were married, still in the process of divorce, twenty-three-plus years, and about four years ago, things got particularly bad. My soon-to-be ex-husband hired a woman to work for him — he has a small business — and groomed her — as I look back now, I can see it clearly — to come work for her, had an emotional affair with her over a number of years, and through that entire process, my anxiety just grew and grew. I finally reached out for help to the leadership of the church when I couldn't take it anymore. And since they stepped in, that's when it really revealed how abusive he was and also how abusive they were to become.

NATALIE: Were there other signs too as far as your relationship with your husband before that time that were problematic?

VALERIE: For sure. I found him doing porn the first year of our marriage. We both actually had struggled with that at different points. About year five or six there was a big stressor in our marriage and I would say maritally that was when things started to change for us. We built a house, couldn't sell the old one. The economy crashed in 2007/2008. I mean, that was a rough time for a lot of people.

And there were some really toxic ways that we learned to relate to one another starting around that time. He was feeling like a failure. Love and Respect was strongly given to us as the solution to our marriage problems, which really only enabled his abuse further. And that, and other boundary issues for sure, was part of our relationship through the years, where he would often have relationships with singles, often women, helping them, coaching them, often in the context of family with me and the kids, but it was really him doing it.

NATALIE: So you reached out to the church to get help. What kind of help did they offer

to you? What were some of their expectations on you?

VALERIE: It was March 2020 when the whole world shut down, and that's about the time when I reached out for this help. And so coinciding with it was all the stress of COVID. But that wasn't really, of course, the problem. It only added to some of it. Expectations in the beginning, really none of us knew what we were doing. I figured they were the people to go to for help. And I guess I would summarize my story even right now at the beginning by saying the people I went to get help from were the very same people who excommunicated me. They were the ones that, the helpers became the harmers.

And so, as I look back now, I didn't know then what I knew. It was really some good pastors giving some advice, marital counseling, to people who were in a toxic relationship. Really when we went for help, it was already too late, because the infighting between us in those sessions, it was just them trying to keep the peace and give some good counsel and give advice, which for my husband was take it or leave it. And in the end, he was always flipping the narrative. And that's what continued for a number of years as they continued to try to "help" us.

NATALIE: What kind of help were you looking for and what kind of help was your husband looking for? What was your end goal?

VALERIE: I reached out, he didn't. He went along with it, kind of big picture — I'd say it that way. We were both in this church and these were our pastors together, so it wasn't that he would have disagreed with going to them, but it was me who was having the issues.

NATALIE: Your husband didn't really necessarily think that there was a problem or that he had any kind of problem?

VALERIE: He admitted along the way to many things, but as I look back, there was never true change. It was a narcissistic view of using people, even God, to get what he wanted.

NATALIE: How would you describe their help then for you and their help for him? I guess I want to get at what was your end goal, what did your husband want, and then what did the church want? What did everyone want?

VALERIE: I think everyone's end goal was for happiness and healing and to fix things between him and I. That was all of our goal.

NATALIE: How did they tell you guys that you were going to get that? How'd they tell you that you were going to get it, how'd they tell your husband he was going to get it?

VALERIE: I don't know if I distinctly could speak to that, but it was just always whatever issue we brought that week in counseling, which we did for almost every week throughout 2020, it would go from one thing to the next and it revealed all the problems from the past twenty years at that point. And because I didn't have the words for it, I didn't know what to ask for.

They were using some biblical knowledge and biblical counseling principles to help us, but my husband's very persuasive, very strong, very biblically knowledgeable, and he could just turn so many things. With the narcissist, things just keep going and going and going, and there's always just a slight movement of what you're dealing with, so now you have another thing, and another thing. And we never resolved much of anything ever, but we were in meetings with them for years. The trauma is just overwhelming, but I think the goal was always to fix things.

But as I shared with you in the letters that I received in this past year, their stated clear goal was to patch up and reconcile the marriage at all costs. It became evident they were not interested in really helping him or helping me as individuals before God in the needs that we both represented, but it was to put a bow on the marriage and patch it up and call it good because for whatever reason, that was their high view. And we can have a high view of marriage, but it's got to include divorce.

NATALIE: Right, otherwise it's not a high view of marriage. If abusive marriages, if we're going to call those Christian marriages, then you're right. The standard is pretty low.

VALERIE: It just revealed to me more of an entire system too that stood behind the way they did things. It was bigger than even marriage or porn. It was a system of they're the authority. They get to say what happens. I had to listen to them. And because my husband's a male, he had an ear with them and vice versa that I never, ever had.

NATALIE: Yes. That is a common theme that I see across the board when I interview people, whether it's on the podcast or just on the side, is that idea that the women, they're not really seen or heard or understood. And the men are coddled and nurtured and listened to and believed. You said that you didn't have words for what you were experiencing back then when you were trying to talk to the pastors or the elders.

And also, even if you did have words, it's hard to go up against, especially if you've got your husband in the room with you spinning everything and throwing out Bible verses

and Christian cliches and spinning the gaslighting webs, the spiritual gaslighting. It's almost like it lays a spell over everybody else and they're just like, "Oh yes, that must be true." If you could sit down and be believed by those elders, how would you describe what you were experiencing in your marriage?

VALERIE: What you just described is exactly what was happening in the room when we met. And so many terms I've learned from so many people, I would say maybe I sort of cut my teeth on Leslie Vernick and learned from her at the beginning of this time, listened to everything she had and learned very much about boundaries — she's excellent on that — and destructive marriage teaching. Learned how Love and Respect was a damaging book, especially in the hands of an abusive man. Learned from you and Patrick Weaver and Sarah McDugal, all my favorites, so throwing those names out there. As I learned, I would say it was coercive control that became the dominant theme of what was happening. It was control at every level in the name of God.

NATALIE: Yeah. And also, having read your story, there was also chronic emotional infidelity.

VALERIE: Correct. It was actually an incident of physical infidelity, not full adultery, that happened thirteen years ago now. I was made aware of it by the woman in the situation eight years after it happened. I addressed my husband on it because she was the one that instigated much of it when it happened. She was not a worthy woman to be believed. So when she came to me though, in retrospect, I'm like, she did the right thing. She was trying to make it right. She was trying to tell me what happened.

But my husband threw her under the bus along with an elder and his wife when I came home to approach him on it. That was eight years after it happened. Then I resurfaced that or brought it back out when all this was going down about a year and a half ago, and then these current elders also minimized it and basically said, "He denies it still, and 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?'"

NATALIE: Unbelievable. Okay, so you actually did have... I know in reading their letters they said you didn't have biblical grounds. One of the biblical grounds is adultery.

VALERIE: Chronic.

NATALIE: Oh, it's chronic. So how many flings can you have if you're a man in the reformed circles before your wife can divorce you? Do you know?

VALERIE: Let me count them up.

NATALIE: Unbelievable. And who are they to decide, "Yes. No, he didn't have adultery. Why? Because we decided that." And then they use the same exact verses that are condemning them, really. It's unbelievable. It's laughable, honestly.

VALERIE: Well, it's internet adultery. It's engagement at the same level when you're doing porn that you're engaging with. All the brain chemicals, all the things happen. That was chronic, still going on. And the interesting point is that along this path, he was, and actually still is, under church discipline as well for internet porn.

NATALIE: Have they excommunicated him?

VALERIE: No.

NATALIE: Just you.

VALERIE: Just me. For getting away from it.

NATALIE: So they'll probably just give him the rest of his life to repent. But you, on the other hand, you get nothing.

VALERIE: Nope. I had to work hard.

NATALIE: It's because you don't have a penis.

VALERIE: Well, you know it. That's exactly what my counselor says.

NATALIE: I know. That is exactly it. They are some of the most misogynistic, entitled human beings on this planet. This is such a stupid question, honestly: How did your church represent the heart and character of Jesus Christ?

VALERIE: Like you said in the beginning, they didn't. There was not gentle shepherding. At one point I was directed to read Ezekiel 34. They were not shepherding. They were the fat ones taking care of the fat ones or — I forget exactly how it's termed in there — but they were not taking care of the oppressed lambs who needed true shepherding.

NATALIE: They were false shepherds.

VALERIE: That's right.

NATALIE: Were you aware... I think you were because they wrote you lots and lots of

letters. They like to talk, don't they, and push their weight around?

VALERIE: If I could articulate the meetings... Hours on end was average. And there were years of them.

NATALIE: I just can't even imagine. So did you know then that if you didn't cooperate with them, those great gods of this church, that you were going to be kicked out of their sandbox?

VALERIE: Yes and no. I had a couple really great people speaking into my life as it went along and they were the ones that continuously called it, and they were right everything they called. They were calling the next step before it happened. And this church lived up to everything they called.

NATALIE: Well, because these are patterns. These people are very predictable. You can predictably rely on their next moves.

VALERIE: But because I hadn't lived it myself, I maybe was hopeful, I was trapped, I was all the things, but I am on the other side of it now. I'm just hoping that somebody hearing me say these things will go, "Shoot, let me believe these people because it's happening to them too." I mean, it's just terrible.

NATALIE: Yeah, it's true. I did the same thing. I went along with it for way longer than I... Looking back, I wish I had just said right from the beginning, "No, goodbye," but I didn't. Okay, I want to read a couple of things. Those of you who are listening, Valerie sent me lots and lots of letters. These men, they just love themselves. So I want to read a few of the things that they said in the letters and then just kind of comment a little bit on them.

One of the things I've noticed in almost every excommunication letter is they always start by saying how sad they are. And I just want to point out that their sadness, it's not true. They're not shedding any tears. It's just a gaslighting lie. People said this to me all the time: "It's so sad what you're doing." No, they're not sad at all. Sadness and sorrow comes when we have deep empathy for other human beings that breaks our heart. It breaks our heart to see them in pain and sorrow and sadness of their own. And if these people had any kind of ability or capacity for empathy at all, they would never have done any of this. It's like the crocodile crying right before he eats you. That's the kind of sadness that these people have.

They said, "We have given instruction to our congregation that they are not to extend to

you Christian fellowship as though you are a believer.” So they actually went out and told the people, other Christians, your brothers and sisters, not to extend any kind of fellowship to you. They're literally kicking you out of the city gates and making you a pariah.

And then they said, “They are exhorting you to get right with God.” These people are not right with God, but they're going to exhort you to get right with God. And then I thought this was interesting: “They were told that other relationships are to continue. Family members should continue to fulfill their duty to you.” Their duty to you! “Family members are supposed to do their duty.” That is not love. To do our duty to someone — that is not love. I just could not even wrap my brain around that.

VALERIE: I can put some context to that. I think it's in the hopes that I will repent and get right with God, that they have had to lower themselves to continue to do their duty towards me, and the context there is that, sadly, my wonderful, oldest son is a member there, and he did vote for my excommunication. But he's the sweetest kid, and I know that the distance that's come from all of this has been very painful. I know we're not going to get into all those things right now, but I really do believe he knows I love him, and you know how when you have a good relationship with your kid, it defaults to that no matter what anybody else says.

NATALIE: Yes. And it'll take a few years, but I've seen my own life, I've seen that come back around. And then the beautiful thing about that is that then they actually see it better. They see the toxic pond that they were swimming in, and that's also a beautiful, healing thing for them too.

VALERIE: I pray so for them, that God would deliver them from that. But that's the context in which that's coming. And they did stand up and read this letter to the congregation, so those people were warned that that's how they should view me now, which is absolutely devastating to just think, who do they think they are to call me — I mean, not that I'm so great — but anyone to say, “They're not...” And for doing actually something that I had biblical grounds to do.

NATALIE: Exactly. You did have biblical grounds to do it. Even by their standards you did. It's just that they were just denying that it happened. How easy is that to just go, “Nope, that never happened. Nope.” They just decided to gaslight themselves and everyone else about the reality of the situation.

There's a story that I heard many years ago about a little bunny in a barnyard who, a dog keeps tormenting the little bunny, but he only does it when none of the other



barnyard animals are looking. And the bunny keeps telling the other animals, "This dog is threatening me and scaring me and hurting me, please," and the animals don't believe him. They're like, "No, he's like a great dog. He treats us great. And I've never seen him do anything bad to you." And so eventually the bunny runs away for her life. And the animals are just like, "That's so weird. Why would the bunny run away? She must be crazy. This barnyard is amazing. We have an amazing barnyard." What they're doing is they're saying, "No, bunny. You have no right to run away on your own. And because you're running away now, what we're going to do is we're going to close off the barnyard so that you can't ever come back again, can't ever come to our barnyard."

VALERIE: They were okay with our separation, but it was only on their timeline, only on their way of "reconciling." And as I continued to prove or not prove, I eventually gave up and said, "I'm done," then that's when they got really upset. It had been years already. It was like, what else... And then they wanted proof that he was or wasn't repentant, and I had already given all of that. But I think their standard is only full-on adultery.

NATALIE: That's good to know. Any men who are listening, you guys are free to go fool around and do everything. Just make sure you don't actually do the actual act, and you're good to go. And if your wife tries to divorce you for that, don't worry about it. The church will just excommunicate her.

VALERIE: Sad to say, there are some men in that church that have actually done full-on adultery and it was not made public and they're still there.

NATALIE: That does not surprise me at all. They're going to find all the loopholes because again, in those denominations, men are entitled, abusive individuals and that's just the way it is. The actual theology that they're teaching is that God gives men that right and that women don't have any rights. They don't have any rights to say, "Please stop," they don't have any rights to boundaries, they don't have any rights to their own bodies, to their own minds, to their own adult autonomy. Women have no rights. It's like, why don't we just go back to the Middle Ages?

There's something else I want to read here. In one of the letters, they give you two Bible verses. They say, "You have provided no evidence of having grounds for divorce that reaches the standard revealed in scripture." And then the two scripture verses that they give are Matthew 5:31-32 and 1 Corinthians 7:12-15. But there are a lot of other scripture verses that talk about grounds for divorce, including Ezekiel 21:10-11, Deuteronomy 21:11-14, Genesis 2:24.

And I'm getting this from the Life-Saving Divorce website, Gretchen Baskerville. She

says, "Plus verses that tell us not to associate with people with serious sins, including all types of abuse and sexual immorality. And also those who don't care for their family are worse than unbelievers in 1 Timothy 5:8."

I mean, we all have to decide, is running away from abuse or running away from someone who is chronically, emotionally committing adultery, is running away from that a sin that you would have to be excommunicated for? I just believe it's laughable to even think that that's even a sin at all, let alone something that you would get excommunicated for.

The four biblical reasons for divorce, according to Gretchen Baskerville's website — she goes into this in detail according to the Bible, and she gives all the Bible verses that back up each one of these — are number one, adultery and sexual immorality... And the Bible doesn't say, "But you can do it three times, just not four." It doesn't say that. It just says, "This is what it is. Did you do it? Are you cheating on your wife?"

I would say this if there are any men listening: If you think that it's okay for you to do everything but the actual act of sexual intercourse with another woman, then likewise, it is okay for your wife to do that with other men in the church. If you would be okay with that and say, "Yes, that is not sexual immorality for my wife to do that," then, okay, let's make it equal across the board. But they're not saying that. They're saying only the men get to do that. The women don't.

VALERIE: And obviously that's not the goal: "Let's all be bad."

NATALIE: Of course not.

VALERIE: Right, of course. But it's laughable, exactly. And the thing I learned from Andrew Bauman, the pornified mindset, this extends way beyond sexual using. It is use of people in every realm of life, which is a narcissist's MO. And as this unraveled more and more, I saw that more and more in all the relationships he had and still does, and also the immaturity financially. I can't even begin to describe the past couple three years off the charts, things that were being done as I was trying to separate and get to safety and survive on a minimal amount of money. It goes hand in hand with the whole picture. But they would only look at the sexual infidelity and again, only at the highest level.

NATALIE: I'm glad you made that point because you're absolutely right. That entitlement mentality is across the board in every area of life. The other three reasons that Gretchen talks about biblical reasons for divorce are number two, physical neglect

or abuse, number three, emotional neglect or abuse, which I would definitely say you experienced, and number four, abandonment by an unbeliever, which includes emotional abandonment. You can be abandoned by your partner and still be living with them in the same home.

And then they said, "Not only have you ignored your elders," — oh, they do not like to be ignored, and they made sure that they would give you lots and lots of stuff so it was impossible for you to ignore them. "You have not only ignored us," you big meanie, "but you have spurned God's revealed will for how these matters are to be handled." I would argue that they are the ones spurning God's will for how these matters are to be handled.

And they put here Matthew 18:15-17, which is the verse about going to the church. If the other person who is chronically sinning against you won't hear you, then you go tell a couple of other people, and then if they don't hear you, then you go to the church in hopes that the church will then hold the other person accountable. But they didn't do that. So they're actually taking the Bible verse that they should have been convicted by, and they've spurned it. They have spurned that Bible verse.

But they, as abusers do, what they do is they project their own sin and degradation upon the victim, and that is what your abusers did. You were grossly abused by your husband and grossly abused by your church, and what do you feel in your body? When you read all of those letters from them... I just can't even imagine continuously being bombarded by their abuse. How did you feel?

VALERIE: Thank you for saying that, understanding. One of them was actually sent on the day of my daughter's graduation from high school back in May and it was just like their timing was always just... Increasingly less so, but I would just be so tormented in my mind, in my body. I would retain stress. A lot of times, maybe a year or year and a half ago, I wouldn't sleep. I'd be wakeful through the night. Every time getting a text or an email from the communication over there, it was just so traumatizing all the time.

It was like condemnation, condemnation. That's just all I could hear. "You're wrong." Wagging the finger. And, as you said, they very much cherry-picked scripture in what they brought to bear on this case. And then they really never were forthcoming with the congregation on what was really happening. They only told them what they wanted them to know, and therefore, then, their openness of all things was very unopen. It was very guarded. It was very hidden, very controlled.

NATALIE: I remember hearing somewhere that emotional abuse, spiritual abuse, other

kinds of abuse that aren't necessarily physical, actually have the same impact on the brain that physical abuse does. Every time that they did this to you to your brain and to your body, it was as if they were beating you up. They were holding you prisoner and going into your prison cell every few days and giving you a good beating. And when your body started healing and you started feeling a little bit better and getting sleep, they would go in and they would do it again. They were torturing you into telling lies about who you were, about who your husband was, about what was happening to you, torturing you into telling lies. That's what they were doing.

VALERIE: They were wanting me to come back in the quote as you said, "With tears, name of Christ, to walk into their open arms of love" and just continue down the road of their narrative, and that I could not tell my own story. I don't know if I mentioned this to you, but I did try to resign three times. I sent three letters over months asking for them to dismiss my membership. And they held on to it and said no, and the reason they first gave, "Due to the unsettled state of your marriage, we cannot release your membership." So that was right there a statement of what was the reason for all of their power and control was to control and reinstate the marriage or reconcile it. It was clear.

NATALIE: Yep, that was the only way out. You admit to this and then we're going to let you go free.

VALERIE: Right, and they held on to me as long as they could so they could now come to the excommunication ending.

NATALIE: Tell us how you're doing today. You got excommunicated and it was actually very recent. What does your life look like today?

VALERIE: About a year and a half ago, I, along with, interestingly, fifty to sixty other people from my current congregation where this all went down, now attend a new church. So this was way bigger than me, way bigger than my story. Other people were seeing it, addressing it, and being very disappointed, and there were a few other people in the fallout of this too who tried to stand up with me and for me, who got in trouble. So a whole mass group left. We're at a new community church. It's wonderful. Absolutely healthy church. And the preaching, the life groups, the teaching, the friendships, everything is life-giving, Christ-exalting, and it's been tremendous.

NATALIE: That's amazing. I'm so happy for you.

VALERIE: Yes, I'm in a new sandbox.

NATALIE: Yes. That's okay. Some sandboxes are fantastic.

VALERIE: Sadly, not all my kids are on board with that. Two of them go with me there, though, and two don't. So I'm happy for that and praying for all the others. So God is healing, growing, restoring all of us that have escaped — if I can say it that way — from that system and that so-called “church.”

NATALIE: I know we talked a little bit about this before we got on the air, but I will just ask you again, just in case — and you don't have to — but did you want to say the name of your church that treated you this way out loud or not? You don't have to.

VALERIE: That's tricky.

NATALIE: Maybe we better not since you're not sure.

VALERIE: Yeah, I'm not sure. I probably wouldn't want to do that, but if anyone reaches out to you, we can handle that and certainly share it if need be.

NATALIE: If you had one message to offer Christians who say that they love and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, what would that message be as it relates to your experience?

VALERIE: It sounds cliché, but I guess I would just say, really know Jesus, Jesus in both Old and New Testament, His whole heart, not just as He's presented by one church or one denomination or one group of people. It's hard when you're in it to even have that perspective or know it exists. I just don't believe that those people are representing Christ in this type of thing well at all. I know they're not. I would never want to judge them fully. They're people of integrity in many of the other areas of their lives. But their theology has led them down this road, their belief system about authority and sovereignty.

NATALIE: For me personally, I don't know how to let them off that easy because Ted Bundy was a good neighbor.

VALERIE: Right. I know. They take their trash out too. I get it. I'm not sure. But that's not something I have to figure out. I just want to get safe.

NATALIE: It's not. And the beautiful thing about healing and moving on is that you don't have to persevere on them, and it's actually not healthy to do that. I do it in my work, but there are some times I'm like, “This is so exhausting. I just want to forget that those

people even exist," but that doesn't help people that are trying to get out. I feel like when we're in that place of constantly thinking about the abuser, whether it's the abusers that live in the church or the abuser that we live with in our house, it just saps us of all of our energy to be able to figure out our own thinking and our own beliefs and change those so that we can actually be like the bunny and just get out of the barn. It's not a safe barnyard to be playing in.

VALERIE: And I'm definitely on that journey still — better than ever, but who knows what's yet to come? You know, there are just many moments of healing yet to come.

NATALIE: Yes, there are.

VALERIE: I would say with regard to Christ, I think what you said in the beginning about love and compassion, I think that was His ministry first and foremost. He came to save, not condemn. And if we're going to represent that in any way to others, that's the top priority, and I think the empathy you talked about, I never knew that in my life. I never knew it experientially, I never knew it from others much, and I didn't know how to do it and give it to others. And now, having received it from you and from so many others who have spoken into this, it's just been life-changing and life-giving, and that's who Christ really is.

NATALIE: Yes. That is actually what my new book is mainly focused on.

VALERIE: Oh, I can't wait.

NATALIE: It's that God is the empathetic witness for us, and then we can be an empathetic witness for ourselves, for our wounded self inside. We can actually take that leadership role in our own life, and then as we get more skilled at offering that to ourself — and we're partnering with God in that, which is so amazing — then that's when it spills over and then we become a better empathetic witness for those around us, and that is like the leaven that leavens the dough in the world?

That's it. It's love. What Satan means for evil, what the enemy means for evil, God takes that and He plucks you up and out of that, and then He turns you into a powerhouse that is going to bring love and good into the world as you are partnered with Christ who is within you doing all of that good stuff in the world. That is our focus now, and that is an amazing honor and privilege and it's so exciting.

VALERIE: Yep, it sure is. Thank you, Natalie.

NATALIE: Well, that's probably a good place to end the episode. So I just want to thank you really for, I know this is a difficult story to tell, and also it's a bit of a fearful thing because you're sharing things about people and you don't know what the fallout of that is going to be. I feel like as victims or survivors, every time we ever raised our head, we got it beaten back down again, right? So we've got this internal fear of, "Well, if I use my voice and say something, I might get beaten back down again in some way, and I'm a lot scared of that." And yet you still were brave to come on here and share your story publicly, and I am grateful for that, and so is everyone who has been able to hear your story.

VALERIE: You're welcome, and thank you for all I've learned from you and what you've been through.