

THE LONGINGS OF WOMEN

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 290 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today's episode is totally different from anything we've ever done before, so I need to set this up so that you have a little bit of context here. I have two programs for Christian women. One is called Flying Free and it's for women who are in emotionally abusive marriages. It walks them through education and support and coaching all the way from the moment they begin to wake up to the reality of their situation all the way through to when some of them end up finalizing their divorce and beyond if they need that kind of support.

I don't tell women to get divorced, by the way. I know some people think, "Oh, I think this program is if you want to go get divorced, then join this program." I mean, yeah, if you want to get divorced, we will definitely help you and support you through that. But I don't teach people, "Yes, you should come in here and get divorced."

However, I do teach that women are biblically free to divorce if they choose to pursue that route, but not everyone does this. Many women stay for different reasons and they'll learn in Flying Free how to change their programming and find inner peace and freedom even if their external circumstances are unchangeable at present. So that's Flying Free.

Now, after a few years of running that program, several women, they ended up getting divorced and they wanted to keep going. So I started a program for them called Flying Higher, which is a bit different from Flying Free in a few ways. First of all, it's only for divorced women. It's not for women who are going through a divorce. That would be Flying Free. Flying Higher is for women who are all done with their divorce. The divorce papers have been finalized.

So while both of these groups, Flying Free and Flying Higher, share the same private forum and the same weekly coaching opportunity, they both have totally different curriculum. I taught completely different classes in Flying Higher than I did in Flying Free. And they also have different live events each month. In Flying Free, those women will meet once a month for a Sisterhood Gathering on Zoom where they break down into small groups to discuss a concept that we teach in Flying Free. And also Flying Free members get a live Q&A every month where they can ask questions and sometimes we'll even bring in a special guest for that.

Whereas in Flying Higher, the courses are more related to rebuilding your life after divorce and they cover more advanced topics that actually build on the foundation that we lay in Flying Free. So Flying Higher members meet four times a month. It's optional,

but that opportunity is there for them. We meet two times for discussions around the curriculum and then two times for anyone who wants to go through our book of the month with me.

So last year we went through twelve life-changing nonfiction books together, and even for those who didn't want to actually read the book or didn't have time to read the book, they could listen to the discussion replays on our private podcast, and several of them reached out to me and said, "Oh my gosh, I've learned so much. It's like taking classes, just listening to your discussions about those books." So those book studies are beneficial for everyone even if you don't read the book.

But this year we decided to do something really different and go through twelve fascinating and thought-provoking fiction books together. Now, the book that we went through in June this year was called *The Book of Longings* by Sue Monk Kidd. Now, this would be considered a blasphemous book by conservative Christian standards for many reasons. First of all, and maybe the foremost, is that it portrays a fictional story that explores the idea of what it might've been like if Jesus had been married at some point.

Now, the biblical account actually doesn't say one way or the other, so it is speculation, obviously, but it's not actually outside the realm of possibility. Since men in that time period were expected to marry and procreate, and according to Christian tradition Jesus was fully human and fully God and Jesus fulfilled all of his duties as a fully human man, so why not this one? What if the rampant patriarchy of our world has hidden this part of his story from us? Who knows? Sue Monk Kidd decided to explore this through the eyes of Anna, the wife of Jesus. So that's who the story is told through her eyes.

Now, someone told me to read this book. They were emphatically hoping that I would read it myself and then have the Flying Higher women read it this year. She was so adamant about it that I took her seriously. I listened to it on Audible. I loved it so much. Honestly, it's a book that's going to stay with me for a long time.

First of all, it's beautifully written. Sue Monk Kidd is an amazing and gifted writer. So that's one thing, but also over two years of research was put into this book, so you can really get a well-rounded scope of what the socio-political situation of that time period was and what it would have felt like to actually live in the middle of all that chaos as a woman.

At the end of the book, the author gives a beautiful explanation for why she wrote this book the way she did, and honestly, I wish I had read that explanation from the very

beginning. Only because of my upbringing in a very conservative Christian home, there were little parts of me, little younger, programmed parts of me, who liked the stories I heard growing up because they were familiar. And these parts of me were activated by the idea of Jesus being married.

My adult self was open to looking at this like, "Why not? What can it hurt? This is not a dangerous book. Let's read it," but these other parts of me were like, "Oh my gosh, this is so dangerous. Jesus wasn't married. We never heard that story. That story was never told to us." So those parts were a little bit activated.

But as I read through the book, there are so many amazing things to even think about Jesus. We have so focused on the fact that he's God, we don't realize the fact that he was also fully man. And she explores the love that Jesus and Anna shared with each other, which was what you might imagine between two people who both wanted to help the other discover and use all of their gifts and come into their full potential of who God created them to be, which is what I would imagine if Jesus was married.

How Jesus related to Anna is how I imagine God relating to us, to each one of us. And it was actually incredibly beautiful. There was a lot of healing, I think, that took place inside of me when I read this book, honestly.

So anyway, our Flying Higher group had two really lovely and lively discussions about this book. And today in this episode, I want to share with you a portion of our last discussion, because so many incredible themes and things to think about when it comes to love and relationships and women, dreams, birth, and death, all the things, they are covered in this discussion. And I think you will be intrigued, and I also believe that you will find many golden nugget takeaways in this discussion for your own life. So here you go.

NATALIE: All right. So first of all, let's talk about the characters. We'll start with Anna. So what do you like about Anna? What are her strengths? What are her weaknesses? What does she represent in this book?

FLYING HIGHER MEMBER: Through the entire book, she remained true to who she was, and she kind of questioned the cage that society wanted to put her in. But I love the ending of this book. I absolutely love the ending of this book because at the end, these women came full circle, even with all these people trying to set these horrific traps. They were in bondage. And it was kind of inspirational because we're in bondage in certain ways we were. We got out of that bondage and now we're kind of free.

I liked her story because it wasn't easy and it wasn't your happy, rosy, "Oh, she was sitting by the beach sipping pina coladas." She was at this place in her life where she could use her gifts. And I think that is the beauty of it. I think sometimes in the Western culture, we kind of have this ideology that we're going to be sitting in these huge mansions, sipping pina coladas, having everybody wait on us. And I love that she came to being who God made her to be. And that's why I like how this book kind of built on her character and never lost that, but that's my two cents.

NATALIE: Yeah, I love that. It made me think too about how they were in a kind of community of women but also ministering. When you said that, I was thinking about all the survivors who have found each other in different ways, and we minister to each other and then we go out in our respective communities and drop seeds of hope and love even where we are. So this has been going on. Sue Monk Kidd captured that whole thing in such a beautiful way. I love too that she's not married at the end too. Like sipping pina coladas, yes, but it's like being happily married and having a family now.

FH MEMBER: And all three of these women did not identify with any of those in the ending of their lives. Their identity was totally theirs through the whole entire story. Even though they were sold into marriage — I'm just going to say what it was. It was literally sold into marriage. They didn't have a choice.

I love this book just for the simple fact that it just kind of brought God into more of a humanistic kind of viewpoint instead of this evil warlord or warlock, for the lack of better terms, that stands over us with a big hammer. It humanized him. I love the way she did it and it was a beautiful piece of fiction in my opinion. I would never have picked this book up in a million years.

NATALIE: I would never have either, but someone was so excited about it and was like, "You have to have the Flying Higher people read this." And I was like, "Well, okay. I mean, if you're that serious about it, okay."

FH MEMBER: Well, I'm glad whoever it was.

NATALIE: Yeah. I wish I could remember. Let's talk about Jesus as a character in a fiction book. It just seems so bizarre.

FH MEMBER: Well, a lot of people put Jesus in a fiction book. There are a lot of fictional caricatures of Jesus. And, of course, "The Chosen" is a great example. And that's the big thing right now. I mean, they want to make it as factual as possible, but they put a spin on Jesus, right? Everybody does that. There are tons of spins on Jesus in lots of fictional

settings if only a glance, right? The glance from the cross. Even if you do the old movies about the centurion or Peter, Jesus is in there.

So there have been many fictional characterizations of Jesus, but she does some very different things. For one thing, I was surprised because in "The Chosen" Jesus is kind of a jovial guy. He's got a serious side, but he's kind of a jovial guy — hip jokes, stuff like that. And this guy has a much more severe personality. He's a much more staid, stoic personality, but still that supernatural caring, that supernatural depth of understanding — the way that he cares for Anna, both outside of and inside of marriage is uncharacteristic of somebody of that time period.

NATALIE: I love how you said that, that supernatural... Yeah, I love how you said that. Because that makes a really good point that even though they were showing his humanity, what a different way of looking at the supernatural God part of him through the eyes of how he would have a relationship with a woman. Okay, keep going, though.

FH MEMBER: Yeah, that's all. Just the components of him I think is a unique portrayal of Jesus. I think she did an interesting job.

FH MEMBER: Well, and even Anna's love for him and how she understood without knowing, she still had understanding that there was something different about him. And she knew from the very beginning that their lives would be different than anything she'd ever experienced.

NATALIE: Yeah. There's something in her heart calling to that.

FH MEMBER: I just liked how she brought in some different ideas about the construct of Jesus in a marriage. Because in the Bible, we just have a few verses about his childhood, and then bam — his ministry. We don't really know what happened. I just like that ending, like you said, the ending of the book, how she ties it all in of what might have happened. But she kind of leaves his ministry alone in the book. You're really left to a lot of your own imagination. So she didn't want to get really deep into the religious context.

NATALIE: Like the miracles — you notice how you didn't see any miracles.

FH MEMBER: No, she totally did it through the eyes and perspective of a human in that time period. And she really tried to tie it in and she said she did two or three years of research as far as trying to find what time period it was or was not — would Jesus have been married? And I guess she said that they were slowly coming off that as being a

disgrace to a family if a male wasn't married. But I thought that fascinating that the culture of that day, if you weren't married, it would have been a disgrace to your family.

NATALIE: One of the quotes that the person who wrote the study said is, "Although the Christian church that will spring from his teachings will deny women a place of dignity and respect for nearly two millennia, the Jesus here listens to Anna, encourages the development of her voice..." I love that. He encourages the development of her voice. And I see that for all of us too. God wants to set us up so that our voice can be in the world and make just as much of a difference as His, because that's who we represent. We spring from God.

"...and takes her counsel at every turn as he moves toward his reluctant acceptance of the dangerous life of an itinerant preacher. Unlike Judas, Jesus preaches a new world brought about not by military action, but rather by humanity reforming. He sees a God that is not here or there, but rather everywhere, in everyone. In that vision lies his tragic flaw, which leads directly to the agony and triumph at Golgotha."

We could call it a flaw or we could call it a...I wasn't going to bring this up until later, but we will talk about this later, but there's this concept of — and the Bible talks about this a lot — of seeds going into the ground and dying and then springing forth. So you see that a lot in this book — things that get buried, things that die, but there's always this promise that that's part of the cycle. That's part of how, then, new growth comes, and the harvest is always more than the number of seeds that die in the ground.

There's always a greater harvest, but there also is a time period between when the seeds fall and die where you're just looking out over your garden, or the farmer's looking out over his field if you've never done it before, wondering, "Is anything going to grow?" I mean, if you've had kids that are like, "Is it going to grow? When's the seed going to grow?" I remember that. So there's that promise. Okay. Let's talk about Judas next. And what's his tragic flaw?

FH MEMBER: I just love how she developed that character. if you think about it in society as a whole, people do things like that to elevate their platforms. They want to start chaos. They want to start some type of martyr per se in politics. We see that happen all the time. It's just not murder today. I mean, they literally murder them on the screen now. So they kind of martyr these people like, "Okay, let's just start a movement here. Let's get this going."

And I never even thought of that, that Judas maybe was doing that because it tells them that he threw the money down because that's what you would do because if it didn't

spur on... He was a zealot, and I never thought about that. He could have been. And throw the money down because you just turned your best friend in for the cause. And you're like, "Oh, snap."

It'd be like me turning you in, hoping that your death would somehow free more women, like, "Natalie was murdered by these patriarchal men on a cross," and then somehow we're all going to be heard for the first time and things are going to change, and finding out that, "Oh, Natalie's death was all for... Sorry you suffered, Natalie." That would have been just horrific. And then you see that. You see that real human grief by suicide.

NATALIE: We'll never know. Well, maybe in eternity we'll know, but we'll never know here on earth. And yet it's very plausible. I think it's a very plausible, even probable, motivation for him. There were a lot of Jewish zealots who were doing all kinds of radical things to try to overthrow the Roman government.

And in fact, that was one of the reasons why they crucified Jesus too, why even his followers turned on him — not the disciples, they just ran away — but some of his followers turned on him because they were following him simply because they thought he was going to be their Messiah, that would set up his kingdom and be their King. And then when he didn't turn out to do that, they were angry and frustrated and, "You tricked us and you're just a fraud, and get rid of him — kill him."

FH MEMBER: Now in the book, did she say that Barabbas, the one they set free, she found out maybe it was more like a zealot or something? I listened to the book.

NATALIE: Yeah, I listened to it too.

FH MEMBER: Which could have been possible because I always was told, "They're freeing this murderer," and stuff like that. Well, he could have been a zealot easily. To get that many people to set a murderer free, I always was like, "Why would they..." Society even today would not do that. But he had to be somebody important to their cause. And Jesus was more of a pacifist, where Barabbas was more of the guy that they were looking for, the one that was going to slay many Romans, you know? So who knows?

FH MEMBER: It does indicate in the book that Barabbas was a zealot.

FH MEMBER: Which, to me, even though it's a work of fiction, makes more sense because we don't know. They just said "free him," and we don't know the history. And

so all the fiction we've been fed in church about that person, this is just a new line of fiction that actually makes more sense to me when you look at it from a humanistic standpoint than their story. Their story just paints all men as these evil people, but we're intelligent. We're calculated. We're going to think of ourselves and our families before we make a decision to free a murderer. So he wasn't just a murderer. I think he was for the cause.

FH MEMBER: Well, the biblical text says that the Romans floated that name and they planted the name and the crowd went for it, and probably the crowd did go for it for those reasons. I mean, he had to have some value to the crowd.

FH MEMBER: Right. And I never thought of it. Because we always tell them that he was this murderous... He murdered children. I mean, I don't know how deep the stories went, but there was nothing scriptural about it. But I bought it like he was so horrid and they chose him over Jesus.

NATALIE: Right. Isn't that fascinating that we grew up with... I love that you said that, "the fiction stories we heard." We grew up with fiction. We were told it was facts, so then when we read another idea that was actually based on at least some research of what was going on at the time and understanding of what maybe people in that situation were probably likely thinking, then we cry out, "No, it's blasphemous."

FH MEMBER: Right. I took a pastor to a scripture and his veins were popping out of his neck when he couldn't read what he was... And I said, "Well, why is this being taught?" And he said, "Well, it's inferred." I'm like, "Well, I'm inferring divorce is okay, but it's actually scripturally okay. You want to go down that route?" And he didn't.

NATALIE: No.

FH MEMBER: I did think it was interesting how Judas was Anna's brother. It just brought him that much closer to Jesus in just a very strong betrayal way. It hits closer to home that how could your brother do that to your husband? I think we can all relate to that.

FH MEMBER: Especially because she saved him.

FH MEMBER: But that's why Judas ended up hanging himself. I'm like, "Why did he..." Because there was a deep friendship. It was huge. You just don't go hang yourself because you accidentally murdered somebody or got somebody murdered or purposely sold them away.

NATALIE: Right. And they just still didn't know. I was taught that Judas killed himself because he realized he had murdered the son of God. He hadn't rose from the dead yet. They did not believe that he was the son of God. I mean, they wondered because he said things like that, but it wasn't like they knew for certain sure that he was what he said he was, especially after he was crucified and he's dead. So Judas wasn't going, "Oh, he was the son of God," and going off and killing himself. It doesn't say that in the Bible, but that's a story that I heard.

So we're going to actually keep going because I want to get to some of these themes that are really very fascinating. So the first thing I want to talk about is the power of longing. So it's called *The Book of Longings*, and I'll start with reading you a quote: "When Yaltha presents young Anna with the incantation bowl" — we were going to talk about Yaltha too, but I don't think we have time — "she tells her a man's holy of holies contains God's laws, but inside a woman's there are only longings." So let's talk about longings. Just give me your thoughts.

FH MEMBER: I think culturally, because women, we were always on the coattails of men. Through our marriage, our identity was our husbands. And if they allowed us to have our longings met, then yay. If not, then we were just... I don't know. I was pretty much in my marriage told what I had to do and how to act and behave. And so my longings were just that. And yes, I love that quote. Kind of resonates, I think, with a lot of us in our own previous marriages.

FH MEMBER: I don't know which place it was on, but it was the clip of the gal who wrote *Lessons in Chemistry* and the day she wrote the first chapter in *Lessons in Chemistry* — most everybody has seen that. I feel like that's a good example of that kind of deep longing. She lived her whole life in the construct of male patriarchy or business office views of women, the same thing that Elizabeth Zott dealt with, and then went out from that meeting, which was a totally incredulous meeting, but that happened. We've all experienced that. So non sequitur. Total gaslighting. And she says, "No, I'm going to go write that chapter," so she writes the first chapter of her book.

And so these normal... I don't even know if "longing" is a fair word because they're normal desires and then they have to be forced into the position of longings, hopes that maybe, one day, possibly, and they're the normal things anybody would want. Basically mutual respect. Just longing for mutual respect, which some of these characters just assumed. So Anna assumed it, Yaltha assumed it, the woman who started the society of people outside society, they walked in it and they walked in their longings, really, and they established pathways for other people all the time.

NATALIE: Yeah. So what is powerful about longings? Because it feels like at first they're not very powerful.

FH MEMBER: I think they drive us to what God made us to be because I would always long that God would release me from my prison. "You created me this way. You gave me these gifts, yet I'm looked down upon in the church because I talk too much, I speak out too much, I'm too bold, I ask too many questions. God, why did you make me this way?" And I longed for a period in time where I could be heard. I longed to be heard. And I asked God to free me from that.

NATALIE: And then you started looking, you started scanning the horizon for your opportunities to find that which your heart longed for.

FH MEMBER: Yes. And again, society marginalized women so bad. And I think we understand what unmet longings are than our male counterparts will ever.

FH MEMBER: The longings in my mind, the way we're talking about it, it's like God has gifted each one of us and our potential of who we are, our soul, our spirit, and so I think when who we are, it's not allowed to blossom in the world, then it does become a longing and it kind of feels bottled up. And I think that's a little bit of what you're talking about. It happened back in Jesus' day, and I still think it happens today. So it's something we all experience.

NATALIE: That was beautifully put.

FH MEMBER: Sometimes our longings get so put away because we've grown up in a culture that our wants and desires are dictated by other people, or we don't even know what we long for. So it becomes almost like a secret longing, even secret to ourselves. But like when I'm thinking about the last moment of my marriage, I didn't really realize how bad I was doing until it just became unbearable. And I think that was my secret longing kind of pushing me away from something that was not good and not healthy. So these longings can be even secret, at least for me. I think that they're very secret to me because I just haven't always been in tune with them. It's always been deferred to, "What do other people want? Well, then that's what I want."

FH MEMBER: It's kind of like the runaway bride and how she changed what kind of eggs she liked based on who she was with instead of finding out what type of eggs she really liked.

FH MEMBER: And rightfully thinking that is, "Oh yeah, this is what eggs I want." You

think that you just stumbled upon it, but that's just because our true desires have not... Whatever makes those desires known to us... I don't even know sometimes. So anyway, that's the joy of being away from that culture is that hopefully the longings have courage to show up.

NATALIE: Okay, so let's talk about how Anna and Jesus used their longing to change the world.

FH MEMBER: Well, they do have very different kinds of longings to me. Anna had a lot of gifts that her father begrudgingly supported because she basically demanded it for all of her writing and her solitude and the desire to grow in her knowledge of languages and her knowledge in general and her curiosity.

And Jesus is portrayed as more reticent. He has a growing longing that becomes unavoidable, where she has all these gifts and abilities and desires to explore the world. So they end up both using their longings provocatively, really, but they have very different, not origins, but they're very different styles of the way they're portrayed, which I think is interesting.

NATALIE: Well, where was Anna's power? Where did she find her ability to like channel...

FH MEMBER: Writing.

NATALIE: But then what happened? And do you guys remember what her goal was? What did she really want to do with her writing?

FH MEMBER: To be heard. I think in a way that was her way of being heard.

NATALIE: And what else?

FH MEMBER: And to support other women, other women that she felt were... Not cast out, but kind of lifting up other women.

FH MEMBER: Somebody might read her stories one day that culturally will come to a place where they can accept that.

FH MEMBER: She helps biblical women. So she had all those profiles of women that, we're all interested in the same women today. And so that was part of her, even her young person, writing in the beginning project of her life.

NATALIE: Yeah. And then in the end, what happens to all those stories?

FH MEMBER: She buries them. But I love the very last line where she says, "I am a voice."

FH MEMBER: She got heard. And I love how this fictional work kind of puts... Because they're archaeologically still finding papyruses that are written and buried like this. So even though it's a fictional work, they have proof that actually people did this.

NATALIE: Yes. I love what you said where you said she was waiting for a time when the culture was ready to hear that voice. Anyway, that's what I was talking about at the beginning. There's that burying concept, but it's not going to stay... She did not bury it thinking "The voices are never going to be heard." She buried it because she knew her time period, they weren't ready to hear it, and she buried it in the hope and dream and longing that one day the world would find those and be ready to hear the voice and that then they could know the truth.

Because if someone didn't write it down, how would anybody know about these women? How would anyone hear? She preserved the voices of women in the world. I can't tell you how much I was so thrilled about that ending. And then Jesus, his ending also — what was his longing and what happened to him?

FH MEMBER: Peace. And he got murdered.

NATALIE: What else did he want besides peace? What did he want for people?

FH MEMBER: To learn, to love, and get along. He had a longing to just bring about change.

FH MEMBER: He wanted them to know God in this true form. He definitely wanted that. He had a greater picture than just the political nature of what John the Baptist wanted or what Judas wanted or what other people wanted — bigger picture of what that was going forward.

NATALIE: Even think about his relationship with Anna, you guys. His relationship with Anna was like a little microcosm of what He wanted for the world. So talk about that.

FH MEMBER: I think he was interested in having mutual love, mutual respect, understanding, acceptability, all the things that I think reflect the nature of God. So it's like the equality between the two of them together is what he wanted in the whole

world, among all people.

FH MEMBER: I had a slight problem with his being absent so much in that his ministry was the main focus, but she didn't begrudge him of that at all because they had this mutual understanding of where, like you were saying earlier, Natalie, he helped her in her longings and she supported him in his, and they came together and it was like this mutual knowing of one another, where my ex was absent so much. And I would long for his return. And when he got home, I'm like, "Why did I long for this?" Where, when Jesus came home, he was so tender and nice to her. It actually triggered me, his leaving and coming and leaving and coming throughout the book because that's what my ex did. But then I was jealous of how he treated her.

NATALIE: It's interesting that you brought that up because when you think about it, a lot of what we expect, our expectations going into marriage have been programmed into us. And it really is a lot of enmeshment when you think about it — that we're one flesh and you're supposed to be having sex all the time and you're supposed to be with each other and the man should be... And I'm not saying that it's healthy for couples to be separated for long periods of time or anything.

FH MEMBER: It was for me.

NATALIE: **laughter** Exactly. But she did long for him when he was gone. But they were so in tune to the essence of what the other person was that they wanted to set that other person free to live into their essence. And that to me is like a transcendent love that transcends just "what I can get from you." That's what it looks like when you have two people who say, "What can I give to you?" Both people are like, "What can I give to you to set you free? Not so that you become dependent on me, but so that you become all the 100% of everything that you were meant to be," which is really not dependent on another human being at all anyways, and should never be that way. It's an interesting thing to talk about. I'm glad you brought that up.

FH MEMBER: Yeah, and I think you're right, Natalie. It's kind of like our programming and our culture itself — we're very enmeshed. I did his hobbies. Everything that I did in my marriage was enmeshed in him. His clock, his schedule. our family, our homeschooling life rotated around him. And so that if we had any wants, needs, or desires, they were, "Well, the man's the head of the home," and we had to set those aside.

Where you're right — in this relationship, even though they were separated, it was still very healthy because when they came together, they were very respectful of one

another, very mutual, and there was this great love that I think throughout the story, I was kind of like, "That's what it is." It wasn't just this fictitious longing. When he came home, he was actually a decent guy.

NATALIE: Not only just decent. When I think of decent, I think of the bare minimum of politeness. He really wanted her to be set free and who she was. You guys, we all have the Holy Spirit of that same Christ inside of us all 100% of the time doing the same things inside of us that this book portrayed Jesus doing inside of Anna, which is kind of profound when you think about it.

FH MEMBER: Well, and I think she captured that when Anna saw him in a vision later and they had the same cloak on, and then she felt peace. Then she realized he was inside of her and he was still there.

NATALIE: Yes. I forgot about that. That's exactly it.

FH MEMBER: Well, if you think about it too, we all learn about relationships in a broken world from other people that have brokenness and dysfunction, whether it's in the church or in our families of origin. And it's not to excuse the way that we grew up, but I do think what they're displaying in their love for each other is what God intends when the kingdom of God comes. Those are the relationships, whether it's a husband and wife or just human to human, another person to another person. That's the beauty of what God's kingdom truly is.

NATALIE: Yes, amen. Gosh, this is better than church — I'm telling you. Okay, I want to read a quote from this study. It said, "The idea that Jesus could fall in love, marry, and have children seems tacky and human and out of line with our idea that Jesus was on a mission." I love that they use the word "tacky" because that's kind of how my initial reaction was: "This is kind of tacky. Why would they do this to the Son of God?" That wasn't all of me. That was a part of me — gosh, I love IFS as well because it explains so much confusion that's inside of me — but a part of me thought, "This is so tacky."

And yet the love of Jesus has always been taught as an empathetic spirit that brings dignity and respect to all people, to humans. So to see Jesus as a human, which the Bible says he was, is not tacky. Why would that be tacky? Unless we, somewhere deep down inside of us or a part of us, looks at humanity and goes, "Yeah, humans are stupid."

And honestly, there's actually a big part of me that thinks, "Ugh, humans are so stupid." And so then that part of me, of course, is going to react when you say the Son of God

was human. "What? He was a stupid human like the rest of us?" Very critical.

But okay, so here's the quote: "The love that develops between Anna and Jesus, however, complements rather than contradicts Jesus as God. It is more than love at first sight, more than marriage and commitment, more than physical love. Kidd expresses Jesus' humanity as a kind of supernal love. The love that defines and unites Anna and Jesus is hardly ordinary. The love celebrates the intimacy of sharing open and honest hearts, of finding in the physical act of love the expression of a far more compelling sense of spiritual oneness.

When Anna first sorts through her attraction for the stonecutter that she meets in the crowded marketplace of Sepphoris, Anna uses as her guide the Song of Solomon, the Old Testament canticle that celebrates the complex fusion of the sensual and sacred, the flesh and spirit. Despite distances, Anna and Jesus are never apart.

The tragedy of their stillborn daughter pulls them closer. The moment when Anna meets the eyes of the dying Jesus at the foot of the cross celebrates a love that is at once deeply secular and profoundly sacred. Much as in traditional parables, Kidd upholds the love between Jesus and Anna as an exemplum of an ideal sort of love.

Surrounded as they are by couples whose marriages and whose love are far less than ideal, Anna and Jesus define love based on trust, honesty, communication, sympathy for the other person's sorrows, and ultimately sustained by mutual respect. It is the very ideal love that Jesus tells Anna during their animated conversations about his mission he sees as God's greatest gift to the world, a gift he cannot fathom why humanity rejects." And I cannot fathom why the Christian church who claims to follow this person rejects these gifts that God gives to all humans. I don't get it.

FH MEMBER: I think the Christian church has really taken the idea that humans, the sin of man, so therefore humans are, what'd you call them Natalie? Not dumb. Icky.

NATALIE: I think I did say dumb.

FH MEMBER: Tacky.

NATALIE: Yeah, tacky.

FH MEMBER: Yeah, they're tacky. So it's ingrained in us because it looks upon that we chose the free will and we chose to do bad. We chose to sin, therefore, we are all dumb. It takes God to redeem us stupid little people. So I think culturally it's in the church —

it's taught to us. But I think that also leads into kind of, again, we have these views of God as abusive. And for some of us, we have to rewire that.

NATALIE: Yes. And the understanding of humans... Even learning about IFS has helped me see my kids and myself as not these bad people. When my kids are misbehaving, I can now see, oh, it's not because they're a dirty rotten little sinner. It's because they have parts of them that are actually trying in the best way that they know how to get their needs met. They're doing it the wrong way or in a way that's going to cause problems for them, so that's my role as a mom to help them, not to shame them and go, "No, you're so dumb for doing that. Why would you do it that way? It's not how you get what you want." Instead to show them what their good motivations are.

What's inside of them that God put inside of them that's actually, it's like germs or seeds of goodness that the world and what they've been... It's our programming. We've been programmed in ways that just take truth and goodness and take those seeds and just like try to destroy them and smash them. So it's getting rid of the programming so these seeds can be free to flourish and grow. It's getting rid of the weeds of lies that we're so surrounded by.

People aren't horrible and stupid and tacky. We are in bondage. And getting free from bondage in our lives, one level of that is just getting out of an abusive relationship, but I'm sure many of you who've gotten out, we've noticed that once you get out of that bondage, well, there are so many other different ways that we're all still in bondage, that truth is going to ultimately set us free.

FH MEMBER: I think Tabitha was a perfect example of that burying and then coming out and blossoming because she was sold into slavery, escaped, and then ended up at Mary and Martha's and found a way to communicate again and found song again and music. And she just became something beautiful.

FH MEMBER: I loved her character.

NATALIE: Yeah, me too. Okay, we have ten more minutes and I really want to talk about this last one, which is the last theme that we're going to talk about. There's a fourth one, but I don't think we're going to get to it. The third one is the problematic place of women in Christian theology.

"Anna's story questions why Judeo-Christian theology has long denied women a place in scripture. Anna's earliest writings center on her ambitious plan to gift each Old Testament woman a voice to tell their story because the biblical accounts neglect the

women's story. Women in Christian theology are stereotypes or characters. They are denied status other than dutiful wife, caring mother, or as is most often the case, an occasion for temptation into sin, which is the threat of sexuality.”

Which is, I think, honestly, the niggling point about people thinking that Jesus might be married because Jesus can't have had sex because sex is a terrible, horrible sin. Which it's not, but that's the thinking.

“Anna understands from an early age that women are far more complicated and far more invested in the Judeo-Christian theology than her culture acknowledges, and for author Sue Monk Kidd, contemporary Christian theology has advanced little from these assumptions. Women here play a pivotal role in the missions of their men, the prophets, who become the defining, iconic figureheads in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

To borrow from the metaphor of Anna's own writing, their voices have been stifled, ignored, dismissed. Anna feels that anger when she steps into the vaulted halls of the great library at Alexandria: ‘I could feel a tiny lump of anger tucked beneath my awe. A half million scrolls and codices were within these walls, and all but a handful were by men. They had written the known world.’

Throughout Anna's marriage, through the loss of her daughter and then the brutal execution of her husband, Anna clings to the power of her place, her assurance that her story has legitimacy and value. Years after her husband's death, even as his message begins to define a mass social and religious movement, she finds her place in that story deleted. ‘Did they believe making him celibate rendered him more spiritual? I found no answers. Only the sting of being erased.’

With Jesus, Anna participates fully in the first steps toward his commitment to his ministry. He shares his vision, together they are baptized, together they tend the sick and wounded at Lazarus' home, together they assess the risks of Judas' political movement. She is there at the foot of the cross at the moment of his death. In Alexandria, in the women's commune, Anna taps into the tonic energy of women committed to the spiritual life of reflection, devoted to scriptural study, and practiced in the arts of expressing that devotion in writing.

In the end, Anna buries her greatest work that is itself a complicated examination of the paradox of women and their place within a cosmos designed by a God able to express itself as both a male and a female principal. Her voice is not silenced. Unlike her mother's or Tabitha's, her voice simply awaits its audience.”

Do you not just love that? I'm going to put this whole thing in there because it's not that long. "Hers is a voice she concedes, 'begging to be born.' The burial marks her hope that in time, women will emerge from the shadows." Reactions.

FH MEMBER: Oh, we're taking our time.

FH MEMBER: Well, are we cicadas? This is the year of one of the broods or something, seventeen years, and they come out.

FH MEMBER: Yeah, it's a cicada year. This is a good example of it though. And I think there have been bubbles. If you take the women's movement, which was made into a pejorative by most of Christianity, whether it was the equal rights amendment or whether it was things that happened in the twenties or the late eighteen hundreds and even today. I was just in a conversation yesterday. "Well, I can't talk. You're just a feminist." What does that even mean?

And so the need to suppress even thinking that women have the right to have equal rights in Christianity is still very strong. And that's a wrong way of thinking. It's not a biblical way to think. It's not a godly perspective of all the things. And when they're saying really legitimate, fundamental truths, that whether you are both a faith-based person or not, there are things that are true regardless of faith baseness, and a lot of those truths are part of who God is and the reason why we can speak those things into the world. They're not secular thoughts to say that somebody should have equal value. And whether that's across racial lines or across gender lines, but just that whole way of thinking is radically liberal still. We're still in that space.

NATALIE: Wasn't that fun? If you would like to be part of our community and go deeper with us, consider joining Flying Free if you are still married or you're in the separation process or you're in the divorce process. Flying Free would be the place for you. You can get all the details by going to joinflyingfree.com and you can complete an application over there.

Or if you are already divorced, consider joining Flying Higher. That's the group that you just heard. Those are some of the ladies in that group. And you can learn all about Flying Higher and what that involves and complete an application by going to joinflyinghigher.com.