

## LESSONS I'M LEARNING IN PHYSICAL THERAPY ABOUT HOW WE HEAL

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 306 of the Flying Free Podcast. I don't know if you can tell the difference in the sound here. But I am not at my podcast microphone. I'm actually walking around my living room with my iPhone and using voice messaging, I think, or some recording device on my iPhone. And I am working with my arm. So it's been two and a half weeks since my car accident.

I think the last episode, or maybe it was two episodes ago, I gave a little update and talked about resisting pain. And today I want to talk about physical therapy, and I've been thinking about some of the analogies that we can draw from physical therapy. So the only time I've ever had physical therapy in the past is after one of my later bed rest stints, I did go and have some physical therapy for my back and my arms and my legs because being on bed rest is... Which, I don't even think they recommend that anymore. But back in my day, back in the olden days, they recommended bed rest. And so I was on bed rest for months at a time with four of my pregnancies.

So anyway, I had some physical therapy and I wasn't really that faithful with it mainly because I had a lot of kids and I just didn't have a lot of time. So in my mind, I always thought that the problem with physical therapy or the hard thing about physical therapy or the reason why people didn't do physical therapy is because they just don't have a lot of time to do it, because that was my experience—my very, very, very limited experience. Those of you who have broken bones or have had major injuries to limbs of your body, you are probably laughing right now. Well, I will be laughing too if I ever hear someone say that to me in the future, because now I have a little taste of experience.

I was texting with someone earlier this morning who said that their mother had gone through this whole thing, but it was her leg that had broken. And I was thinking, "Oh my gosh, that would be horrible. I can't imagine how hard it would be to not be able to move around because your leg is broken and to be doing physical therapy on your leg and your ankle." It just sounded awful. This is my right arm. It's my dominant arm. My wrist was broken in multiple places. I have a plate and several pins in it, and I'm feeling kind of sorry for myself, but honestly, in the grand scheme of things, I'm very thankful.

So anyway, because I have a plate and pins in my wrist now, I had my one-week follow-up with the surgeon a few days ago, and then I had a follow-up with the physical therapist. So I'll be going in once a week just to get my new exercises or whatever. So anyway, she gave me my first exercises and oh my word, were they painful. They were

so painful. I was breathing through them and making faces and being all dramatic because before I went, I was thinking, "Oh man, I'm going to be badass about physical therapy because I got time now. I'm going to make sure I do it four times a day and it's not going to be a problem at all."

And what I didn't realize is how painful it's going to be because I have basically, as of a few days ago, I had zero mobility in my wrist. I can't move my wrist and all the different.. Do you know how many different ways we move our wrist and our hands? I can't grip anything or I couldn't... Actually now as of today, I can actually pick up my earbuds case. I can pick it up with my thumb and my two fingers. That is such a score for me, I'm so excited. But I couldn't do that even three days ago. I have been faithful with my physical therapy and I plan on it because they told me, "If you do your physical therapy," and they said, "You can get aggressive with it because you have plates and pins. You're not wearing a cast. Breathe through the pain and do your best to do these exercises each day and you're going to see progress week after week, and hopefully within the next three months, you're going to have most, if not all, of your mobility back if you're faithful with this."

And so I fully intend to be faithful with this. It's been an education in just all of the ways that... God made our bodies so fascinating. One of the things I noticed is that, so I have to write with my left hand now, which is my non-dominant hand. I've had to sign a lot of papers and there's a lot of paperwork when you have an accident. And then even writing notes, or I have this mom journal where I write two or three lines each day. So I've been trying to keep up with that too. I've narrowed it down to one line a day. But it's written in this childlike, scrawling handwriting with my left hand.

But here's the thing I noticed. When I'm using my left hand, the muscles in my right hand are mirroring the muscles in my left hand. So my right hand and wrist are actually feeling very fatigued and in pain after I'm done writing with my left hand. Isn't that interesting?

Okay, so so as of a couple of days ago, I wasn't able to use my right hand for really anything, even lifting it up and moving it in such a way that you could, for example, like in the shower, washing your hair. When you wash your hair, your wrists and hands go in lots of different directions as you're scrubbing the soap into your scalp. They go around and they move in different ways.

And so I thought, "Okay, I've been doing this physical therapy for three days. I'm going to put the shampoo in my right hand and see if my right hand can make some of these movements on the top of my head, these circular movements." And my fingertips are

able to actually do some scrubbing now. This is just the progress I've made in three days.

I was watching, and I've been watching this about other things too. My left hand is helping my right hand. My left hand, which I have always taken for granted, it has always been like the weaker part of my body because it's not my dominant hand, it's always been the helper, but in the last two and a half weeks, my left hand has stepped up to the plate and taken over everything. It has done all of the tasks that my right hand normally does.

And is it doing the tasks well? Not necessarily, but it's doing the tasks, and my right hand has been very thankful. So I've been applying this to thinking about the different parts of myself inside. And even the Bible talks about how different parts of our body, some parts are seemingly more important than others because maybe everyone can see those parts, and then other parts are tucked inside of our bodies where people can't see, but those are the parts that are actually the most important. Things like our heart and our lungs, things you can't see, that are just working hard behind the scenes to keep us alive.

We don't necessarily always think about those parts. We're thinking about our legs, and we're thinking about our arms, and we're thinking about our brain, and we're thinking about our eyeballs, and we're thinking about our ears, and all the things that we can see and we can feel their functions all the time, but not necessarily the hidden parts. I think the Bible talks about the less desirable parts or something. I can't remember.

Anyway, my point is, because I'm riffing. I have no script. This is another podcast episode where I'm not going to be writing things down and scripting things out. I'm just riffing here. Anyway, I was thinking about how I have different parts inside of me—not just body parts—but different parts of me that are showing up in different ways. I have a little girl part who is really kind of scared. This is a part that feels very vulnerable, that feels like, “See, I told you so. We can't control everything in life. Things can happen out of the blue.”

I'm a really careful driver and I'm a very defensive driver, and I've only had one other accident and it was when I was right out of college doing my first teaching job. And that was also not my fault. Someone rear-ended me on the freeway. And so those are the only two accidents that I've had have been people coming out of the blue at me where there's nothing that I can do. It's completely out of my control. And so that makes me very fearful for my own self, it makes me fearful for my kids. I can give them all the instructions and help as they learn how to drive and as they go out the door to drive to

all kinds of different places, but they can be good drivers too and it doesn't matter.

There are so many drivers that are just not paying attention or that are on their phones or that are inebriated or that are distracted or whatever the case may be, and they're not driving well. And when they're not driving well, they put everyone else on the road in danger. And we have zero control over that. So there's a part of me that feels very vulnerable and rightly so. I just say, "Well, it's true. We live in a world where we are all vulnerable and where things can happen out of the blue. So that's out of our control, so who do I want to be within that fact, that reality of what life is like on planet Earth? Who do I want to be? How do I want to show up?" So anyway, there's a little girl part of me like that, but I've never really thought of my body parts as being parts.

So anyway, I've watched my left hand, especially as my right hand is trying new things, my left hand will assist my right hand in some things. So for example, I had a protein drink in an eight-ounce cardboard container, and I used half of it in my coffee. So I thought, "I'm going to see if I can pick this up with my right hand and just see what happens." This is this morning. I could grip it, but when I tried to pick it up, it felt too heavy. It felt like I wasn't going to be able to sustain the weight of it.

So then my left hand just came over and gave a little bit of a boost. And once I got that boost up, my left hand kind of hovered right over it, but it was able to let go a little bit and see, "Can you do it? Can you do it right hand?" And my right hand was like, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can." And then I was able to do it. So it's been so much fun to watch my left hand take care of my right hand in this way.

And then I was thinking about the people in the Kaleidoscope, the survivors that are there. There are survivors in our Kaleidoscope community who are brand new or who are maybe just trying to figure out whether or not they are in an abusive relationship, and they are not feeling strong at all. In fact, they've never maybe even exercised some of the muscles that are able to tolerate pain... Well, we all have to be able to tolerate pain, right? We have no choice in that. But sometimes we run away from pain or we buffer our pain. And we don't want to feel our pain, and so we do things to help ourselves feel better in the moment.

And there's nothing wrong with that, by the way, but if we're doing that all the time, it would be kind of like if I decided, "I don't like the pain of physical therapy. It hurts too much, and so, therefore, I'm not going to do it. It feels better to put my arm back in the splint and let it hang by my side and do nothing." Actually, it doesn't feel good to let it hang by my side because all the blood rushes to it and then it hurts. But to put it in the splint and then put it in—what do you call it—the sling, and just let it rest. "That feels

better, so that's what I'm going to do."

But if I do that, yes, my arm will feel better in the moment, but it's never, ever going to get strong and it'll eventually atrophy and then become useless. But if I think, "Six months from now, I'd really like to be able to use my arm the way I used it three weeks ago, have a fully functioning arm back again." Well, if I want that, that means I'm going to have to take small steps today to ensure that that's the outcome that I get six months from now.

And that's what I want to offer you today in this podcast episode, is that the small steps that you take today, they may feel very painful, they may be very uncomfortable, but that doesn't mean that you're doing the wrong thing. I hear this a lot in the Kaleidoscope where people will be like, "Well, it hurts so much or it's so surprisingly painful when I take these small little steps that I I always wonder, 'Well, maybe I'm not doing the right thing. Maybe I'm not doing it right.'"

And I think that's because we've been sold a bunch of crock that says, "If you're a Christian and you're a good Christian and you're doing it right, then things are going to go well in your life and you're going to be blessed and you're not going to feel all that pain. You're going to have peace, the peace that passes all understanding."

And my arm does feel peaceful when it's in its splint and in its sling and it's just resting. It feels at peace. I get relief, but I'm not growing, I'm not changing. I should say too, there are times when we need to rest, right? If I was doing physical therapy 24/7, that would actually damage my arm. Take a small step, and then rest. And then take a small step, and then rest. Anytime you take a small step, it's going to hurt. It's going to feel painful. Something's going to be uncomfortable. It's not going to feel right. You're going to feel like, "This doesn't feel normal to me. This doesn't feel right, but I'm going to do it anyway," and then you're going to need to recover from that, so you take a rest.

So make sure that you have a supportive community. Make sure that you are getting educated and you're learning and growing and filling your mind with the truth. Make sure that you're getting supported as far as just being able to change your brain around your programming because when we have our same programming, if we believe the same things over and over again, we're just going to keep creating the same things for our lives over and over again.

So if you want a different life six months from now or a year from now, the thing to do is actually change your brain first. You have to start there. You can by force of will make decisions and do things that are completely not in alignment with your core values or

with your programming—you can do that. But sometimes it comes back to bite you in the butt later. This rarely happens, but once in a while, I'll have someone come back and say, "I joined your program five years ago and I just went out and got a divorce." And by the way, I don't tell people in my program to go get a divorce, just so you know. There are a lot of people in my program who are not getting divorced.

But they, for some reason, thought that they should get a divorce. They made some certain things mean that. They went out and got a divorce before they had ever done any of the program changing in their own mind. And because they had never changed their programming, after the divorce they're still living with the old programming, but they've got this new weird life that does not align with their belief system, and that's a problem. And it was a problem. It's a problem when we do that.

So we don't want to do things or take actions based on programming that we don't have. We have to change our programming first, and then that drives our feelings and our emotions, and then that drives the actions that we take. And then when we take those actions, then we feel it all lines up. It all lines up and feels right. Even if it hurts, it feels right. We know deep in our core, "This is right."

So when I'm doing my physical therapy, even though it hurts really bad... And it even looks like I'm doing weird things with my wrist. Sometimes I have to do it with my left hand just to see, "Is this really how it's supposed to look?" And my left hand seems to look natural whereas my right hand looks kind of abnormal and deformed.

But even so, I know deep in my core, "This is the right thing to do. I need to make these movements even though they hurt and take these small steps every single day, and eventually, I'm going to be where I want to be six months from now."

So the last thing that I want to offer in this episode is a tool that I used when I was getting out of my abusive relationship, and was so painful and it took many years. You can read about it in my book, *All the Scary Little Gods*— it's on Amazon. It's my spiritual memoir, but I bring in my whole process of actually getting out of my abusive relationship because I needed to change my programming about God, really, in order to do that because I really believed that God... When I look back, God was pretty scary to me. And that's what kept me in an abusive relationship and also kept me thinking that an abusive marriage was normal, that that was actually a normal Christian marriage. I know quite differently now, but at the time I didn't.

So anyway, this is something that I used to help keep me going back then, and I actually have been using it with my physical therapy as well. And sometimes people do this



when they're working out too. If you're someone who likes to work out or if you've watched people working out, it's music, you guys. Music is so powerful. And even when I just say that, it's like, "Yeah, music is powerful." That's like a cliché, right? It is like that until you pop in your earbuds or put on your headphones and you get immersed in it, and all of a sudden you experience the power of it.

So I have this playlist. You can find it on Spotify. It's called "Flying Free" and it's got tons of songs on it now, but I started it years and years ago. I should look at it. I bet the date's on there of when I started it. I feel like it's been a decade ago or longer. I think the first song on it is "Need You Now" by Plumb. So I was sitting in a parking lot of a store and that song came on the radio, our local Christian radio station, and back then, I only listened to Christian music. I was raised in a home where you really only listened to hymns. And any music like Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith—totally satanic. My mom believed that was satanic music. But in college, I kind of broke free from that—at least the Christian side of things.

But anyway, this song came on the radio and I just bawled. It resonated with me so much. I felt validated and seen, I think, for the first time. And so I started a playlist on Spotify. I found that one on Spotify. I think Spotify was brand new to me back then. And I thought, "I'm going to start a playlist and learn how to do that." So I added that and then I started adding other songs that I would hear that were very encouraging to me. I was driving kids around a lot and so I was listening to Christian radio a lot, and I just started adding the songs that were encouraging to me at the time—started this playlist.

Well, if you go to that playlist, you can see that over time I began to listen to secular music as well. I don't know how, but I was introduced to different songs that were really written for survivors. And I realized, "Wow, there are a lot of secular artists out there who are writing about the things that I'm experiencing." And I began to listen to their music, and it started to create a lot of shifts in me. And so I have since then always really used music as a way of... When I get up in the morning, pop in my earbuds, listen to some uplifting music, and it gets me going for the day.

So I've noticed that when I'm doing my physical therapy without music, it's harder for me to move my hand because my brain is focused on the pain. And when my brain is focused on the pain, I naturally resist the pain. And I don't push myself as hard and I don't do as well. But when I'm listening to music like "Never Give Up" by Sia, I feel this rush of adrenaline flowing through me that says, "I can do this and I am never going to give up." Or "Titanium," it's another one by Sia, I think, "I am titanium. You shoot me down, but I am going to get up. I am titanium." And I know it sounds stupid when I'm just saying it, but I'm telling you, go put in that song in your earbuds so that you're

immersed in it in your brain, and it is going to fill you with all those powerful feels that you need to help you get through your day.

If you're having a crappy day, go put in some music. For me, it works better than anything else I have ever tried. It works better than drugs. Not that I've tried drugs. But I imagine that it works better than drugs. Maybe I'm wrong. I don't know. Anyway, music is where it's at for me.

So I like to listen to music in the car, and I also like to listen to music when I get up in the morning when I'm feeling tired and groggy, or if I'm ever feeling, there have been times since this accident where I have started to feel depressed or where I've started to feel just a sense of grief over some of the losses. And I let myself feel that grief. I've cried. I let myself feel it. And then when I'm done, I put in my music and I recover. So it's kind of like physical therapy, feel the grief, feel the pain, and then I recover. I pop in my music and I rest, or I pop in my music to do my physical therapy so that I'm listening to music while I'm experiencing that pain, and it helps to alleviate some of that pain.

If you are not a person who exercises, exercise is so important for our mental health. You guys, I cannot reiterate how important it is. Even if all you can do is get outside and take a walk each day, just take a ten-minute walk, start with ten minutes, just go down to the end of your block and back again and listen to one song. Just try it. Try it and see how you feel when you get back. Get outside, even if it's super cold or super hot, get out there and just do it for a few minutes. Listen to a song, come back, and see if it doesn't give you a little bit of a kick in an upward direction.

And you can start turning that spiral, when you start feeling yourself spiraling out of control, you can start turning that spiral around. Especially if you've had an altercation with your husband and you feel worthless and you feel shame and you feel disrespect for yourself because maybe you showed up in a way that really doesn't align with your core values and doesn't align with who you are as a person... That happened to me all the time and I would just spiral out of control in anxiety and shame and depression, and music would pull me back. It would pull me back. It would help me realize, "It's going to be okay."

Each one of us is a warrior in a battle on this planet. This planet is not paradise by any stretch of the imagination. This is battle time, and you're a warrior on the battlefield. And so I'm just trying to give you a few little tips to help you fight your best battle that you can so that one day you can have some peace and rest in your life.

Not that we ever have complete peace and rest. I mean, I'm out of my abusive



relationship, but I got to tell you, my life today is very, very different from my life ten years ago. I wouldn't go back for the world. I would not go back for anything. There is nothing I would go back for. I love the life that I've built today.

And yes, bad things have happened since I've gotten divorced, and more bad things are around the corner. I know that that's true because that's the nature of living life on this earth. But I also know that we all have each other and that we have tools, that God has given us tools, God has given us resiliency, God has given us our bodies and our minds and our souls, the ability to heal when we have been broken down. And that is my word for you today.