

HOW OUR FEMALE BODIES REFLECT GOD'S GLORY

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of Flyingfreenow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 45 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I'm talking with Christy Bauman, an author, teacher, and psychotherapist who also spearfishes. Don't you just love a well-rounded soul? Christy practices as a licensed mental health counselor and supervisor and has co-founded the Christian Counseling Center for Sexual Health & Trauma.

Christy has a brand-new, absolutely fascinating book that should be out and ready to purchase by the time this episode hits the airwaves. It's called "Theology of the Womb." That's what Christy and I talked about in this episode. I really think this conversation is going to un snag many of you from lifelong lies that have held you down. I pray that it might even be the beginning of the long journey of healing for some of you. No matter what, you are going to be blessed by this conversation. So let's get started.

Christy, I am so excited to have you here! I talked to your husband a few weeks ago, Andrew Bauman, and he was talking about the intersection between pornography and abuse. He told me about your new book, and I thought I had to talk to you too. I really think the listeners could get so much out of... We were talking right before the podcast started. Your book really dives into who we are as women and our value. There is so much shame around our bodies, I think.

CHRISTY: Yes.

NATALIE: Even in the church, I think. I have to tell you, and then I'll let you talk. On Twitter this morning, I saw a person on Twitter. Her name is Wretched Sinner or something like that. She is part of a group of people who call themselves these wretched people, but they are Christians. They get their theology from (I want to say names, but I won't) preachers who basically teach that we are just basically wretched sinners, and they leave out... So I read that. Then I had a survivor just tell me this morning that she feels she had this breakthrough in her therapy where she feels like God just showed her that she doesn't believe she has any value at all. So we think we deserve the treatment that we get in the church and at home because we are female. "We are flawed. Our brains don't work right. We're hysterical if we have any emotions. Our bodies are disgusting and just to be used or ogled by men." I think that your book

really helps to set women free. So tell us about your book. What's it called, and why did you write it?

CHRISTY: Oh, so many good questions! Again, I feel like I could talk... There are so many things you just said that I want to say, "Yes, and there's research, and there's this." There are so many things, but I will just stay with what I am currently birthing right now this month. It's a book called "Theology of the Womb: Knowing God Through the Body of a Woman." There is so much to say about it in the context of the church. But really, it came from the cry of my heart of the silence my body was being asked to bear, particularly in a Christian context. Whether it was the embarrassment of bleeding; whether it was females not having a primary place in scripture where there is worth, advocacy, or deity — I was searching for why my body felt less than.

How it has come forth, even in seeing clients or seeing marriages that are struggling to be in a relationship, I see women saying again and again, "I am taught to be submissive." I will tell you I get fired up, because it is false submission. They are not — and that is just killing them. It's killing their marriages. It's not their calling. It was not our calling as women. That is not what the Bible is asking from us. That's not what God is asking for us. But sadly, the church in some places of power and patriarchy has come alongside and asked that and told us that. They are stealing from us what our body is telling us is most true — what the image of God in us, what the Imago Dei, is telling us — which is that we bear Mother God in us. We bear the feminine God in us.

That's hard in a patriarchal context, and yet I can't divorce that from myself, because I have a vagina, I have a clitoris, and I have breasts. I have to understand God having those same body parts to use those words. I understand that God does not have body parts, and yet I needed God to be woman and mother so that I could continue understanding how I'm called to live in God's image.

So that's what the book is. It's an exploration of why my blood matters, what it means in scripture, what it means in creation and that story, what my breasts mean, what pleasure and my clitoris means, and what my vagina means — how it is holy, how it is supposed to be used for God's glory, how it's supposed to be spoken — loud — and have a voice, and what it means to bring the voice of my body into context to the church.

NATALIE: Right. It sounds almost heretical. I mean, really — from my background, my upbringing — to talk about God as being female. Not that you are saying He is female or male, because He's not a gender, but that He embodies both female and male. So tell me about this. I just recently heard someone made a case that the Spirit embodies

more of the feminine qualities.

CHRISTY: Yes.

NATALIE: When I heard that, a lightbulb went on inside of my mind. When I thought that God actually could relate to me as a female on some level, I burst into tears. There was something profoundly healing about knowing that. I had never — that thought, that reality — it never crossed my mind before. Never.

CHRISTY: Yeah. Again, yes, the Holy Spirit. There is the feminine nature in the Spirit. I think that's obvious just when you engage with the female. There is something with our spirit's that we know. There's a knowing, and it's mysterious. I think that's the quality of the Holy Spirit that I connect with. Even how I wrote the book out, it's going into God's birthing room, and you see the creation story. But this time it's God and the Holy Spirit holding up us, their child, and saying, "Oh, she has my eyes. She has my hair." There's some glory of the Holy Spirit and God looking at their creation, us, and saying, "They come from both of us. They are made in both of our image." So the Holy Spirit taking that Mother-God role more in depth.

I think you're right. I think everything in me was taught to be uncomfortable with that. Using the female pronoun, using "she" in certain ways, it does feel heretical. It feels like, "There is no way I can do this." But honestly, if I'm alone and not in the presence of a man, I feel really intrigued by it. I feel nervous and hopeful and loved. I feel like if God made my clitoris out of His image — and I'm going to use "Him" because that's the "proper" pronoun that we have ascribed — but honestly, if that's in His plan and out of His image, then He is She, and She is me. I need that, otherwise, my body is somehow less than gross or it's not part of God's plan, and that's just not true. It's not true, but I don't think we've had female theologians from the pulpit long enough not being martyred to tell us that story. We're not in a society where that is invited.

NATALIE: Not yet.

CHRISTY: Not yet. But there are societies that are inviting that. I tell this story. It is very common in African cultures where women will come. Once a month they will have, more or less, a bachelorette party for the women in the villages who are getting married, and all the women are required to come. All the women of old — grandmothers, mothers — they bring three sexual positions to teach the brides that are going into marriage. Now we might think, "Ok. That's hard to unpack." But what they are saying is female pleasure and their bodies and knowing sexuality is very important. A woman trusting and knowing her body is very, very important in a

marriage, in an act of intimacy, because if we look back in scripture, temple prostitutes brought us into the divine. If we look at Kama Sutra, the female body, her arousal cycle brings us into the divine.

Now, we're taught in patriarchal societies that we've just got to learn how to get off quicker. We just have to learn to orgasm at the same time that our partner orgasms or that a man reaches climax, and that's not the story. That's not even fair. That's us silencing our bodies and not listening. We're just not explained that to, and yet, other cultures know that already. Jewish law of Onan, the sexual law, it knows that the women are in charge of sexuality. Yet in a patriarchal society, we see so much harm in objectification and in sex, because that is not being taught. Women are not being taught to trust their bodies, and we are failing a society in that.

NATALIE: Think of all the pleasure that could have been had by both men and women. Men love that when women are getting pleasure. Men love that. I always think of God and the enemy as being that God wants to give us all these wonderful things and the enemy wants to steal all of them away.

CHRISTY: Yes.

NATALIE: So wherever we see our freedom being taken, our autonomy being taken, or our pleasure being taken or twisted and warped, we see the enemy at work — not God. Yet, we've been told the opposite. It's been flipped so that we've been told, "Oh, no. God's way." We've been told that what the enemy is doing is what God has been doing.

CHRISTY: Right.

NATALIE: Even as a female... I don't know if you've felt like this, but when men have hurt me in my life — and I've had many men hurt me — when they have hurt me and then God is a man, it's been very hard for me to separate that God wasn't on their side, that God wasn't identifying with them and not with me. Intellectually I can say, "Well, that's not true." But on a fundamental core level, my body greatly fears that God is rejecting me or wants to use me just as much as these men rejected or wanted to use me. Or that I am only good for what I can give to people, but I am not worthy enough to receive anything good from God or from other people. I've done a lot of healing in that, but that's what I have struggled with my whole life. So let's dive into your book a little bit.

CHRISTY: Okay.

NATALIE: It's so intriguing that you talk about the different body parts too, because

again, even now as a fifty-three year old adult, when I hear you say words like “vagina” and “clitoris” right here, I think, “Oh, we can’t say that. That’s a ‘no.’ That’s our bottom. We just call that our bottom.” That’s my upbringing; “We don’t talk about those things. We don’t talk about the fact that you bleed every month or what that is. We just deal with it.” Yet in your book, you just throw that right out there. You not only throw it out there, but you talk about it in this really beautiful, incredible way that actually marries what we think of as disgusting things with God’s holiness and Who God is. So tell us about that.

CHRISTY: Yes. What is beautiful to me is that in this process of research, it has become more and more apparent that God has been jointly telling His story through women. Where I used to look in the Bible and think, “There’s no women in this Bible,” or my daughter will say, “Mom, where are all the women? Where are the stories?” Sadly, for me, they have all been connected to sex or objectification or if you could birth a male into the tribe. It’s been so painful, and yet now when you talk about it, I think, “But there are so many stories! Let me tell you!”

Like this past Sunday, if we look, the Magnificat is Mary’s story, Mary’s song when she finds out that she’s with child, and she’s going into advent. There is story upon story where God is telling the story through a woman’s body — Eve’s body. I’m starting to get so excited because it’s there, we just have not been shown it. I’m just so ready with this book to be like, “I need all of you women to just check in with your bodies, because God has been waiting to speak through it.”

So let me start with something as simple as our blood. We do bleed. As some say, their mothers told them “That was the curse. That you have the curse. Now you are bleeding, now you’ve reached menstruation, and that’s what it is.” That was not the story for me, but every woman remembers how she first bled, when she first found blood in the bathroom and what that story was like for her. That’s our birthright story. The red tint, the passing down of mother before mother telling us, “This is how you get to co-create with the Creator. You’ve just been initiated into the process — the life-death-life cycle.” We must bleed so that we must birth. Men are not given this gift. They are not given the gift to birth life. It is one of the most powerful acts. I have chills right now. I can feel it. I feel the holiness of being chosen to bring life into this world.

Does that limit women who choose not to bring life into this world? No. It’s just the initiation of our birthright that we were invited to co-create and to create. There’s something in all women that we want to create. We want to create businesses. We want to create beings. We want to create relationship. We love life. At our core, we love creating life. We love creating love. It just bubbles out of us. But there is a cost, and the

blood reminds us of the cost. That's why we still care. That's why it still matters to us. That's why when we are birthing a big dream in our life it hurts. There is pain because we know there are times when we've birthed and it has laid lifeless, and we've had to bury. Every one of us know those stories. Every human knows that story. But women are invited to remind us through their cyclical bleeding that it's only a season — that life and death and life always comes.

But we're not telling our daughters that story. We're not telling them their birthright. When we look at the Bible, we see a lineage of men. "This was the son of so-and-so and so-and-so," and women are not named there. Yet every child, every woman that's born, her birthright gets told to her in the red tent from the story of her mother and her grandmother. I'm afraid that women have forgotten to tell the story. They don't know the story anymore. They don't know what matters. They don't know how to give birthrights to their daughters. The church is the place that has failed us as women. It hasn't given us our birthright. It hasn't told us why we bleed and why there's a purpose and that Christ mimics that in the crucifixion and in the resurrection — that our stories mimic that on a cycle. That's our story. That's our birthright. That's what happens when we bleed for the first time. We get invited into that story.

NATALIE: Can you imagine a church where the men and the women and the boys and the girls were united with equal value, equal opportunities, equal celebrating what we each bring to the table through our bodies, through our intellects, and through our spirituality? I really believe that this is the single most thing that is hindering the growth of the church of Jesus Christ today. It's the lack of understanding, or the lack of capturing this vision of working together as a people of God, of all races and both genders working together for the Kingdom of God. It's just this grasping of power that's a total sign of the enemy. The interesting thing is that the men would say (I've heard men say this — I've seen it), "You women are trying to grab power away from us." But that is not what we're talking about at all. When we give birth, when we are acting out of who God created us to be, that is not grasping for power other than the power that God has given to us to do the things that He has created us to do.

CHRISTY: Right. That's the dynamic, right? If we want to use the physical bodies, if that's more helpful, there's the context of having penis envy and vagina envy. The truth of it is that they need the other. That is just so frustrating and so mind-blowing, because trauma enters here in these very sensitive places, but where a woman needs to be soft enough to be entered into and a man needs to be hard enough to enter — or strong enough; maybe "hard" is a more violent word — but strong enough to enter... We need men to have strength to hold a woman's vulnerability and when she brings her glory into the church, into the story, or into the society.

Where I think in some ways men may have vagina envy is because they can't birth life and they need a woman's glory, they submit to women's glory. They struggle with that, so they try to overpower it, harm it, and violate it. That's where we get objectification and trauma, because it is hard for a man to stand next to the glory of a woman and not want to consume it or stifle it or shut it down. It's hard to engage in that.

And vice versa. It's with shaking hands that I come in front of a man and I want him to stand in his power and bless me and promote me and to honor me. I long for that. I long for his strength to come alongside me and say, "Yes, what you are saying is glorious. Will you speak?" His strength right there is so complimentary, and yet I feel so nervous. I don't trust it because it has harmed me prior. I don't trust it because it is going to want to squash me at some point. It's going to want to violate or objectify me. My glory easily turns into my beauty, and then my beauty gets devoured. That dance of men and women working together — we just don't have good mentors. I don't know stories where it's been successful. I just don't. So that's where the heartbreak is, because the church is supposed to be leading in that, and we aren't.

NATALIE: Yeah. I really believe that there is a movement, that God is doing a very powerful thing right now in the church and really dismantling it at a core level. It's kind of imploding from the inside out. It seems like, "Oh, no! It's going down the tubes." But it's not. He's doing a healing work, but He has to do serious surgery on a serious cancer that has been in there since the beginning of time. This is an in-the-garden problem. I think He's been working all along, but I think He's doing something on a massive scale right now and there is a huge awakening. I don't believe that we're going to see a whole lot in our generation, but I think that God is doing something powerful. One of the things I wanted to talk to you about is mothering. Now, you've had a loss.

CHRISTY: Yes. We lost our first child.

NATALIE: How many years ago was that now?

CHRISTY: It will be eight years this December.

NATALIE: So not that long ago. That pain never goes away. But you've had two children since then, correct?

CHRISTY: Three children.

NATALIE: Three children!

CHRISTY: I have three children.

NATALIE: Three children. Wow, that is fabulous. I have friends who have not been able to have children, and I have friends who have adopted children. I have friends who have lost children. I have a lot of children, but I also had five losses. Then there is the whole idea of sometimes your children grow up and don't follow the Lord, or they are on their own journey. Hopefully they will come back, but they are on their own journey trying to figure out life. Many of us, especially my listeners, are coming out of broken homes, even if they are still with their spouse. Their home is really broken on a very core level, so the parenting is affected. Obviously the children's lives are affected, and there is just a lot of dysfunction. You're a therapist. You see this all the time.

CHRISTY: All the time.

NATALIE: So, as far as mothering, though, whether we are mothering our own children, we're mothering lost children, we're mothering not biological but adopted children, or we're not mothering children at all but we're mothering the children in our lives — the nieces and nephews or even just other women who are younger than us that we are mentoring — how does your book have a framework for the whole idea of mothering?

CHRISTY: It's a great question. What we know and what I call forth in all people, but women in particular, is to know their own story and to know their story of mothering. Meaning I ask, "What was your birth story? Were your parents in love when you were conceived?" Do we really know that question? No. Do we have an idea? Possibly. Then, "What was the day of your birth like? How was that story told? How do your parents recall it? Who was there? Who was not there? Who tells the story and who doesn't?" There is so much curiosity we should have in our own stories of birth, because we want to learn how we were taught to birth. Meaning, how you come to birth something (a child or a dream) is going to show up later in life. Our story shows up thematically: Evil shows up thematically; good shows up thematically. Meaning, if God is constant and evil knows how to try to thwart that, there is probably one theme that keeps happening in our stories, and it probably happened on our day of birth.

So for every one of us, knowing how we came into the world is very important. Knowing the day of our birth, our birth story, and our birthright are all important things to mothering. So I'm asking every woman, know the story of how you were mothered so that you know the story of how you mother, how you have had to learn to mother and build those tools, or how you are mothering yourself.

Truly, when I birthed children into this world and my first son being stillborn and then

birthing three more miscarriages and three more live births in a matter of eight years, how I mothered myself when I buried a child, when I flushed blood and tissue down a toilet, how I kissed or brought a child to my breast whenever it came out of me was very important to how I mothered myself. Do you see? I am asking, "How do I mother that younger part of me, that part that never thought God would ask me to hold something lifeless in my hands?" I actually thought God loved me too much to let me birth something dead. I thought somehow I was more chosen, more holy. And yet I had to mother myself in that moment, that God loved me so much that He allows all women to lose and to have loss and all women to have gain. That's just a part of the story. He loves us all the same.

I'm not more privileged because I'm white and because I live in a western society with money and I had hospitals and things. Suffering doesn't have that, and God is kind enough to give us and to allow us to handle suffering. I get off on tangents because I get so excited about this information, but truly, how are we mothering ourselves is the question. How do we mother ourselves through heartbreak, through goodness, through glory, through trauma, through hope, through birth, and through life? It's a question we don't wrestle with very often.

I have mothers upon mothers say, "Will you help my child?" And I say, "Okay, but do you know if you care for yourself, it's going to be tenfold if I sit with your child? It's not that I'm not willing to sit with your daughters, but I want to sit with you first so that you know how to mother yourself so that you know your worth so that then you can bring it to the rest of the world." I think that mothering is a bigger act than birthing or fostering or adopting. I think those are true, but I think the themes all along in our story have been "How were you originally mothered? How were you brought into this world? How was your birthright handed to you? How were you greeted when blood and body were broken on your behalf? Did your mother hate that her body was broken and torn open for you? Or did she look at you with glory and name your glory?" These are just important questions in mothering. They are our tools. Our body gives us our tools to engage in glory. I hope that makes sense, but to me, that's the story of mothering.

NATALIE: Yes. It does make sense, and I think what you just said in mothering yourself, that's the key. I've noticed that in my own life and in the people that I have talked with, if they can grasp their own value and that they are worth turning inward and taking care of, if they can learn how to take care of themselves — they will start making decisions that begin to set them free. But until they see their own value, until they look at that little child that they are — that little girl — and love that little girl instead of despising her... Because we take on the attitudes of the people we grew up with, a lot of us grew up and we despised ourselves, because we felt that from other people. That

unless we were perfect, unless we showed up and made everyone happy, that we were just an ugly little cry baby who deserved to be locked in her room. Then we grow up and we feel like that ugly little cry baby, and “We just need to shut up.”

CHRISTY: Yeah, and the story of the mother is that the mother comes and says, “What’s the story of your breast? What’s the story of your vagina? What’s the story of your clitoris? What’s the story of your belly, your pelvic floor? What’s the story of your lips? What’s the story of beauty? How has beauty either cursed you or harmed you or let you get away with things that you shouldn’t have or how has it damned you?” These are the questions a mother asks. When we’re not asking them to ourselves... Maybe I’ll take it further than mothering. When women are not asking the questions of “What’s the story of my body,” we don’t know how to invite those questions in other women, and we’re silencing their most powerful tool and their most common use of glory which is their selves, their stories, their bodies. Our bodies, my breasts — they have a story. How I interpret that story and how I come to know that story is how I’m going to bring my breasts into the room with pastors, with my clients, with my children. Do I wear my breasts as a breastplate of righteousness, or do I hide them in shame? Do I cover them?

NATALIE: Okay, Christy, in your book you give a lot of personal details about your own experience with stillbirth, having children, all your losses, and your whole journey — your path. You made yourself very vulnerable and transparent. What was that like for you, and does that make you nervous when you think about releasing a book like that to the public?

CHRISTY: It actually makes me a little more nervous, for I don’t want to make my clients ever work harder, and sometimes the gift of having a therapist is that you don’t know anything about their story. You don’t know their life, and that’s kind of great; whereas my story has been out there — my grief, my questioning of God, my coming back, my stories of my period, my stories of sex with my husband. These are things that are uncomfortable, like you said, just in the essence of them. So I think I feel more of my client’s having to do more work. I feel a little sad for them.

NATALIE: I think this will help them. I do. They will be able to relate to you as a human.

CHRISTY: Right. That’s the greater thing that keeps me going. What I truly believe is that our transparency combats the jealousy that women are innately inclined to have towards the other. That’s what beauty does. “She’s more beautiful than me; she can show more skin than I can; she can allure in a way that I can’t.” We are set up with the lie — that sisterhood comes against this lie that would say, “I have something you don’t have, and I’m going to keep it from you.” I want to dispel that.

Here's what you will find. People will also be jealous that I'm so transparent, and they want to be that too. The truth of it is that we want to be known, we want to be seen, we want to be connected to, and we want to be chosen. That is my greatest desire also, but the belief you said — that "This will probably help your clients to see this part of your transparency" — we all want to be mothered by an honest mother. We all want to be in a sisterhood with people who are telling each other not just their secrets but the way to make it through this world okay and empowered. That's what I'm trying to do.

My transparency of telling a story of a tampon getting stuck or bleeding through my shorts, it's to say that every one of us has either had that experience, and whether we've been caught or not, there's been shame attached to it. I want to dispel that shame. I want truth to just break that open and say, "You are free to come as you are and say your body is good." You have a good, good body, and it's telling a really incredible story, so don't be afraid to tell it.

In that, I would say I tell stories about sexual encounters with my husband because I want people to be known in the scariest place, and I think evil has such a heyday in the bedroom and in the sexual experience. I want to disperse it. I want to break it open and say, "There has to be a bigger story to sex." It cannot just be about orgasm, because I would give that up every day of the week to erase the harm that sexuality has done and what it has stolen. Sex trafficking and abuse; I would give it up in a minute. It must have more power or more meaning, and I need to explore that and tell that story so that every woman has that same understanding and empowerment when she goes to the act of intercourse. I want her to know her body. Or at least I want to explore my body honestly enough of how I managed to stay married, to stay a person who thinks sex can bring power and my body can bring — I call it gold dust — can bring glory onto this earth to combat the harm that is happening. I think the only way to tell those stories is to expose myself, because I believe it is for the greater good.

NATALIE: I love that! That's so beautiful! You're such a beautiful person! I am so tickled that I got a chance to meet you, and we wouldn't have met otherwise. I just feel so blessed. Before we close, what is the main thing that is the core gem (or you talked about "gold dust") or the gold nugget that you really want your readers or these listeners here to walk away with that they would transform their life?

CHRISTY: That their body is telling a story, and it is worth looking at and studying. That means the next time they go to take a shower, they look at their naked body in the mirror and they ask their breasts, their lips, their hair, their vagina to tell them the story from their point of view. That they stop and listen, they take it in, and they mother it well by saying, "Thank you, breasts, for the cost. Thank you for sagging because you fed

three of my babies and gave them life. Thank you stretch marks, because those were my children's artwork that I forever get to hold tattooed on my abdomen." Will we look at our bodies and bless them, bless the markings, so that we can know intimacy because we offer those markings to others who are safe? Will we exchange those stories, know each other, and be known by the other? That's the hope for every woman for every human.

NATALIE: Thank you so much, Christy. That I am going to take. I'm going to do that the next time I'm in the shower, because I do have a lot. I just feel gross about my body, and that needs to change. I had nine kids. But, yeah.

CHRISTY: And what a warrior body you have. So will you bless it and weep with it as it tells its story?

NATALIE: Yeah. Alright. We're going to say goodbye now.

CHRISTY: Thank you, Natalie.

NATALIE: Actually, before we go, I want to say that this episode — and I have to read this because I don't have it memorized. Those of you who are just listening to the podcast, you would never know this except that I just said that. But those of you who are watching on YouTube, you can see that I am reading. This episode of the Flying Free Podcast is sponsored by the Flying Free Sisterhood. It offers courses, workshops, live coaching, and more for women of faith who are seeking hope and healing from emotionally and spiritually abusive relationships and communities. You can find out more at joinflyingfree.com. Thank you so much for listening, and fly free.