

QUESTIONS CHRISTIANS HAVE ABOUT REBUILDING LIFE AFTER DIVORCE

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 56 of the Flying Free Podcast! You guys, I am so excited to have Gretchen with us again. She has been with us a couple of times last year talking about her upcoming book, but her book is now out. She agreed to come and do a couple of podcasts, one today and another in a few weeks, talking about divorce. Her book is called "The Life-Saving Divorce." I just got my copy in the mail this week and it is absolutely phenomenal! I started reading it last night and I cannot put it down. Well, I had to because I got tired. It is so, so good. Gretchen, welcome to the podcast again.

GRETCHEN: Thank you so much, Natalie. It was great meeting you recently. It is just inspiring to be around you, so I'm happy to be here.

NATALIE: I feel the same about you. For those of you who didn't hear earlier podcast episodes where I interviewed Gretchen, I found Gretchen on Twitter. By the way, what is your Twitter handle in case people want to jump on there?

GRETCHEN: It's GGBaskerville.

NATALIE: Okay, so GGBaskerville. Her tweets were like, crazy good! They were all about divorce and from a Christian perspective. They were so profound. I started following her, and I realized she was tweeting all these great tweets because she was writing this book. In the process of her research, she was putting out these great tweets. I thought, "Man alive! If this book is like her tweets, this is going to be an amazing book!" I interviewed her a couple of times last year. I will put links to those past podcasts in the notes so you can listen to what was said in the past. She also did an expert workshop in the Flying Free Sisterhood Group, which is a locked group. But if you are interested in finding out more, you can check it out at joinflyingfree.com. She did an expert workshop in there called the "90 Day Escape Plan" where she explains all the steps. There were like forty. How many were there?

GRETCHEN: There were like forty or fifty, yeah.

NATALIE: There were a lot of steps, but they weren't all overwhelming or anything like that. If you followed those steps, in ninety days you could be really, really prepared to

file for divorce if that's what you wanted to do. Anyway, we collected three questions on the Facebook page that had to do with divorce, and I thought you were the perfect person to ask. I also just want to remind people about you and let people know that your book is now out. It's on Amazon. It's called "The Life-Saving Divorce" by Gretchen Baskerville. It's written from a Christian perspective. Gretchen has years and years of experience working with women who have been divorced or women who are in the process of being divorced. We're talking life-saving divorces here. Without any further ado, Gretchen, I'm going to ask you your first question.

GRETCHEN: Shoot. Let's go for it.

NATALIE: "How do you explain things to your children during and after divorce? My children are eight and ten, and while they don't need to know the gory details, I want them to know and understand that what they've seen their whole lives is not normal, it's not healthy, and it's not love. But I don't want to teach them to disparage their father either." So, what would you tell this woman?

GRETCHEN: If I were face-to-face with this woman, I would ask a lot of questions like what kind of information does she want to shield her kids from right now? The fact that she's talking about this, the fact that she is asking this question, tells me that she has good intuition. Her guts are telling her that things aren't age appropriate to discuss with her kids. I agree with her. I was in a situation just like this. My ex-husband was involved with a lot of immoral activities, and my little children were around preschool age. It just wasn't appropriate to say anything. They didn't observe it, which is the big key. Is there something they are observing? If they didn't observe it, then you have a different direction you want to go.

Let's say that they are observing things. For example, I'm not sure what this woman is facing, but she talks about how their whole lives haven't been normal. What they've been seeing isn't healthy or loving. They're going to figure out healthy and loving relationships just from being in your home and then going back and forth between your home and your ex's home. That almost doesn't need to be discussed from the standpoint of what's healthy and what's not because they are just going to feel it going from house to house.

But let's talk about the situation where there are activities going on that they had no knowledge of. What do you do about that? Let's say there were affairs. Let's say there was child porn viewing. Let's say there were even felonies going on, or other kinds of felonies because child porn is already a felony. I would say that you know as a mom, I knew as a mom, that someday my kids might want to know more about the divorce.

Even at that age they would ask me questions and I thought, "Oh, I don't want to go there. That's just not age appropriate." But someday it will be age appropriate, and I figured that age would be 21. It is part of their life story. You cannot keep this stuff hidden. If you try to keep it hidden, they will eventually hear it from someone else if you don't tell them. It's best if you can keep the line of communication open and control the version of the story they hear, right? Otherwise their friends, your friends' kids, they will hear it from other people. You want to agree with them that what happened in this family was really bad, that you forgave over and over, but at some point you had to draw the line and say, "This bad behavior is continuing and I need to get us out of this situation."

What I told my kids was that when they turned 21, they could ask any question they wanted and I would answer completely truthfully. That's what I did. There were a lot of immoral things going on that just weren't appropriate for a 4 and 6-year old. They each asked me, and I told them the truth. I even kept two big bankers boxes full of documents if they ever wanted to see them. Neither of them wanted to see them. They just wanted to hear from me my version of the story. Believe it or not, the older one said "Oh, okay. I think I had overheard you talking on the phone. So this jives with what I kind of thought was going on." The other one said, "Oh my goodness, I had no idea." But because he was older, he was able to absorb it better. We talked the next day and I asked, "How are you dealing with this?" He said, "You know mom, I'm okay with it. If I have other questions, I'll ask you. I just want you to know, thank you for divorcing dad. That was really important."

NATALIE: Wow. That's good. I'll throw this out, for whatever it's worth. I made a huge mistake. I didn't get out of my relationship until... Well, I had nine kids. So some of them were older, in their late teens and early twenties. I waited so long to get out because I thought divorce wasn't an option. If I would have had your book it would have really opened my eyes to see, "Whoa! This is so pathological. I need to get out not only for my own sake but for the sake of my kids." But I didn't know that. Because my kids actually observed so much of my ex-husband's behaviors (because he treated them the same way he was treating me) and it wasn't sexual but covert passive-aggressive behaviors, they were experiencing the same kinds of things, so we actually triangulated. We talked about their dad and what he was doing to us. That was not healthy for any of us. I think it's good to talk about things, but I was really using them as a sounding board because I wasn't allowed in the church to "gossip" about my husband. Those of us who were living in the environment talked amongst each other.

Looking back, I wish I would have gotten someone outside of the family to talk to so I could have been a support to my kids instead of using my older kids as a sounding

board for my emotional trauma. So if you are in that situation and are using your older kids that way, read Gretchen's book and find out that there is a healthier way to deal with an emotionally abusive relationship. There's a healthier way to protect yourself and your kids.

Also, I want to add that for my younger kids, when I did finally file for divorce and get out, I read them books from the library that talk about divorce in general so that it kind of normalizes the whole divorce process for them. Then they don't feel like, "Our family is the only one that has ever gone through this," which is a complete lie. Also, whenever my kids come home from their dad's house, as Gretchen said, they come home from their dad's house and they tell me... I don't even ask them because, honestly, the things they tell me are so triggering for me. I don't ask them, but they offer, because they trust me, they tell me what happens over there. Then I always ask them, "How does that make you feel? What have you learned from these behaviors? What are some ways that you can respond to protect yourself from these kinds of behaviors?" That way they aren't denying it or pretending that it's okay for adults to treat people like that. I want them to know it's not okay, but I want them to come to those conclusions themselves. You don't even have to bad talk your ex. All you must do is listen to what your kids are saying and validate their experiences. That's what they need. They need to know this really happened. "Yes, my dad really does say these things. My dad really does treat me this way. No, it is not appropriate."

GRETCHEN: Right. I appreciate your insight because you did have older kids where I had younger kids. It does really make a difference.

NATALIE: Yeah, and what they're dealing with. Obviously, you aren't going to be talking about sexual issues with your younger kids. That's a no-brainer. I think a lot of people are dealing with that undercurrent of passive-aggressive behavior that is always present or the walking on eggshells, and their kids are dealing with that too. So it gets complicated. Let's go on to the next question: "Gretchen, how do you suggest that a person goes about the process of rebuilding their life as a single person after their divorce?" You were single for a long time. This was one of the topics of a podcast that you did. The entire podcast was on rebuilding your life as a single person. But let's touch on that now, and then people can go and hear more details in that other podcast.

GRETCHEN: Yeah, I think that was Episode 33. I was single for twenty years after divorcing. I didn't expect that. As a devout Christian, that was not part of my game plan for sure. But I tell you when I look at those years I think, "Wow! How rich, meaningful, and purposeful." I'm married now. I married about three years ago, but those years

were amazing. Since we've already done a whole podcast on that, let's try to break it down to a five-minute explanation. Depending on where you are with God or faith, one of the first things I recommend doing is finding an affirmation or a Bible verse to put up on your mirror or fridge. Something like maybe Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He is walking with me through the valley of the shadow of death." Or 1 Peter 5:7, "Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you." I like having a little affirmation that I say in the morning and say before I go to bed.

Second, it's well known that the first two years of divorce are just painful. There is a logistical reason for that. First, divorce involves so many changes. There is moving, legal documents, school, your kids' feelings, maybe moving to a new school, setting up new bank accounts, doing your taxes, finding a better job. There is the friction between you and your ex. All these factors would have been easy if they had taken place over ten years. You'd have been able to handle these if you had years to handle them. But when you compress them into one or two years, it's incredibly stressful. So be gentle on yourself those first one or two years. Just say, "I know these are the bad years. I'm going to just keep trudging on, and eventually I will start seeing some light at the end of the tunnel."

I usually tell people that the first six months are horrible. By the end of the first year, you should be able to smile. By the end of the second year, you should be able to laugh and start to see the light at the end of the tunnel. But all of this is predicated on whether or not you are safe. Getting you and your kids safe is really your top goal. Then do expect to be happier. If you have exited from a long abusive marriage, your chances of being happier are quite good. Researchers Hawkins and Booth, way back in 2005, discovered that after these long abusive marriages where there is a lot of passive-aggressiveness, maybe violence, and walking on eggshells, that you actually will come out happier, and if you choose to remarry (if that is something you would really like to do), your remarriage is likely to be happy after a long, unhappy, destructive marriage. So that is good news.

Fourth, I would say find your voice. When you've been in an abusive relationship, you don't have a voice. You have told yourself to stay quiet and your spouse has told you to stay quiet. So revel in making your own decisions without interference from someone else. Maybe you want to paint your kitchen pink. Do that! I found myself spending money on things that other people... Even repairs. I thought, "I finally get to put a brand-new roof on this house without having to consult my ex-husband. I am so thrilled." Other people were saying, "That roof is going to cost you thousands of dollars. Why are you so happy?" But I had my own voice, I had my own agency, and I could make my own decisions without interference from him. That was just great. Really

enjoy that. Lean into finding your own voice and your own agency.

NATALIE: Yes. I want to piggyback off that thought. A lot of times we get our identity from other people, especially if we've been in a marriage like that. We get our identity from our church, our ministry, our spouse, our friends. Then when we are suddenly single we ask ourselves, "Who am I? Everyone else made decisions for me. I looked to other people for the direction for my life. Now I'm by myself. Who in the world am I?" Sometimes we try to fill that uncomfortable feeling by looking again for somebody else to validate us, to hold up a mirror so we can see ourselves again. I think it's a golden opportunity to do some serious deep healing inside of yourself so that you get your identity from Christ for sure, but also from who He made you.

You are strong just by yourself. You are comfortable in your own skin. You can go to a restaurant and have dinner by yourself or go to the movie theater and have a date night with yourself and you feel happy about doing that. If you can get to that place, you will be in a healthier place to get into a new relationship as well, because then you are no longer looking to use someone to reflect who you are. You are already strong in yourself and you'll be able to give to someone and look for someone who is also strong in themselves. You'll be more attracted to that kind of person and they will be more attracted to you. I didn't mean to interrupt. Do you have more things?

GRETCHEN: Yeah, I do. You mentioned you were told not to "gossip." But the truth of the matter is that one of the most healing things after trauma, the trauma of being in an abusive relationship for a long time, is telling your story to safe people, because the way you stayed in this abusive relationship is by covering it up and hiding it. That destroys you, your psyche, your sanity, and your physical health. It's time to start telling your story to safe people. The operative word is "safe" people. Find some resilient friends who have walked in your shoes. About one in four people of faith have ever divorced, so there's a good chance there might be someone who will surprise you and be a great listening ear.

None of us want to whine about the perils of marriage to our single friends or to our children, of course. We've already discussed that. We don't want to be a burden to our married friends. But this is our story. It is our truth, and we do need to find someone safe to share it with. I would say get active with the survivor community. Get active with Natalie's group. I think Natalie is unusually gifted in this area. But there are all kinds of secret Facebook groups that may even offer you support in an area that is specific to what you faced in your marriage. Whether it was gambling, child porn, infidelity, or something else, there are secret Facebook groups that focus on those kinds of specifics. Of course, get therapy. I wanted to share one story if we have time.

NATALIE: Oh, yeah.

GRETCHEN: Judith Herman's book "Trauma and Recovery" is a landmark book on trauma. In her book she tells the story of two World War II doctors who discovered that even the strongest and toughest soldier would have trauma and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) if they were in combat for 240 days. Imagine that if the combat that happens in an abusive marriage for twenty years is a lot closer to 7,000 days of combat, you have really been through a lot. Many people I have interviewed have PTSD or complex PTSD. You really need to find a good therapist, a support group, and perhaps group therapy. If you can't afford a therapist (I know many, many people listening to this podcast cannot), talk to the other survivors in these abuse groups. Natalie's is top notch. Watch for the secret groups on Facebook. But you are going to need some therapy after 7,000 days of combat. The fact that your health isn't great, the fact that mentally you're really exhausted, the fact that standing another day and fighting is not something you think you can do, that is understandable because of what you have been through.

NATALIE: That makes me think of how at the beginning of your book you discuss the fact that for so many women, by the time they are thinking about killing themselves, that is when you know they are ready for literally a life-saving divorce. I'm so glad you mentioned that, because there are so many women who don't know why they are physically falling apart. Literally, mentally, emotionally, and physically, they are completely falling apart. They don't understand the dire circumstances that they are in and that they are dealing with something that is just as traumatic as seeing an accident happen. But they have been dealing with it for such a long, long time. The healing process is obviously not going to happen overnight. I hear this so much: "I've been divorced now for a year (or two years) and I still just feel so sad. I still feel like I am just stuck." Well, this is a long road of recovery. I really believe it is an insidious form of brainwashing. A lot of these people who are still stuck, they really haven't gotten the help that they need because they haven't known how. They haven't really understood the ramifications of what they've been through. But once you start getting help, it takes a long time, but you can get better. Gretchen, you've seen this happen over and over with the women you have worked with.

GRETCHEN: Right, absolutely.

NATALIE: Another question that people have is that they are really scared of losing everything in a divorce. You do lose a lot. But you have practical tips (I know because I've heard them) and I'm sure you talk about this in your book, too. What are some ways that people can preempt losing or minimize the losses? What are some ways they can

prepare to do that?

GRETCHEN: You're right. I've redone the tips that are already part of your Sisterhood video, and I've put them in the book. You can see the various tips on how to be proactive as you look toward the future and suspect that it may be heading for divorce. I did interview a Christian divorce attorney and asked, "What are the common mistakes that women make in divorce?" He gave me the most common ones, and they are in the book. But for the purpose of this podcast, I would say the number one thing is to get an attorney if you have assets. Now, if you have no assets and no kids, you can probably do this at the courthouse. It will be easy, and the forms won't be that expensive. Also if you are disabled. In my county, if you are disabled you can get your divorce handled for free, which is unbelievable because divorce can be a bit expensive. But number one is to get an attorney. If your spouse has already been abusive, they are going to be abusive through the divorce process too, and you need that attorney to protect you and help you.

Having said that, number two is to be proactive in your case. Your attorney is handling other cases. The mediator is handling other cases. The judge is handling other cases. The mediator and judge may be handling a thousand other different cases this year alone. That means they may overlook something, so you need to be on top of it. You need to keep reminding them of the facts of the situation. You need to put on your detective hat and find those facts and just be involved and proactive. Don't sit there and hope that someone is going to rescue you because even if their intention is good and they want to rescue you, they've got a billion other people that they are interacting with. They may forget something important from your case.

Number three is to treat your divorce as businesslike as possible and keep the emotions out of it as much as possible. One of the biggest mistakes this Christian divorce attorney told me is that so many people want to make it about the infidelity or about the abuse. Just don't go there. We have no-fault divorce in every state in the U.S. This is not the time to try to lambast your spouse in court. Just get out of there with your money and your sanity as fast as you can. Ask your attorney right up front, even when you are interviewing (bring in your asset sheet showing how much you make and how much your spouse makes), and say "Hey attorney, based on these assets, my house, the cars, maybe a business, how much spousal and child support do you think I can get and why? How much of these assets do you think I can get and why?" Almost every state has guidelines that they consider to be fair, so you should kind of expect to get about 50/50 - 60/40 in the worst case. But you're not the first person to go through a divorce in this state. The state kind of wants us to be fair. They kind of want it to be 50/50, but you need to talk to your attorney about your own state and your own

situation on how you get to fairness. That's what you are aiming for. You want this to be businesslike, and you want to get half of your assets and get out of there so you can rebuild your life.

NATALIE: Yeah, I have heard that judges don't like drama. So if you are coming to the table with drama, they will already be unfavorably disposed toward you. You don't want your judge to have bad feelings towards you.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. Be as businesslike as you possibly can. Treat it as if you and your spouse are business partners and you just want to split the assets and move on. If your spouse doesn't use overtly hostile tactics, maybe their tactics are more like stonewalling, ignoring, and not engaging, this is the time to just make it all business and not personal. Just move forward. Also, this is not the place to get justice, moral vindication, or punish a bad spouse in court. Focus on having peace, safety, and a fair division of assets. If you do have a dangerous spouse, I have a whole section at the end of Chapter 7 on these vitriolic, angry, vengeful spouses and divorces where there is parental alienation (in other words, your spouse is actively trying to turn your kids against you). Then you will want to be documenting the lies, threats, and accusations and doing it in written form to show to your attorney. For those of you in that situation where you know you've got someone who is extremely hostile, I've got a whole list of books on my website, books on hostile divorces and parental alienation. There are some excellent ones out there. You're not reinventing the wheel. You're not the first person to go through a hostile divorce against a narcissist or a sociopath. There are lots of books written on how to do this and how to do it well and come out with your sanity and your assets if possible.

NATALIE: What is the URL of your website?

GRETCHEN: It is lifesavingdivorce.com. The links page is the page that has all the best book recommendations. Of course Natalie's is in there. But section ten on my links page will give you the tried and true excellent books on dealing with hostile, vengeful divorces. These are unusual divorces. This doesn't happen all the time. Only one in ten divorces that go to court are this bad, so you are going to need people around you to understand that and to give you love, care, and support.

NATALIE: This is good stuff. Gretchen, we are going to be having you back again to talk more about your book, but I want to close by letting people know that her book is meaty. Do you know how many pages it is?

GRETCHEN: It's 440 pages. It's crazy.

NATALIE: It's huge. But it is so good. It is gold. Seriously, I am going to be telling everybody about this book. It's going to be one of the number one resources that I recommend to people. Go get her book. It's on Amazon right now, "The Life-Saving Divorce" by Gretchen Baskerville. Check out her website. I'll have all the links in the show notes. We're going to be bringing her back in a few weeks to talk mainly about her book. I'd like to go into your book and talk about all the different areas that you covered. She's done tons of research. She's totally done her homework. I want to say that she's badass. I hope that's okay with you, Gretchen.

GRETCHEN: That's fine.

NATALIE: You're badass, and I really think this book is going to open the doors to prepare women for walking through divorce as well as for women who have already been divorced. You know what else? If you are listening to this podcast or if you know of someone who is a people helper who wants to have a better understanding of what divorce for people of faith looks like, what it should look like, and how to support people of faith who are walking through life-saving divorces, please let them know about this podcast. Please let them know about her book. I think we need to get this in as many hands as possible. I really think this book is going to start shifting the culture in our churches in our faith communities. I really do. Thank you, Gretchen, for writing the book. How long did it take you?

GRETCHEN: About three years.

NATALIE: Yeah. It's three years of writing and researching, but also twenty years of experience behind her before she even wrote it. So it's a high-quality book. I just cannot say enough good things about it. We'll talk some more about the book in a few weeks. Thanks for joining us, Gretchen.

GRETCHEN: You're very welcome.

NATALIE: Until next time, fly free.