

ABUSED BY HUSBAND AND REJECTED BY CHURCH

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 61 of the Flying Free Podcast! Today I have with me a longtime member of the Flying Free Sisterhood. Her name is Lisa Neal. She is a survivor, but she is also the owner of Riverledge Farm. She has a website. What is the URL because people must go look at this?

LISA: It is riverledgefarmvt.com. VT is for Vermont.

NATALIE: She told me that she had this farm. They host weddings and other mini-conferences and retreats here. I went and looked at the website and I thought, "Oh my word! This woman lives in paradise." It is absolutely gorgeous. You must go check it out and look at it. I am super excited about this interview because she has a unique situation where she was married for twenty-eight years to a wonderful man. Then he passed away, and she ended up marrying someone who was not so wonderful and was in a very abusive relationship. This is her story of how she got out and what she is doing today to reach back into the pit and help other women. So Lisa, welcome to the podcast.

LISA: Thank you, Natalie. I was so excited when you invited me to come on.

NATALIE: This is going to be a great interview. Set this up for us. Why don't you tell us a little bit about your first husband, what happened, and then how did you meet your second husband?

LISA: I met my first husband, my late husband, when I was fourteen. We dated for five years. I married him when I was nineteen. We were married for twenty-three years, but I say we were together for twenty-eight because we were. It was a healthy relationship. It was definitely not abusive. No marriage is perfect, no relationship is perfect. I don't want people to get the wrong idea. But he loved the Lord, I loved the Lord, and we both brought some wonderful things to the marriage. When he got ill, the Lord gave him ten weeks. It literally was a story where one day you are fine and the next day you are told to prepare because you have three months to live. It was that dramatic. There was nothing left unsaid when he did pass away, but one of the things was that he was so grateful that we raised each other. He also said, "You know God put us together like we

were perfect for each other.”

He also asked me to write his story, our story, because the Lord did so much, which He does for all of us. God is for us, not against us. I have his story, our story, in a manuscript form. I'm ready to do whatever the next step is, but I'm waiting for the green light from the Lord because I want to make sure that what I do is God-ordained and God-driven and not, “I just think I need to do this.”

Anyway, I met my second husband, which was the abusive relationship, in the church that I attended for over thirty years. He swept me off my feet. There were lots of red flags, and we don't need to get into that a whole bunch because of lack of time. But he was definitely too good to be true. He mimicked. He was like a mirror to me. For some reason when we are vulnerable... I say I had a big “S” on my forehead for “sucker.” He evidently had good vision and saw “sucker,” and he took advantage of it. I look back and I understand what happened. I also have that written down, but we'll see where that goes because I documented a lot of those things. I married him within five months. He came in real strong, hot and heavy. It was wonderful for about the first year that I remember. My kids weren't so happy. Both the kids were out of the house when their father died. Actually, my son was a senior in high school and then he went to college. My daughter had bad vibes from him right from the beginning. She's an amazing girl. She tried to warn me.

I also had the ex-wife (because I come from a small town) warn me, and I said, “Listen. He is saved. There is no way that he is abusive. You cheated on him.” He had told me this huge story which I now know is not true. We were married for six years, but from year two to four it progressively got worse. Years four to six we were physically separated. I put a lot of effort, time, and energy into getting him help. Does this sound familiar? I went through the church and went to a Christian counselor, and man was that wrong! The church was the least safe place for me to leave an abusive marriage. The counselor that we went to that was supposedly Christian, and he might be... but I found out after the fact that he was also an abuser.

So it was like a Lifetime movie. It's not a Hallmark. It's a Lifetime movie. Anyway, we got remarried and I tried to put my family back together because I was always taught the highest calling was to be married and have children. Says who? Honestly, I'm single now and I'm loving it. I'm not dating. That's my choice. I want to read a couple of things so I don't get ahead of myself. When I left him, I sent him this letter. Let me back up. All the stories that I hear on the Flying Free Sisterhood... By the way, Natalie, when I finally left my second husband, physically separated from him, your ministry and what we learn with you was a life saver. I was so traumatized. I could hardly get out of bed. You don't

know me, but that is not me. I have a lot of energy, the glass is always half-full, rose colored glasses, blah, blah, blah. But it was the worst time of my life. It was even worse than my late husband passing away. It was worse than that emotionally, mentally. Spiritually I came to the end of my rope because I didn't want to serve God if that is how God was, that I had to stay married and that I had to stay in this terrible situation. Natalie, keep me on track here because I get excited and there is a lot I want to share. I know our time is limited.

NATALIE: You're doing great!

LISA: Some of this is a little bit dramatic, and I want to tell you this is my story, so take it or leave it, but this is what happened to me. This was near the end. First, I tried to defend him for years because I knew that I wasn't allowed to get divorced. I really thought God was going to curse me. I was told that God was going to curse me. Even in the physical separation, I was told that I needed to stay separated until he died or I died. That's not true either. But let me get back to this. I'm going to read you the letter that I wrote him. We had already physically separated after the last time. I went back to him more than a dozen times. I went back over and over and over again because he would cry, he would beg me to come back, or he would send me flowers. I remember times where after physical altercations he would literally get on his knees and hold my knees and weep saying, "I'm sorry! Don't tell anybody. I'm sick. I need help." But it was play-acting. Let me read this story. I'm not going to name him. It's a small town. If you lived here, you'd know who it was. So it says:

"So and so, I've been upfront with you since this situation transpired. You know why I'm filing for divorce. I've not involved the authorities in what transpired between us on the dates in October 2015 through January 2016." I included the documentation. Documentation, ladies, is our friend! Remember this was written a couple of years ago. This was in 2016. "I still have love for you." I love him as my enemy. I want to make that really clear. I am not in love with this man anymore. I was in love with an imposter.

Natalie, before we were recording, one of the things the Lord put on my heart was that I married an imposter the second time around. With money like a dollar bill, when you go to the FBI, they are trained to spot fake money. They don't give you fake money to study, they give you the real thing. You study the real thing so that when the imposter money comes, you can pick up on it immediately. My first time in marriage, I married the real thing. He really loved the Lord. The second time I married an imposter who was really gifted at quoting scripture and saying, "I got saved and I love the Lord." He used to love to tell me that I was to be subservient to him.

A couple of the things I was counseled to do before we got married and during the marriage was because he is the head of the house, I needed to let him take control of finances and of everything. An example was that I was in the choir of the church I attended for over thirty years. It's a former church, I don't attend now. I refuse to and I'll tell you more about that later. But I was in the choir for many years and he told me he didn't want me there because he was afraid that the guy that directed it was going to come on to me. So I asked the pastor what I should do, and I was told that I needed to listen to my husband.

NATALIE: I have a question, though, about this. So were you at that church in your first marriage as well?

LISA: Yeah.

NATALIE: So that church was great for you when you were in a healthy marriage. It only was a bad situation when you were in a bad marriage. I really want to bring that out for the listeners, because a lot of people think that their church is great. Churches are great when everything is going great. What makes a church great is when they can come in and love people even when things aren't going great rather than judging. I have another question for you. In your first marriage, was there this expectation that you would be subservient and that he would control everything?

LISA: No. I need to back up. I'm a missionary's kid and a preacher's daughter in a very conservative, non-denominational religion. There's a lot of religion out there. But no, my late husband was abused as a child (actually, both of my husbands were), but he never laid a hand on me. I was raised that I was a female: I am less than, I am to be quiet, the man is always right and if he's not, don't follow him, but if you are married, you have to stay there. Because I didn't have the male equipment, I was less than. So my first husband, Joe... As I look back over this, we had a machine shop and he would come to me for advice. I found it fascinating that he respected me enough to come to me for advice. For example, I was a registered nurse and very confident. God has given me skills and abilities as He gives us all. But he wanted me to grow myself to be a better version of myself. He told me that I needed some counseling and I thought, "No I don't," because I was so steeped in that tradition of men that I thought I was more spiritual than him. I'm telling on myself because he was abused and he overcame so much. He also made some bad decisions along the way as we all do. But I was the "good girl." It makes me sick now.

I could vomit because God showed me and opened my eyes that he was closer to God than I was. I didn't get those things until after he died and I got remarried. Natalie,

when I became a widow the church just was right there and everybody was so, "Oh, Lisa!" I've got to tell you, when I sounded the alarm about what was going on behind the closed doors of my home, I got nothing. I had a meeting with the pastor. He can't hear me. I at least met him because I know the Lord put that on my heart. I shared my story, but they can't hear. It's like they are blind and deaf, and it's okay. I followed the Lord's leading. What they do with that information is on them.

But I was bleeding in a ditch, literally. I was in a very dark place. I had C-PTSD. I know that because I've had a lot of therapy. I was self-medicating, and it was ugly. When I went and said, "Something is wrong, help me," I got nothing. Remember the Good Samaritan where the guy was in the ditch? They stepped over me and said, "We'll pray for you," or "I don't have time. I've got to go help these other people." They forgot their first love. The modern-day church has forgotten Jesus, Who is their first love. Their whole thing is about keeping the marriage together no matter the cost, the institution, but the person didn't matter. They could just die. I heard, "You made a vow before God. You may not cancel it because you are suffering for God."

I'm going to tell you something graphic, so if this triggers somebody, please turn it off. My ex-husband, the second guy, he never punched me with a fist (he used to say that's not abuse), but he slapped, kicked, bit, pushed, and shoved. The worst thing he would do is grab me by the ears, shake me violently, and scream obscenities in my face. I would have blood that would come down after these episodes. I left the first bad therapist. I found out later he abused his wife and ended up in jail, which he divulged to my ex but not to me. They ganged up on me and it was horrendous. But God helped me.

My next therapist said he would eventually break my neck. He was a bodybuilder, a very large man. I'm pretty sure she said that during a session, either she or the Holy Spirit, I can't remember, but I want to get my story straight. She said, "He's going to break your neck. Your kids are going to bury you by their dad, you're going to be in a vegetative state or paralyzed and in a nursing home where your kids can see you in that condition. Is that the legacy you think the Lord wants for you?" After those words were spoken, I still stayed three more months. That's that brainwashing because I thought I loved him. But the person I loved was never there. He wasn't real. It was satanic. There's no doubt in my mind that it was satanic.

About two months before I left, he came up the stairs. Again, this is triggering, so be aware. He was in the basement and I was sleeping. He came up and he wanted sex. I said, "No." I wasn't mean, I was just tired. He used to tell me when I could sleep and when I couldn't. It was awful. It's a Lifetime movie. So he got on top of me and started

choking me and screaming in my face. He told me that he hated me, he hated my family, and "F" you. He spit on me and then he forced himself on me. I remember because I put this in the back of my head. This came out a couple of months later. God gives us some defense mechanisms. When we are in fight or flight... I forget what it is.

NATALIE: Fight, flight, or freeze.

LISA: We shut down. That came out in therapy a while later. I remember when it came out in therapy that the Holy Spirit put on my heart that we don't fight against flesh and blood but against principalities and things of the sky that are evil. He wanted to snuff out my light and my life and God said "no." God literally rescued me. I know that's dramatic, but that's part of my story. I should have called the authorities. I didn't. During this time, he was counseling with our pastor because I asked him to go. He was telling our pastor lies, that I was a raging alcoholic and I was a drug addict. I didn't know any of this until after I filed for divorce. I didn't know. He would tell me he was getting help and that he loved me and that he was so sorry. It was all about power and control. I want to stop talking about that because I know in your Flying Free Sisterhood, with a lot of them it didn't turn physical. Mine just happened to turn physical.

NATALIE: I'm glad you said that, because I want to point out that even though you may be listening and think your situation isn't as bad as that so the information doesn't apply, it absolutely applies to you! Here's the thing. I think you would say, Lisa, that the psychological abuse, the fear, and the betrayal is something that... The bleeding behind your ears and the headaches and the physical things you dealt with, those things have gone away. It's the psychological trauma that you went through, I'm guessing, that you had to heal from when it was all over.

LISA: Thank you for bringing that up. That is what led up to the physical. It didn't start physical because I never would have stayed. But once he had me hooked, then he could escalate. He obviously has severe issues. I know that now. The physical part I healed from quickly. The mental/emotional/spiritual... woah! I was in therapy for eighteen months. That was another thing that the leadership at the church told me. All the answers were in the Bible and I didn't need therapy. That's where they are so blind and so deaf to trauma and what that looks like. It's a whole different animal, and people don't care or want to be involved in that kind of thing.

Natalie, yes. I have a couple of ladies now that I talk to who aren't being physically abused, but they are definitely in danger. They truly are. They need to make that decision just as I had to make that decision. I went to Bible study last week. An older guy came up to me afterwards because we were talking about scripture. One of the

verses that the Lord has unpacked for me during the last couple of years is, "Perfect love casts out fear." I was telling them about how the Lord's perfect love cast out fear in my own life and fear of the backlash that I did get from people in the church. I'm a persona non grata. "Don't touch me because it might rub off on you." He is in his seventies or eighties and he's been married sixty-four years. He said, "My wife always said that if I hit her one time she would leave." His name is David. I said, "David, it's not that simple. When you're in deep with someone like that and you are told that you made this vow and that no matter what you must keep it or you are less of a Christian or less of a believer or Jesus won't love you as much... you don't understand what you would do in that situation." He looked at me kind of weird. What I'm learning is unless you have been through it, don't try to explain it unless that person wants to hear, and then the Holy Spirit will tell me to tell my story. But I don't waste my breath anymore. I used to want to tell everyone about the pain and to "Please run, run, run." I don't do that anymore.

NATALIE: People aren't always ready to hear that. Those are treasures. Your story and the stories of the women who are listening to this right now... You have been entrusted with a treasure that's bought at a very heavy price. It's a pearl. To give that pearl to someone who is just going to trample over it ... That's why God says to not throw your pearls before swine. He's not saying that other people are swine. He's saying that in the same way that a pig is going to take that pearl and... A pig is not going to value that! In the same way, some people are not going to value the story that God has entrusted you with. I'm excited because this ties in with something I know you are going to talk about later: how God had told you that you were going to have this ministry to women. This was before you were even married to this nasty person. I don't know if you're ready to dive into that part yet.

LISA: Absolutely! Let's lighten it a little bit because that's heavy stuff. Actually, with C-PTSD, I'm sweaty right now. I'm a little shaky. But I know that God has my back. I know He loves me. I know that He protected me. He spared my life. This is exciting. So when I was married to Joe, my first husband and the father of my children, he was a good man. He overcame a lot. The Lord helped him overcome a lot because he was severely abused as a child. He really was. He could have abused me, but he chose not to.

NATALIE: That's another thing I want to bring out. Sometimes women will say, "My husband had this bad childhood, so I need to help him. I need to rescue him. I need to be there for him. I can understand why he is abusive." No! No! No! That is no excuse for not getting therapy, for not healing, for not getting help, and for not being a better person and making better choices. So if your husband is not doing that, that's his responsibility and you are not to be his rescuer. You can have compassion for him that

he had a bad childhood, but that does not give anybody the free reign to treat other human beings in horrible, abusive ways.

LISA: Yes! Natalie, I'm so glad that you said that. First, we ladies are very gifted. We were created as a helpmate to our husband, which means we are a little deeper than they are. I'm paraphrasing, please. I know I'm not technical. But God gave us a lot of gifts. We are very bright and smart and resilient. We have that sixth sense. We see the world as much more colorful for us than for a man, I think. That's my opinion.

Both of my husbands had fathers that were in the Vietnam War with multiple tours of duty. They came back. They were both alcoholics. They got beat up, both physically beat up and lots of bad stuff. My first husband never touched me. It was a choice. My second husband beat me. You are correct. It is a choice. Ladies, and I'm talking to myself too, quit trying to play God. It got me into a lot of trouble. There are consequences for what that man did to me, period. There just are. I withheld those consequences because I loved him. Because I loved him. I suffered, but God spared my life, literally. God spared my life. I don't have to tell you how, but it is amazing how the Lord loves me. He loves us so much. He spared me. But I withheld consequences, and I don't ever want to do that because I almost died.

I need to tell you another very interesting story. Some of the leadership at my former church... The one fellow was raised by a dad who was a severe alcoholic and abused the kids and sexually molested the girls. He passed away and then his wife passed away recently. She was older, I think in her eighties. This man got up and praised her for keeping the family together. (I had heard this. I didn't go to the funeral.) But it made me sick to think that those girls could have avoided that abuse and those boys could have avoided the physical part. But they were staunch Catholics and you don't leave your marriage. You stay married. So she was "a godly woman."

I'm trying to remain calm because I get so excited and so much has been revealed that I'm trying to process this and ask what the Lord wants me to do with this even if it is one-on-one. It's not okay. I know them. There's a lot of issues there that could have maybe been avoided or prevented. I'm not telling people to leave. That's not what I am saying. I'm saying to ask God. Get away from the situation, ask the Holy Spirit and one or two people that you trust, and do what God lays on your heart.

I've got to tell you that my divorce saved my life financially, spiritually, physically, emotionally, and sexually. It protects me to this day. I am not "cursed" that I am divorced. That was another thing. I filed, so I was the sinner. Do you understand the double standard there? It is so blatantly obvious now. I do attend church now. I didn't

for a long time. I thought I was sinning, but I wasn't. But I attend church, but if I even get a hint of man-made tradition or judgment or legalism, man-made rules, I'm out. I have no time for man-made crap anymore. I just know that Jesus loves me, Jesus rescued me, and He can rescue others. With the same grace and the same comfort and protection that He poured down onto me, He wants me to share that with others, to tell others who He is and what He is capable of.

It was hard to go through this. I went through this pretty much by myself. My kids, because they were grown and they knew me, they stuck by me and they still are. They are amazing children and they have gone through a lot since their dad died. What I went through did not help. They have been through so much, but you know the results. Before I married my second husband who is an abuser (unless he has changed, and they rarely change), I inquired of the Lord, and the Lord told me he was a gift. I want to make it clear that what he did to me was not a gift. It was his choice to do the things he did to me mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically. Those were his choices. But what I have learned as a result of it, that is the pearl. That's a great treasure, and I cannot keep my mouth shut. I was in the pit and it was dark, nasty, slimy, and ugly. I cannot go on my way and pretend it didn't happen. I must go back and get in if I have to and pull others out, because that is what I'm called to do. I don't know what your story is, but that is my story. I feel very passionately about what you do. I know it has grown a lot. I've been a member and will continue to be a member. But Natalie, get your seatbelt on because God is doing a work in people's hearts and lives. I think He is going to open some eyes and ears with all that is going on in our world.

Let me interject this. This coronavirus, COVID-19... I am a registered nurse, so I keep track of what is going on. I've got to tell you what I went through with the ex is much worse than this. I'm not kidding. I can't explain what it has done, but I am a warrior. I did not know that. I didn't know how loved I was. I did not know that God was for me until everybody left. When I cried for help, man couldn't help me. The church couldn't help me. They didn't want to. They didn't want to get messy, but Jesus did. That's why I say I will never be the same. The same religious man-made tradition that I raised my kids with, God thankfully took the blinders off my eyes and has taken the blinders off their eyes. They saw what these people did to me, people that they grew up with. They said, "I can't believe they weren't there for you."

It reminds me of the scripture that says God is a husband to the widows and a father to the orphans. I used to take that so black-and-white and think only if you were a widow. No! It is that God is a husband to the husbandless. He is a father to the fatherless. God says, "What I want is a broken and contrite spirit. What is true religion to Me is taking care of orphans and widows," which is the marginalized, the least of these. Why as the

church are we not taking care of women and children? Why are we allowing the wolves in sheep's clothing in the church to literally wreak havoc and rip the sheep to shreds. I was told he was a new Christian, I needed to be quieter, tone it down, give him more sex. I was told that. Do you know what happened? When I continued to lose my personality and be more and more subservient, the abuse escalated. It was not compatible to my life. I don't know how much longer I would have had. I will tell you I would not be here doing this podcast right now had I not left. I know that. I'm positive.

NATALIE: If you would have obeyed your spiritual mommies and daddies you would be dead.

LISA: Absolutely.

NATALIE: There's so much ignorance there. What blows me away and makes your story so interesting is that it was the same church. It is hard for me to wrap my brain around. They are loving and supportive of you as long as... You had a great first marriage. It wasn't even this, "I'm the head of the home. I'm the head honcho and you're the subservient woman." It wasn't even modeled after that. It was modeled after mutual love and mutual respect. Yet, you then get into a relationship that is, "I'm the head honcho and I'm going to beat you into subservience," that the church says, "You know what, that is good. You stay in that marriage. It's not good, but there's nothing we can do about that."

LISA: Right. Or they say, "You made a vow, so you better not break it." Again, it blows my mind. Someone had said to me, one of the two pastors who were there at the time, had they witnessed what he was doing to me, especially physically, I think they would have thrown him outside and called the cops. But because it was his word against mine... Let me back up. I served the Lord through this church for thirty years. I was in leadership roles. I have loved Jesus since I was four years old. Jesus loves me. It was shocking to me.

I write a weekly devotion called lisasjarsofjoy.com. My church would sponsor me. (I still write them.) Because I went through that, I said, "I will sponsor them, but can I put your name at the bottom?" It was an advertisement to attend our church because I knew they were preaching the word. But they said, "No, thank you." That hurt so badly. I was bawling and I called my daughter. She's an amazing warrior. She's an introvert like her dad. My son is amazing too. I called her crying and she said, "Mom, they'd better quit reading the New Testament because look at Paul. Don't read Romans or Acts. Do not read the Psalms because David was a murderer and an adulterer. Quit reading the Bible. Who are you? You are a sinner. You shouldn't be writing about what God did."

She was being very sarcastic.

NATALIE: What a wise girl!

LISA: She's amazing. She's in school to get her master's and eventually her doctorate. She is going into counseling specializing in trauma in small part because of what I went through. She'd never seen that side of me. She said, "Mom, that's not right." So it is cool what God is doing. There are the gifts that are coming. Before this podcast interview... I have a granddaughter who is going to be three. You aren't a grandparent yet, Natalie. I can't wait until you are. It is amazing!

NATALIE: I can't wait either.

LISA: She came in. She's in a princess phase with a princess dress. She came in just before the podcast. I was doing my makeup and hair. I have a little pretty purple blouse on and my earrings. She says to me, "Gigi," (that's what she calls me) "you're a queen, and I'm the princess." The Lord told me that during all of this. He said, "Lisa, you are my daughter. I love you so much. Do you not understand who you are in Me? Do you not understand Whose you are? You are a daughter of the King." That is who we are. I know that for sure now. I didn't know it then.

But we'll get back on track now. I'll give you a visual, and then I'd like to talk a little bit more about Riverledge and what the Lord did. I had a vision. I've had lots of different things happen since this happened. I was told the Holy Spirit doesn't speak to me like that. Those are all lies, I know that now. It was from the evil one. Remember, our fight is not against flesh and blood. I know we are angry at the people who hurt us, but really, Satan is trying to destroy us. He does not want us to achieve our full potential as human beings who happen to be female here. That's what he wants.

Anyway, I love the beach. When I was a little girl, we always went to the beach. When a wave comes and hits you, you fall and get sand in your bottoms. What happened to me with my abuser... His whole family was abusive too, as they put so much crap out into the community about me. God is defending my name. The stories I could tell you would give you chills because I never said a word. God said He would defend me, and He has and will continue. When the abuser came along and I fell in love with him, that was like getting hit with the wave like when I was a little girl. I got hit and I fell, but I got back up. The second wave was massive, and that was my church family, religion, and man-made tradition.

When I was rejected by those... When the door was open, I was there. I lead women's

retreats and all those things. When I was rejected by them, when it knocked me down, I almost didn't get back up. I swallowed so much salt water and I had so much sand in my bottoms I couldn't get up. I almost drowned. But Jesus rescued me from that too and said, "I've got to teach you something, daughter. Trust me. Lisa, I love you. Do you trust Me? Let's go. I want to show you some things about how people get it wrong." I always followed the rules. I always followed whatever man told me, especially the preacher and the people in authority. I always put them above God, really. They got knocked off and Jesus, God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, He is on the throne of my heart. I listen to Him, period, because I don't want to go through the pain that I just went through. I hope I explained that okay.

NATALIE: Yeah, I love that. That is going to mean so much to so many women.

LISA: So can we talk about Riverledge?

NATALIE: Let's talk about Riverledge. It's great timing because you are hosting... Are all the spots filled, or are there still some spots open?

LISA: Pricing has been an issue, and I know that. I did it the best that I could. We have eight out of twelve. If only eight come, that is who God draws to Riverledge. If twelve come, that's who God draws to Riverledge.

NATALIE: This is going to go out before that whole thing is over. She is going to tell us about Riverledge, but there are four spots open. You can register. Maybe you can tell us a little about that after you're done telling us about your farm and how you started it. We would love to have you come and spend time with both Lisa and I and eight other women besides us. We are going to be having a healing retreat on May 1-3 in Vermont. [This retreat is now over.] I'm going to be there even if the COVID-19 is still raging. I am flying out there come hell or high water. I'll have to be in the hospital or else I will be there.

LISA: That sounds wonderful. The first time that I sounded the alarm that something was wrong with my marriage back in the end of 2015, one of the things I needed to do was to flee because he is not wired right. That is his story to tell if he ever gets it right with the Lord, but there is something very sick about him and his behavior. So I needed to get out of Dodge. I come from a very small community in Pennsylvania, and my daughter married a man from New England. So I asked to take refuge up there. I had asked someone close to me, who is still close to me but still indoctrinated and ingrained with religion, if I could come stay with them if he got physical. I was told "no" because they were in leadership at the church, and "What would other people think?"

Maybe God would punish them because they were encouraging divorce. It was sick. By the way, this person's eyes are wide open. She is one of my dearest friends. God does work with us. She has apologized. She is one of my best friends, has seen the whole thing develop, and has never given up on me.

Anyway, I went to Vermont. Because I was married at nineteen, met Joe at fourteen, and five months after he passed away I got into another relationship, I have never been alone. I didn't know what alone looked like as an adult. When I was up in Vermont finding refuge with my daughter and son-in-law and trying to heal, they went away for a romantic weekend and I took their dog. It was my grand-dog at the time, Russell. It was the first weekend of my life, the first time in my life, that I had ever been alone. It was just me and the Lord. I got in the car with Russell and was in the middle of nowhere. I was so sure of God's love for me and His protection over me that I went in the car and had an adventure by myself. You don't understand. I always had to have someone around me all the time because I love people. But I needed to be alone.

So the Lord and I took a ride. I got really, really lost. I think it was in March before Easter. So really, it was 2016. Russell was panting. I guess I wasn't technically alone because I had the dog with me and the Lord was with me. There was a creek, which they call a brook up there, that was kind of high. I thought I needed a drink for myself and the dog. I got out and drank the crystal-clear water. Across the street was this farm. It was magnificent. It had a "For Sale" sign. I thought, "That is beautiful, but I could never afford that." I got in the car and left. There is so much more I could tell you, but I don't have time. I was still really lost and was going in circles. An hour later I came past the farm again from the opposite direction. We were thirsty again.

NATALIE: You really were lost.

LISA: We were out in the boonies. I couldn't get a phone signal, so I didn't have GPS. I knew the Lord would get me where I needed to go. My faith was growing by leaps and bounds. I didn't need a man or anyone else to complete me, so it was okay that I was alone. I got out and grabbed the brochure. I looked at it and it was very expensive. I looked at what was there, and it was huge. I brought the brochure home and started praying. I felt the Lord say, "Lisa, I want you to look at this." I thought, "Do you know I'm in an abusive relationship and that I'm not well in my head?" I came up with a list of ten questions that I needed to ask if I was going to put an offer in on this farm. All ten answers were a "yes." On Easter Sunday, something happened during the worship service that was insane. I put a bid in on the farm, and I got the farm.

It's a long story. It's a huge project. Before I purchased it, and the way that God got the

mortgage and put everything together is a story I may share when we're all at Riverledge, I stepped out in faith. I remember the day I met the realtor to do a final walk through, I was scared. My stomach was a little sick. I was sitting out there and opened the scripture to Samuel where it talks about David defeating Goliath. I sensed the Holy Spirit say, "Lisa, this farm is a giant. I know you don't understand how you're going to do it, but I'm telling you that I went before you and I've got it all figured out. Your job is to trust Me and just keep taking the next step. I'm going to show you things you've never seen before." That is exactly what He has been doing.

I've been up there almost four years now. The healing that is there... I know the Holy Spirit and God resides in us, but that farm is a very special place. I have a feeling that... And again, I told you Natalie, earlier, that unless the Lord builds a house, they that do it build it in vain. I think God has a very special plan for this place related specifically to women that have gotten out of a domestic violence situation, not just physical, but other ways too. I believe that He's going to do a lot of healing there and I'm stepping out in faith. I know where to walk in faith not by sight. I know it sounds crazy, but what God has done in and through Riverledge... I can tell you story after story of Him showing up. It just blows my mind. That is the Father that I and a lot of us ladies serve. He has a purpose and a plan. He doesn't want anything to get us off track.

My second marriage got me off track. It almost destroyed me. But as a result of that, God opened my eyes that evil is real. I was very naïve. I was one of those women that... You would have puked because I was like, "You shouldn't get divorced because blah, blah, blah, blah!" No! A complete 180 in my life because I lived it. I get it now. God isn't done. He's just starting. He's going to do some amazing things. Natalie, you know I'm excited. I would like to see a huge network for women worldwide. There are a lot of pieces that aren't together yet because I really had to dig to find you. I know where to seek, ask, and knock. That is for salvation, but it is also for in life. God promises life and that life more abundantly.

When I was with the ex, I remember being in my closet weeping and hiding and saying, "God, this is not abundant life. You are either a liar or I am getting something wrong. I have served You my whole life and You've allowed this." I just didn't get it. I know there is the domestic violence shelter that you can call, but I would like to see something more formal with money and education that goes into it, especially in the church. That the church would open their eyes and start ministering and be the safest place for someone in that kind of situation instead of the least safe place. Because as of today, the church is the least safe place. Unfortunately, this blows my mind. God showed up in people who weren't even Christians. I found healing, and that blew my mind about who I thought God was. God owns it all. Whether you are a believer or not, He is in charge

and He loves us.

NATALIE: Amen! I love that. I'm going to put a link in the show notes to the place where you can go if you are interested in joining us in May. We should have you come back again and talk more about Riverledge. We can talk about our time together. Right now you are doing a lot of weddings. Is that correct?

LISA: Yes, I am doing weddings. My heart is with retreats and conferences. We'll see how the Lord takes care of that. But I do need to pay the bills, and that's okay because that is part of business. That's not a bad thing. There are people who help me out. One of them is a mom who is in a really bad situation. So God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to behold. I'm excited to see how He is going to grow it. If the Lord puts it on your heart that you should go, go. Trust Him. He will make a way. If not, that's okay too. Those who are supposed to be there will be there. That's how God works. I want to say if anyone is having financial hardship, please let me know. Shoot me an email. I'll see what I can do. I have people who have a heart for this as well and are ready to help if it comes to that.

NATALIE: That sounds great. Thank you so much for giving us some of your time, Lisa. I think this was an excellent episode. I think it's really going to cause some breakthroughs for a lot of women. Light bulbs are going to go off. Your story is very relatable, and you have unique things you have brought to the table that will help people unstick some of those things that are keeping them stuck. I appreciate your time.

LISA: Thank you, Natalie. Keep up the good work, please. You were a lifesaver. You truly were. I was so traumatized, and your material was lifesaving. It saved my brain and my heart. God used you in a very powerful way to get me back on my feet.

NATALIE: That's awesome. There is a growing band of women who are rising up. They are doing exactly what you described. They are getting out of abuse and they are the ones on the front lines reaching down into the pit and rescuing other people. The church is not doing it, but God is doing it through these survivors. I think it's a beautiful, amazing, incredible thing. I am super excited to be a part of it. For the rest of you, thank you so much for listening, and fly free!