

HOW DO I KNOW IF A CHURCH OR PERSON IS SAFE FOR ME?

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 90 of the Flying Free Podcast! Today I have with me a familiar face and voice, Patrick Doyle. He is a public speaker and coach who has over thirty years of experience working with people from all over in treatment centers, churches, and in his office. Many of you may be familiar with him from the Dove Channel videos that he has on YouTube, which are shared constantly in survivor circles. So welcome to the podcast a second time, Patrick.

PATRICK: Thank you, Natalie. It's great to be here and again, thank you for what you are doing. It's very important, your work.

NATALIE: Thank you. I am excited about our topic today, and I think many people will be interested in hearing what you have to say. We're going to be talking about safe and unsafe people. I think you are just the person to talk to about this. You have personal experience as well as experience in your professional field understanding, working with, and dealing with safe and unsafe people. I think we should probably start off by asking you, how would you define a safe or unsafe person?

PATRICK: That's a great question, because I think so many people get... I hear a lot of ladies talking about trying to define "unsafe." But when they do that, they are defining it with the lies in their head from their abuser.

NATALIE: Yes.

PATRICK: One thing that I often say is if you feel unsafe, then I'm convinced. You don't have to give me a long list of behaviors. I see that with ladies in particular it shows up in their body before their mind catches on. They feel exhausted. They feel hopeless. They feel overwhelmed. They feel tired. They want out. That is all the result of being in an unsafe emotional environment.

The problem is that our culture gives no credence, for the most part, to unsafe realities. In fact, you've probably seen it, Natalie. You go to your favorite breakfast place in the morning and there's an older couple sitting in there. You've seen this? They're having breakfast and they never look at each other, they never say a word, and they don't like

each other. You can tell. You can feel the vibes. But you know, "praise the Lord," they are still together.

NATALIE: Yeah, that's so sad.

PATRICK: It's sad. But you see, that is what we're promoting. "Avoid everything. Be in unsafe relationships. The number one goal here is to stay together." It's not to have what God intended, from my perspective, which is intimacy, care, and a reflection of the beauty and the safety that He provides. No! It's so we have a cultural mandate that commitment is more important than safety. The church, unfortunately and unwittingly (I don't believe purposely), has done it, which is to promote that idea.

NATALIE: I am coming off a personal situation where I'm trying to prove that someone that I love is not safe in a certain situation, and you can't prove it unless you have evidence of physical abuse happening.

PATRICK: Right.

NATALIE: Otherwise, people think as long as you are not being physically hurt then you must be safe, and there is no understanding of the emotional dynamic and the severe destruction that can happen to the emotional well-being of children or of adults in an unsafe relationship.

PATRICK: I think it's even worse than that, Natalie. It's not even that they don't recognize it. They judge it as something bad. If you have the gall to confess out loud that this person is unsafe but you don't have a laundry list of reasons that are empirically provable, then you're the problem. Which is insane!

NATALIE: It is. I've noticed in my own life and in women I've worked with, when they try to explain specific incidents that have happened that have caused the harm, even as they are saying it and voicing it out loud there's the sense in the room of, "What is the big deal? Why is that a problem?"

PATRICK: Right. Here's the other thing I've noticed over time. One of the major problems of being with someone who is emotionally unsafe... And I would equate that with "abusive." Long-term emotional unsafeness is abuse. What I see is that because of the profound level of subtlety that is embedded in the emotional abuse process, the abuser isn't hitting you and leaving a black eye.

So how are you going to prove it? I always say it is the death of a thousand cuts. If we

looked at one of those incidents, one of those cuts, we might say, "That's not that big a deal." And it truly wouldn't be. But when you look at a thousand, you're looking at a pattern of profound destruction. This pattern is the thing that no one wants to look at. They want to take each individual instance and make a judgment on that, but you must see the whole. If you don't see the whole, then you miss the whole point.

This is what I see all the time with ladies. They are stuck looking at the instance. I'm saying, "No, you have to look at the pattern here." So I keep using the word "pathological." It's predictable. The behavior is consistent. That consistent behavior is what drains your soul of life: that consistent harm, that consistent undermining, that consistent denial, blame shifting, rationalizing, justifying, spiritualizing. All those things are ways that an unsafe person maintains their control and does harm to the soul of the person who is in the relationship with them. Our culture as a rule doesn't look at whole things easily. You even see it in the medical community. They want to look at a symptom and then treat it. They don't want to look at what's going on underneath that because that's not what they get paid for.

NATALIE: Okay, so I have a question. When I was married to my ex, I would never have probably articulated that I felt unsafe with him because he was familiar to me, and my life with him felt normal even though I was literally dying inside. Also, because the things he did were so intermittent and so subtle, it was exceedingly difficult... I mean, I knew within six months of being married to him that there was something seriously wrong. But it became a norm.

I had grown up in a family where I had experienced the same kind of treatment, so I just thought... How would you explain to women who are listening to this and may even have seen the title and thought, "My husband is not 'unsafe.' This is familiar to me. It feels normal to me. What feels unsafe to me is getting out of this relationship and being on my own and having to support myself and deal with everyone leaving me because I didn't stay with my husband. That feels unsafe"?

PATRICK: Yeah. Not only will it be difficult to do that, but you are going to try to get out of the relationship while everybody is shooting at you.

NATALIE: Right.

PATRICK: "Just stay." Trust me, that's kept me for a while. So that's a very real thing. If we took "unsafe" and broke it down this way... I talk to lots of ladies who are in relationships where they trust the man in terms of fidelity. They trust him in terms of he says he's going to pick up the kids at 5:00, and he picks up the kids at 5:00. There's

no mistrust in other areas of the relationship.

The place where there's the most profound mistrust is on an emotional level. This is where I see a lot of confusion happen because "He said he was going to pick up the kids and he did, so I trust him." But when he comes home and you say, "Hey, that hurt me," he says, "That wasn't me, that was you. You misunderstood, and that's your problem. You're too sensitive. Stop that."

If you just looked at the emotional level, that's where you'd see the unsafeness. A good abuser must have a good external view. People must see him as a good guy. That's how you maintain the control of abuse. If he's going around with a gun and hitting people, he's outed. Every abuser's denial keeps them in... I mean, their well-being to other people is way more important than the well-being to the person they are supposed to love. So if you looked at the unsafeness just in the emotional arena, you would get a clue.

But again, I just talked to a lady last week. She had an amazing story. I worked with her for five or six years in individual counseling. On her second session she told me about the marriage and about her husband. After the second session I said, "He's cheating on you, and he has been for a while." She said, "How do you know that?" I said, "I've met your husband a thousand times in other guys, and all the things you're telling me are signs." She said, "Oh no! He could never do that. He plays on the worship team at church. He's such a good man. He prays with me," and blah, blah, blah. I said, "He works out of town four days a week, every week." So long story short, not only is he that but he's also emotionally abusive and gaslights on a regular basis. Five years later, it comes out. Yeah, he's had not just two affairs, he's had nine. He's been with countless prostitutes and Craigslist hook-ups and all the while been the great worship leader at church and the great husband.

NATALIE: Incredible.

PATRICK: She said, "How did you know?" I said, "It's pathological. What you were telling me were clear signs." It still took two years, Natalie, after that for her to make the decision. So seven years in total.

NATALIE: Wow.

PATRICK: I was talking to her online this last week. She did a bunch of work after that. She did her work. Now she's in a relationship with a guy who is an amazing guy and she's super happy. Her life is radically different in a good way. But she said, "I wish my

clarity would have come sooner.” What I said to her was, “Clarity comes at exactly the right moment for all of us.” I wish it came sooner for me, sure. I wish I could have avoided all that time. But it didn’t. Stop dislocating your hip to kick yourself in the rear and be in the moment that you are in. One of my mentors and favorite theologians used to say he believed in what he called “the holy now.” You can’t experience God or another person at any other time but right now.

NATALIE: I love that.

PATRICK: So you have to stay in the now. But in an abusive or unsafe relationship, the “now” is the last place I want to be.

NATALIE: Right. You are constantly being triggered. It’s difficult to stay present when your amygdala is freaking out and your prefrontal cortex is totally offline.

PATRICK: Yeah. And the person you are with is creating a reality that is causing you harm. So you are trying to live in clarity... I see this all the time with unsafe people. They are always rewriting history. They are always rewriting the events. They are always changing events that you see. The number one goal of an unsafe person is to get you to doubt your perceptions.

NATALIE: I’m going to have to write that one down. “Their number one goal is to get you to doubt your perceptions.”

PATRICK: Because if you get clear about what you are seeing and you trust your own version of what you see, they are done! And that’s why gaslighting, rationalizing, justifying, minimizing, spiritualizing, all those things, are tactics that are employed all the time because those are all geared to get you to not be in reality.

NATALIE: Okay, so let’s open this up to other relationships, like co-worker relationships or relationships with friends at church. I’m sure there are some women listening who are divorced and are thinking they’d like to get into a new relationship, but they don’t want to fall into the same trap. The problem is that because these kinds of abusers are so subtle, it’s difficult... I mean, if you couldn’t see it in your marriage for so long, how are you going to see it in a brand-new relationship with someone who is putting their best foot forward and probably not being abusive at first?

PATRICK: Right, and you’re desperate.

NATALIE: What can we look for, and how do we... Let’s say someone has a co-worker

about whom they think, "There's something a little off here, but how do I know for sure?"

PATRICK: This is something that I talk about all the time, particularly in Pathway to Hope, because it's ongoing. Whether you're coming out of a relationship or whether you're going into one, no matter where you are at in the process of healing or recognizing emotional abuse, here's one of the key components to never being abusable: you must trust your instincts, your gut, your spirit. Every woman I've ever talked to, myself included... I'm not a woman, but I talk to myself occasionally. If I would have paid attention to my instincts, my gut, my spirit, I would not have been in the relationship I was in.

NATALIE: Okay, well, the Christian community really encourages us to not put a lot of trust or stock in our instincts because "our hearts are deceitful, and who can know them?"

PATRICK: Let's talk about that lie for a second. At the risk of offending some, I will tell the truth that I believe. In my opinion, over the last one-hundred and fifty years, what we have done in the church is made an idol out of the Bible. (I'll explain that in a second.) That has led to us making an idol out of marriage.

So Jesus is with the disciples and He says to them, "Hey guys, I'm leaving. It's a good thing that I'm leaving because when I leave, I'm going to send you the Bible." No - "I'm going to send you the Spirit." What we're talking about in biblical terms is the third person of the Godhead, the living, breathing, powerful Creator of the universe, living within you. Why would you trust a written document that is interpreted and misinterpreted over the person of God living in you?

So what we've done is said, "If it's not in the Bible, then it's not real." I'm like, "Wait, wait, wait! What happened to all those thousands of people, millions of people, for centuries who lived on earth without the Bible? How did they function?" Well, they functioned based on the Spirit. So you and I both know, right this minute, when you sit down with someone and your spirits connect, it's a totally different world. When you deny your spirit and you try to connect to that person despite your spirit going, "Err, err, err," you always end up in trouble because what God is saying is, "Honey, move away!"

One of the main things that happens in abuse or unsafeness is that you lose your choices. When you stop having the ability to choose "yes" or "no" if you're going to be with that person, you are in an abusable situation. So God in His mercy gives you His Spirit to guide you, but the problem with the Spirit is that it gives me information I can't

prove — I just know! So in our abused worlds, in my world, you have to prove everything with everyone. You must have twelve Bible verses and you have to have rationalized reading and all this stuff. So to go with my spirit is like jumping off the cliff. “I don’t have them. What went wrong?”

NATALIE: Right.

PATRICK: I say all the time that I’d rather be wrong and have to apologize than not pay attention and be abused.

NATALIE: You know what, jumping off that cliff, if you want to use that analogy, is like jumping into God’s love. What I’ve noticed in the Christian community is that people who are really into, as you call it, worshiping the Bible rather than worshiping God, they use the Bible as a weapon to hurt people. That is not the Spirit of God at all. That’s how Satan uses the Bible, because Satan used the words of God in the garden and in the wilderness with Christ. The Bible illustrates beautifully how God’s words can be used to do great damage and great evil in the world. So why are we banging people over their head with Bible verses, and why are we not loving them the way Jesus loved us?

PATRICK: There are theological reasons why, Natalie. Having been a pastor and having been a theological nut job, historically I would have been the guy that would have landed on your chest with all fours and told you how wrong you were because you weren’t obeying the scriptures, and I could give you fourteen cited reasons off the top of my head because I had the Bible memorized. So I was the worst offender of what I’m talking about.

NATALIE: Right.

PATRICK: I’m not sitting in some ivory tower going, “I should do it different.” No! I learned this from doing it. But here’s the bottom line. If I theologically believe because of my understanding of the Bible that God’s world operates in X, Y, or Z way, then I must get you to comply.

NATALIE: Yep.

PATRICK: You and I both know this. You’ve been through a lot of religious abuse. I have. But if you would have talked to me in the midst of that, I would have said that anyone who doesn’t agree with me is out of line. They’re wrong. They don’t have the right theology. Their spirit is broken. I would have said something horrible!

Now what I realize, particularly having dealt with thousands of people in abusive relationships in the church, is that the vast majority of time, the most unsafe people are the people from the church who are trying to help, because here is what I've seen. If a man and a woman from a church walk into a pastor's office for marital counseling, before they ever sit down, the woman is ninety percent responsible for the problem.

NATALIE: You're right.

PATRICK: And she is ninety percent responsible for the solution before a word is spoken! The reason why is theological. This is maybe going to catch some hair on fire, but I believe the modern church has become a factory for narcissistic men and a factory for codependent women. I believe that because what we have done in our theological error is to severely overvalue men, leading to narcissism: "I'm the last word; I'm the spiritual leader; I'm the one God created first, so I have more value; I'm the one who has charge."

All these are theological lies about men – patriarchy – being more important, which is insane! Then we tell women their job is to make them happy. "Your job is to give them enough sex, to give them enough meals. Your job is to win them over by your winsome behavior." What we're doing is institutionalizing narcissism and codependency, and we're supporting it with theological lies based on an idolization, a misinterpretation, of God's record called scripture.

NATALIE: I am one-hundred percent in agreement with that.

PATRICK: I wish I could say it was something different, Natalie, but I've got the experience stacked to the ceiling. I've said this before. This is the analogy I always like to use to let people know. But it wasn't long ago I had a woman who was severely beaten by her husband and hospitalized twice. She went to her pastor for help. And what did he say? "Well, what's the worst thing that could happen? He kills you and you go to heaven."

NATALIE: Yeah, that is profoundly wicked.

PATRICK: I thought... I won't say what I thought. This is supposed to be a family-friendly podcast.

NATALIE: Well, here's the thing. When I was back in my relationship, I literally thought I was the anomaly. I thought there was nobody else who had this bizarre marriage like I had. I couldn't explain it. I have found since then... I really believe that over fifty percent

of marriages in the Christian community are cookie cutter, formulaic replicas of what I went through.

PATRICK: Yeah! Look at all the material we are putting out.

NATALIE: Exactly!

PATRICK: Read a Christian marriage book. It's got the same theological lies in it that lead to those two people sitting at the table at breakfast in their seventies hating each other. I'm sure that's not what God intended when He talked about marriage. We're supposed to reflect the intimacy God has within Himself, three people living in absolute harmony together, in unity, in peace, and in mutual respect and care.

NATALIE: Yes, and in freedom. Freedom to be who you are without getting shamed, blamed, accused, and beaten over the head with it.

PATRICK: Not only free to be who you are but, even more importantly, spring-boarded by the care into the freedom of who you are. This is something I say all the time: pain lets me know there's a problem, but pain doesn't heal the problem. What allows me to heal the problem is care. This is why you see women in abusive relationships. They start to get the pain, they start to see the problem, but there is such a disparity of care, which is why your program, my program, and Leslie's program are so beneficial. Finally, there is some care available to move me forward. Without that care, then you have the woman sitting in the breakfast place with the husband whom she hates.

NATALIE: Yes.

PATRICK: So do I have haters for what I just said?

NATALIE: I'm sure you do.

PATRICK: Yes, and God bless them. I don't know if you know this, but I've spent some time with Paul Young, the guy who wrote "The Shack."

NATALIE: I just saw that for the very first time. I've never read the book, but I just watched it less than a week ago. I watched the movie. Terrible acting. I have to say, the acting is perhaps the worst acting I think I've ever seen. But I need to read the book because the concepts in it were amazing.

PATRICK: You do. Being a good Piper disciple, I can see why you never read it.

NATALIE: I know! We were told it was complete and utter heresy.

PATRICK: Yeah. I've told the story before about me going on the radio and tearing the book apart before I read it. Then I read it and said, "Oh! I'm wrong!" Then I had to go back on the TV and say, "Well, I was wrong." Then I got to meet Paul. I got to tell him that story and I got to apologize to his face.

NATALIE: Oh! I bet he's a beautiful soul. You must be a beautiful soul to write that.

PATRICK: He really is. He said, "You know, Pat, eighty-five percent of the people who hate my book have never read it."

NATALIE: Wow, that is so sad.

PATRICK: Anyway, here's the thing. Paul wrote that book, and you talk about hate coming to somebody. But here's what he always says. He says, "Patrick, look. Those are my people. They're my people." He doesn't have any hate! I think, "What?! I need to get to your level." It's really been an inspiration to me because I was the same person. I was the person freaking out about his book without having ever read it. Then I met him and thought, "Oh. He's a lovely man." And talk about a history of trauma, good gracious! Do you know his history?

NATALIE: I don't.

PATRICK: Oh my gosh. He was raised a missionary kid. His parents were missionaries in New Guinea. The tribe they worked with was a very sexual tribe. Their greetings were sexual. He said, "If you had asked me when I was a child who my family was, I would have told you the tribe. I spent all of my time with them." It was a very sexualized tribe. Then at seven or eight in a normal missionary family you get sent off to boarding school. Then he was molested there.

NATALIE: Oh no.

PATRICK: So here's a guy who... The fact that he believes in God is a miracle to me.

NATALIE: I can see where the concepts came from, though.

PATRICK: Yes. That's what he said. He said the shack represents the place of your deepest pain. If you don't go to the shack and have some healing, you'll never be free.

NATALIE: Yes. I cried. There were three different occasions where I was wracked in sobs while watching the movie, and that's with terrible acting. So the concepts hit home to me in three different places where I realized just watching it that I still have some tender spots. I think the abuse stuff I have been wrestling with, but now it's down to, "God, who are You?" I see so much pain, and it's easy to say... I'm getting answers. Answers are coming. God has been faithful to me. But I have had to get to that really dark place, that abyss, where you wonder, "God, are You there? Do You really exist or are we just alone on this planet?"

PATRICK: Yes. If you're not asking those questions, it's because you are lying to yourself. If you look around, if I look at my own life I think, "Hey, dude. How come I didn't get the good train? I see other people whose lives are perfect. They don't have trauma. They don't have problems. Their families are good. Everything seemingly goes their way. Why is that?" I always think of the verse that says, "It rains on the just and the unjust alike."

This is the other thing. Your leading question – thirty minutes in we are going to finally answer it. Your leading question was, "How do you define unsafe?" I'm saying "unsafe" is defined by the eye of the beholder. It must start there. If you read Dr. Cloud and Townsend's book "Safe People," you'll get some very clear behavioral examples of what safe and unsafe looks like. That's great. But the problem is when you are in an unsafe relationship, one of the main things that gets destroyed is you paying attention to your own spirit. This is what I see all the time, Natalie.

Ladies start to see the problem, and then they go into information-gathering mode. They read every book. They look at my videos. They look at your stuff. They just start gathering information. But one of the consequences of that is that it gets them into their head. Your head is where the problem lies, because that is where all the lies you've been told live. That's where your theological issues are. That's where your abuser has been aiming everything at. What I want you to do is get out of your head and get into your spirit and listen to your gut. It will guide you out. It will guide you to safety, but only if you listen.

The thing I say to ladies all the time is if you get ten opportunities in a day to listen to your gut and you take one, do a celebration dance and be grateful because that is going to move you forward. None of us are going to do it ten out of ten times. That's that old religious lie of perfection. It's a process. The more we can pay attention to our spirit the more clarity we are going to have. But here's the problem. One of my clients said one time, "Clarity should come with a warning sign: grief up ahead."

NATALIE: Here's the thing. A lot of us who were in abusive relationships were actually

told by our abusive spouse, by other people in the church, or by a counselor that because we finally stood up and told the truth, what we were experiencing and how we were taking it, we were told that we were the ones who were unsafe.

PATRICK: Right. Yes.

NATALIE: That's very confusing. I remember that would set me back. I always believed everybody. I always believed that everyone was coming from a place of authenticity and honesty. So I would step back and think, "Oh my gosh! What am I doing that I am unsafe? I don't want to be unsafe." My whole goal is to be safe, loving, and kind, and I'm being told I'm not. It was the quintessential catch-22.

PATRICK: That is where your spirit gets you free. If your spirit says, "That's not true," you must believe that. What you are talking about, Natalie, is something very subtle. In the church particularly, women are trained to think they are too emotional, and "never let your emotions be out front." Remember this teaching?

NATALIE: Oh yeah.

PATRICK: When I'm talking about your spirit, I'm talking about the third person of the Godhead, not your emotions! But this is the lie the church tells. But listen! Women... One of the greatest beauties of their reflection of the person of God is their spirit. So having that diminished is a core-level harm.

NATALIE: Not only to them, but it's a core-level harm to the organism of the church.

PATRICK: Yes. It is death. So when you talk about the people helpers saying that you are being unsafe because you set a boundary, that is institutional gaslighting. "And there's none of that going on in our culture."

NATALIE: We won't go there, though.

PATRICK: I mean, it is everywhere!

NATALIE: Yes. It is.

PATRICK: Again, I don't care... It's not just politics. It is everywhere. In the church, the gaslighting is made normal by people claiming spiritual authority.

NATALIE: Yeah. Then the rest of us think, "Well, they know. They're in charge. They've

got the education. They've got the leadership ability. They are like the voice of God in our lives, so we need to listen to them."

PATRICK: Listen, I'm going to tell you a dirty little secret. Do you know how many pastors and elders I have had in my office?

NATALIE: Well, I would believe you now. I would have been shocked before.

PATRICK: In some instances, the fact that someone is a pastor is a sign of pathology.

NATALIE: I wonder what the percentage is?

PATRICK: It's high. Here's the problem. Having been in this reality, this is how I know. My reality was way less intense than most guys because I would not allow the church to support me financially, so I had a lot of freedom. But guys who are being paid for their service as a pastor are in a trap. They cannot be honest with anyone about anything that is difficult because if they are, they will end up losing their job.

So that construct is a set up for dishonesty. They must get up on the pulpit, and what people want is for them to be perfect. They want them to be the one they worship. They don't want them to be real. That's too uncomfortable. This is just human nature. It's why the Jews said, "Nah, we want a king. We're good. Give us a king like the rest of the countries. We don't want to be this God-led group. Give us somebody we can look to." That turned out badly for them. So this is human nature.

So you trusting your spirit, your gut, your instincts... I was just editing through the book I am writing about this, and I have a whole chapter about this because to me, it is imperative for your healing. If you cannot pay attention to your instincts and act on them, you will be abusable. Earlier, you talked about ladies who are getting out of relationships, have some healing, and now are going to go into a new relationship. The number one way to stay out of abuse is to pay attention to your instincts. I tell ladies all the time, "Get on a dating site. But you aren't getting on to have a date or find someone to date. What you are doing is getting on to practice saying 'no' and to practice trusting your instincts, because you must practice. You've spent a whole lifetime or a whole relationship getting told you don't have a choice. So practice trusting that instinct and gaining confidence in that area is imperative."

Trusting your instincts is one of the greatest... I say that it makes you "abuse resistant." When you are compliant, when you are listening to everyone, when you feel guilty and shamed — those are not things your spirit is going to tell you. Your spirit — and this is

back to my belief about God: God is the author of life, therefore, He never devalues it. If someone is devaluing your life, devaluing life in general, move away from them because they are dangerous. If someone is not devaluing life, then okay, "We'll see how you do." Trusting your instincts in an unavoidable requirement for wellness. It's not just when you are out of abuse. It is in general.

Here's a thing I see a lot, Natalie. Ladies say, "I get confused when I start talking about it. I don't know if it's my head or if it's my spirit." What I often say is, "If you have children, you probably pay attention to your instincts all the time. As a mom, if you see something with your kid, nothing has been said or done, you just see it and then you move into it because it's your instincts, right? That's where you can recognize your instincts. Now if you just gave yourself one-tenth of the energy that you give your kids, you'd be amazing."

NATALIE: Yeah. I think you hit on something there, too. Women don't really have their own backs, and they also don't trust themselves to take care of themselves. They've been programmed that it is selfish, that it is not Christian, or that if they take care of themselves that they will somehow not have anything left to take care of other people when the exact opposite is true.

PATRICK: Exactly, Natalie. That's so true. When I look back at my own journal, I can see me gaslighting myself.

NATALIE: Yes!

PATRICK: I think, "Where is this coming from?" Now that I am where I'm at I can say, "Wow! I was really deep in it." So it takes time. Like I said before, clarity comes at just the right moment. So don't dislocate your hip to kick yourself in the rear. Just keep taking as many chances as you can each day to trust that instinct, that spirit, your gut.

NATALIE: Yeah. I think if I were to sum up this whole thing, this whole subject, I would say it boils down to getting rid of religiosity. Getting rid of a god that is made in our image, in the image of a man, or in the image of an abuser. God is love, so if you filter anything you think about or that is happening to you through that grid of love, I think that will help to clarify things.

So your relationship with God, but then also your relationship with yourself. You must have a loving, trusting relationship where you are your own best advocate. I always looked outside of myself to be rescued by somebody out there who would sweep in and give me permission to take care of myself. Of course, no one is going to do that. No

one is going to give you permission to do that.

PATRICK: But how many young girls are trained in that mindset by fantasies?

NATALIE: Yes! So true!

PATRICK: When you look at the reading material of a young girl, you see the white knight in the shining armor. He's going to swoop in and save the day, which is embedding the idea that men are more valuable and women are incapable. So it's even in the lore, if you will. But what you said is so profound. I say this all the time to ladies: "A well 'you' is the best gift you can give your kids."

NATALIE: Yes. Amen.

PATRICK: That requires you to spend the time and energy. If I said, "You need to care for your child," you say, "Oh yeah, I got it." If I say, "You need to care for yourself first," you say, "Wait. I've got to what?" Well, how do you care for a child out of an empty soul? I see women all the time being just drained of every shred of care because there is nothing coming in. It goes against the spiritual training: sacrifice yourself, carry your cross, die to yourself. All those messages are unhealthy, and I think theologically unhealthy.

NATALIE: I learned that each of us has a child part of ourselves that is still in there and often was not being parented well or in a healthy way. So that child was never able to get what they needed. Now as adults, that is our responsibility to give that child the nurturing that she or he needs so that we can then know how to nurture the people around us.

PATRICK: Yes. So back to safe or unsafe. I always say that I have two rules that I live by in this way. Rule number one, no crazy allowed. Rule number two, I decide what's crazy.

NATALIE: I like that.

PATRICK: Here's why. In an abusive environment, you lose all your choices. You don't have the right to choose what's safe or what's not, what's good or what's healthy. Your only option is to comply or die. So when you say, "No crazy allowed and I'm going to decide," now you are an entity, and that makes you abuse-resistant because you get to decide.

If I put somebody outside of my life and later realize that they are safe, okay. I always

tell people, "You are way better off being late to the party of trust than early." The damage that can be done to you by being early to the party of trust is cataclysmic. The damage being done by being late, not really. But in the Christian world, we are always pushing people into situations prematurely because we want them to get back together.

NATALIE: And I just don't understand why.

PATRICK: It's theological. It's built on the idolization of marriage. You have this profound level of importance placed on the marriage staying together. This is why when the man and woman walk together into the pastor's office, the pastor has an agenda before one word is even spoken. The agenda is to keep them together. The agenda is not to listen to what is going on. This is why so many pastors listen to the story and filter out the damage and say, "You guys need to pray together," or "You guys need to have a date night," or whatever instead of, "You guys are toxic and you need to get the heck away from each other." Where is that at? That doesn't fit with the theological narrative. So what results is a lot of harm. Frankly, my opinion is that the most loving thing you can do for an abuser is to get away from him. That's loving him.

NATALIE: That's living in truth and authenticity.

PATRICK: Yes. When I started getting clear about my situation, what became the most honest place I ever was is when I was saying, "No more," instead of rationalizing, justifying, minimizing, and spiritualizing to stay.

NATALIE: Here's the thing. If you were to extrapolate this whole thing out maybe two-hundred years, and let's say we were able to turn the ship and it became popular in Christian culture to not keep marriages together where there was one person harming another, two-hundred years from now we would have much healthier homes, children would grow up in healthier homes, they would have more to offer in their relationships, and they would understand. There would be more freedom, more love. It would just be so much better.

But nobody wants to do the hard work, which is digging up all this hard, rocky ground. It hurts to dig it up. That means that some of us are going to be displaced out of our marriages for a while. Some of us are going to be excommunicated. Some of us are going to lose our families of origin. That is a painful process, but I always say... I really believe, if you look at other movements in history, that we are a pioneer movement. Hopefully two-hundred years from now the people on this earth will be reaping the benefits of the hard work those of us living now are doing.

PATRICK: I certainly hope that's true. That's a beautiful vision. I also hope that we could have some impact on changing the narrative of men, because that's the main problem here. As a man, I can speak to this with a little authority, but in the church, we are training men to be abusive.

NATALIE: Yep. The church is very misogynistic, and that is the foundation for abuse.

PATRICK: The other parts of the church that are not misogynistic, they swing the pendulum way the other way. Then they have an imbalance like a reverse discrimination. So that's not healthy either, because that's harming women and doing the same thing we do to men on that side" we're overvaluing them. So the balance is that everyone has value, and everyone has a place and a role.

NATALIE: And it's individual. It's not based on your gender or your socio-economic status.

PATRICK: Yes.

NATALIE: It's based on your personhood.

PATRICK: This is the thing. God is the author of life. You are profoundly valuable because you exist. End of story. But all of religion, regardless of its type, packs meaning into the human based on the theological understanding. So if you are in a Bill Gothard seminar your obedience to your parents is how you get your value. Or if you are in a Pentecostal environment, "Did you speak in tongues? Yes? Then you have value."

Again, culture at large does it as you said: socioeconomic. "That guy is driving a nice car, so he must be successful. He's a good guy. He's better than me." No. But we do that kind of stuff. This is one of the things I say over and over in my program: "You are profoundly valuable right now. You don't have to do anything. You don't have to change anything. You are enough at this moment. Can your circumstances change? Yes! Good or bad? Yes! But regardless of what happens externally, your internal value does not change." This is one of the problems with codependence, particularly codependence that is supported by bad theology. Your value as a soul is dependent on the happiness of the person you are with, which is absurd!

NATALIE: Yes. And impossible.

PATRICK: Absolutely. I call it the death treadmill.

NATALIE: This has been a valuable conversation. I really appreciate your coming on here and giving us some of your time. I was wondering if you could let us know a little bit more about your program. My program is closed until April of 2021. [The Flying Free Sisterhood program is currently open and accepting applications! Apply today at joinflyingfree.com] But your program is wide open.

PATRICK: It is.

NATALIE: So why don't you tell people about what you have to offer?

PATRICK: My program is called Pathway to Hope. You can go to patrickdoyle.life and get information about it. I've done a whole new basic set of videos from start to finish, from helping you identify all the way through the process of living free, in those videos. Then we do live Q&A's, member spotlights, and a forum. The forum, to me, is one of the greatest things I've ever done. The forum is managed by someone so that there is lots of safety there.

This is the thing I see all the time, and I know you can attest to this, Natalie, that safety is imperative for ladies to get healing. Having a safe place to talk honest and raw, with no judgment... You can be in a complete place of deconstruction or you can be praising Jesus. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if you've just realized that your husband is a nut job or if you are on the other side and are trying to decide who you are going to date. None of that matters to me. What matters to me is the safety. In that there is a lot of beauty.

The other thing that happens is that your value as a soul is reinforced in that safety, and that is what gives ladies the courage to take the steps that are required to get to a healthy place. Tell me how you feel about this. (I know this isn't really about Pathway to Hope.) But I am always amazed, Natalie. You are a good example of it. I've talked to so many ladies, and I see it in the forums all the time: the level of constant harm that they have experienced, yet none of them are mean, bitter, ugly people. They are so caring and so loving. They are hurting, but they don't want to do harm to anyone. I think that is some sort of miracle that they don't just hate everybody.

NATALIE: It is a miracle.

PATRICK: It's the Spirit!

NATALIE: I think women who tend to be like that tend to be targeted. They are easy prey because they are so kind. They really do care about other people, and they are

also very trusting. Nasty women aren't going to stick around with an abusive man. They're going to give their man the finger and walk away.

PATRICK: Yeah. They've got the "no crazy allowed" down.

NATALIE: Exactly. But for the rest of us, we loved our husbands and we just really wanted to make it work really badly, twenty-five years worth badly, and we just couldn't do it.

PATRICK: Yeah. So go to patrickdoyle.life and check out Pathway to Hope and see what you think. I'm grateful for your encouragement of this process from your perspective and what you're doing. I think, as you said before, there is a little bit of a movement happening here.

NATALIE: I believe so. I really do. So let's all jump on board. For those of you who are a brand-new listener or maybe have been listening for a while, head over to Apple iTunes and give this podcast a rating. Here's the thing about podcasts. There are algorithms. Google, Spotify, and iTunes will show this podcast to more people as a recommendation when it gets more traffic, and they really look at ratings and reviews.

You can help get this podcast in front of the eyeballs of other people by going over there. You don't have to leave your name. People leave all kinds of interesting names when they leave a review. Or to be super easy, just leave a rating. Pick a number from one to five. Actually, don't go over there if you're going to say a one. (I'm kidding. You can.)

PATRICK: You can't rate us a one! Come on!

NATALIE: What's interesting about this work, Patrick, and I'm sure you can speak to this, we make a lot of enemies because... I've been accused of being a marriage breaker-upper, a daughter of the devil, and whatever. So there are some interesting ratings and reviews on my book and on Apple iTunes. So those of you who aren't like that, go over there and counteract the negativity from all the misplaced abusive men out there.

PATRICK: I can so relate to that.

NATALIE: Well, thank you so much for listening. Thank you, Patrick, for coming on.

PATRICK: My pleasure.

NATALIE: Until next time, fly free.