

The Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 337 - Praying for a Miracle—When the Miracle Might Be You Walking Away

Heads up, friend: What you're about to read is a raw, unedited transcript straight from the robots. That means you'll find some weird words, funky punctuation, and moments that make you go, "Huh?" If you want the real experience (and to actually know what's going on), I recommend reading the polished article, listening to the full episode, or watching it on 1.5x speed with captions on. Your brain will thank you.

Natalie: I used to cry on my bathroom floor begging God to save my marriage. But what if the miracle I was praying for was actually me walking away?

I remember so many nights, so many nights, you guys nights when I would go into our tiny bedroom bathroom, lock the door. Curl up on the floor with my face pressed against the cold tile. Tears streaming down my cheeks, whispering through sobs, begging God for the millionth time. Please dear Heavenly Father, fix this marriage.

Change his heart. Make him see what he's doing to me. I will do anything. You've got to save me. I can't do this anymore. I had been praying these same prayers for two decades. I memorized scripture. I joined and even led women's Bible studies about being a godly wife. I read tons of marriage books. I worked hard on submitting and staying quiet when I wanted to speak up in indignation.

I tried harder and then harder now. Was I perfect? No. Sometimes the deep rage at what was happening to me broke through, and I yelled, sometimes I even said the word damn when things got really terrible. And then afterwards, of course, I would try to repair, I would apologize. I would ask for forgiveness for being a rebellious woman who had no self-control.

And then I would go back to quietly baking bread. Burying children, house cleaning, homeschooling, cooking meals, nursing, and holding it together without any encouragement, praise, or appreciation. I believed that it was even selfish for me to want or need those things. And what did I get in return? I got more blame, more passive aggressive criticisms, more gaslighting.

That left me wondering if I was going insane. More moving goalposts of what would finally make him happy. And I just couldn't ever figure out where, where the goalpost was. And I'm not the only one. I have worked with thousands of Christian women now over the years, and the stories are all eerily similar.

If we had a magic ball and could see everyone on this planet, how many women would we see curled up on their bathroom floors begging for a miracle? Through my classes and my coaching, I help women come to a place where the dawning light of awareness will break through in their core being. That speaks this truth.

What if the miracle isn't him changing? What if the miracle is you finding the courage to walk away? Now, I remember when that thought terrified me. It contradicted everything I thought I knew about being a Christian wife, but it also sent a little flutter of hope through my chest for the first time that I, that the, from the first time that I had that thought.

And somewhere along the way, I think many of us have absorbed the same message that God is going to heal your marriage if you have enough faith. But you guys, it's the prosperity gospel just applied to relationships. If you pray enough, if you believe enough, if you submit enough, then God is obligated to transform your spouse.

But here's what we need to understand. Nowhere in scripture does God promise that our marriage is gonna be healed if we just hang in there long enough? Now, you might read that in women's marriage books written by men and women who are either uninformed or inexperienced or maybe just plain ignorant of the impact of psychological abuse.

But you're not gonna read that in scripture because I promise you, God is very aware of psychological abuse. Nowhere does Jesus teach that we should stay in harmful situations in order to prove our loyalty to the institution of marriage. In Matthew 10 14, when Jesus sent out his disciples, he told them, if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.

Jesus did not say if they abuse you well stay longer and pray harder. No, he gave them permission to leave unwelcoming places throughout the Bible. God is described as a defender of the oppressed, a protector of the vulnerable close to the broken hearted. Psalm 34 18 reminds us that the Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

If your spirit is being crushed daily in your marriage, God is not asking you to endure that crushing as some sort of test of faith. In Joshua three, the Israelites were about to cross the Jordan River into the promised Land. Now, God had instructed the priests to carry the arc of the covenant and to protect it, but he also said you step into the river first.

Now, this wasn't this river, this was not a, an easy thing to go down a bank and step into the river with the arc of the covenant. And they were instructed, you, you, we, they could not let that arc fall. It was holy, but they obeyed. And when the priest's feet touch the water, the flow of the river stopped and allowed the people to cross on dry ground.

Joshua tells us the idea in this behind the story is that. They had to step into the water first before it parted. Sometimes the miracle doesn't happen until you take that first terrifying step. I, I also wanna challenge the notion that divorce always breaks God's heart. I believe what breaks God's heart is abuse.

What breaks God, God's heart is seeing his daughters diminished and devalued and dehumanized day after day. While being told that it's their Christian duty to endure it, I not only believe it breaks God's heart, I believe it blasphemes God's name because it tells a lie about the character of God. When Jesus encountered the woman caught in adultery, he didn't lecture her about her marital obligations.

He defended her and spoke to her with dignity and sent her off to begin a new life. Go and sin no more, he said. Sometimes going is exactly what we need to do to break the cycle of sin that's happening in our homes. I also wanna talk about this idea of waiting on the Lord, because I think it's one of the most misused concepts in Christian circles when it comes to difficult marriages.

Yes, scripture tells us to wait on the Lord, but biblical waiting is not passive. It's not sitting in harm's way doing nothing. Then expecting God to send a lightning bolt from heaven. We can't go out into the middle of a freeway and then expect that, that, that no cars are gonna hit us. But in Isaiah 40 31, we read, we read what it actually does mean to wait on God.

Those who wait on the Lord. What's gonna happen to them? They're gonna renew their strength. They are going to mount up with wings like eagles. They're going to run and not be weary. They're going to walk and not faint. So notice the action words here. Mounting up, running, walking, waiting on the Lord in scripture is about drawing strength from God for the journey ahead.

It's not about staying stuck. We could call it miracle inertia, where we beg God for divine intervention while simultaneously ignoring all of the small, clear promptings to act. We pray for a miracle, but we dismiss the lifeboat that God has sent our way sometimes in the form of a caring therapist or maybe a domestic violence shelter or a hotline or friends who've offered a safe place for us to stay.

Here's a question that changed everything for me, and I'm gonna offer it gently to you. What if the thing that you're praying that God will fix is the very thing that he's inviting you to walk away from? What if God has been answering your prayers all along? Not by changing your spouse, but by trying to lead you to safety.

What if the still small voice urging you to protect yourself and your children is actually the Holy Spirit? Moses waited 40 years in the desert, but when God spoke from the burning bush, Moses had to act. Esther waited and fasted before approaching the king, but ultimately she had to walk into that throne room.

Noah waited for instructions, but then he had to build the arc. Waiting on God doesn't mean doing nothing. It means listening attentively for guidance, and then having the courage to follow that guidance even when it conflicts with what your pastor or your family or your church culture has told you about.

Marriage is, let me share with you what happens when women recognize that they themselves just might be the miracle that they've been praying for. Jane prayed for 17 years for her marriage to be healed. Her husband's emotional abuse and spiritual manipulation left her with chronic anxiety problems with her digestive system and panic attacks that the doctors couldn't explain.

Three years after she finally found the courage to leave, her health began to return. Her children who used to walk on eggshells and struggle in school, they started to thrive, and most surprisingly to her, her relationship with God started to deepen in ways that she never thought was possible. She told me, I realized that I had been worshipping my marriage instead of God leaving felt like a failure at first.

I. Looking back on it now, I see that it was actually an act of faithfulness, or what about Molly? The first six months after leaving her abusive husband were the hardest of her entire life. Her church shunned her. Her in-laws, started spreading rumors about her. She had to move from a beautiful home to a tiny apartment and then get two jobs to make ends meet, but then something happened.

She began to experience genuine peace for the first time in decades. She used to think that life might be in her system was so used to all the chaos in her home. She thought maybe it would be boring to actually live alone and have nothing going on. But then she told me, turns out it's not boring. It's actually peaceful.

She didn't even remember what peace felt like or what about Sonya? She stayed for the kids. She believed that an intact family with an abusive father was better than what she called a broken home. Now, I would argue that a home with a abusive father is already broken. But that's kind of how we've been taught, right?

But after she left, her teenage daughter came to her in tears and said, mom, I have been praying since I was a little girl, that you would find the strength to take us away from him. 'cause her children didn't need a martyred mother. They needed a mother who modeled healthy boundaries and self-respect.

Guys, these women aren't failures because they left their marriages. They're not spiritual disappointments. They're not women who gave up on their marriages. These are women who finally recognize that walking away from destruction can be a holy act of faith. And each of these women would probably tell you that sometimes the miracle is you walking away.

Now, I know that for many of you listening, the thought of leaving feels like betraying God. It might feel like death because in many ways it is a death. It's the death of a dream that you had. It's a death of a marriage that you wanted. It's the death of a future that you imagined. So I wanna acknowledge that grief.

It's real and it's profound, and it deserves to be honored. I also wanna gently suggest that walking away from abuse is not walking away from God. In fact, it might be walking toward him more, more fully. Many of us have been spiritually abused to believe that our submission to a harmful spouse somehow is the equivalency of submitting to God.

We've been taught that our suffering in marriage earns us spiritual brownie points. We've internalized the message that keeping a marriage intact no matter what the cost to our souls is what makes us valuable to God. But that's not true. Your value to God is inherent. It was established at creation when he made you and his image.

It was confirmed at the cross when Jesus died for you, nothing, not your marital status, not your capacity to endure mistreatment. Nothing is gonna add or subtract to that value that you have. In one Corinthians seven 15, Paul writes

that if an unbelieving spouse leaves, let it be so the brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances.

God has called us to live in peace. Now, many biblical scholars extend this understanding to abusive situations because living with ongoing abuse is not living in peace, and God wants peace for you and for me, I think it's safe to assume that a man who is abusive to his wife does not believe or embrace the love of Jesus Christ.

He is not a believer in that sense. Now, that doesn't mean God doesn't love him or that God won't save him. It just means that this type of man is choosing to walk in his own belief that he is a demi God and has the right to rule over other people in his home. A demi God is not a follower or a fan of Jesus Christ.

He is a follower and a fan of himself. And he uses and abuses the name of Christ in order to manipulate the people around him and to serve his own wicked desires for power. Now, if that isn't the definition of an unbeliever, I don't know what is. You're not betraying God. When you seek safety, you're not failing him by refusing to be mistreated and you're not disappointing him.

When you say enough. You are aligning with the God who consistently throughout scripture leads his people out of slavery, out of bondage, out of Egypt, and into the Promised land. But sometimes you have to walk through the wilderness of rejection and grief to get there. God is not waiting for you to be more holy by staying.

He's not measuring your faith by your willingness to endure mistreatment. He's already with you. Exit plan. He's the strength in your shaking hands, he's the wisdom guiding your decisions. He's the whisper that says you're allowed to go. You're not a failure. You are the miracle. You are the answer to the prayer that you have been praying all these years.

The God who parted the Red Sea, who brought, who brought water from a rock. Who raised Jesus from the dead. That same God is powerful enough to guide you to a life of peace, to heal your broken heart and to restore what the locusts have eaten. So if you are sitting in this space between hope and despair, wondering what your next step is, I want you to know that clarity will come trust.

The still small voice inside of you. Trust the physical symptoms that your body is manifesting. Trust the weariness of your soul. They're telling you something so important. And if you're craving a community of Christian women who

understand exactly what you're going through, who don't judge you for your questions and your doubts, who recognize the complex reality of Christian marriage and divorce.

The Flying Free Kaleidoscope is here for you. We are walking miracles too. And there's room for you with us. Visit [join Flying Free dot com](http://joinflyingfree.com) for more information. I wanna read a short chapter from my book, all The Scary Little Gods that describes the moment when I realized I was always meant to be the miracle that I had been praying for all along.

It's chapter 68 and it's called another hotel room. On April 1st, 2016, I checked into another hotel. This time I was alone and armed with 24 journals I had kept throughout the course of my marriage. I was going to spend the next 48 hours giving my full attention to what the past versions of me were trying to say, and then I was going to make a final decision about whether or not I should file for divorce.

I played instrumental music on Spotify and began reading I. When I came to something I believed was significant, I typed it out on my laptop along with my thoughts, and as I read, I noticed the patterns showing up. Subtle patterns, more obvious patterns. Patterns. Not just in my relationship with my husband, but in my relationships with my family of origin and some of my church friends.

I read about what happened and how I filtered my circumstances through my programming. And how those program beliefs flooded my body with fear and shame, and how I subsequently responded and showed up for my life in the same ways. Over and over again, I saw clearly how my beliefs had created a never ending loop.

I would never be able to escape unless I interrupted it. I completed an exercise where I imagined what divorcing John might be like the first year, and then five and 10 years later I wrote that I would probably spend much of my time crying. I would be lonely and experience feelings of isolation and sadness.

I would grieve for my kids and the loss of the family I had dreamed of and tried so hard to build, but then things would probably settle down. We'd all find our new normal. I would get therapy for the kids and we'd work through it. We'd get stronger. We would heal. I would not have financial stability at first, and we would have to go back to pinching pennies for a while.

Maybe I would have to move in five years. I would look back on everything like a bad dream. I would be proud. I finally went through with it and I would

wonder why I waited for so long. I might grieve the years I wasted. I might be remarried to a healthy man and discover what marriage was intended to be.

My kids would be able to see it too, and might have a better chance of recognizing and marrying a healthy partner. In 10 years, I would've sold my soap business and I'd be helping Christian women just like me, while also providing for my family. I would be able to help my kids go through college and discover their own life goals.

I would be happy and free. Then I wrote down what my life would look like if I stayed with John. I would continue to experience emotional turmoil, frustration, and confusion. I would continue to live with foggy thinking, emotional and physical stress and instability. I would continue to deal with gaslighting criticism and the inability to solve problems or find closure.

I would have no hope of anything changing or being different, and I would continue to wonder. Death would be better than life. Basically, all I could see in one year, five years, 10 years, and all the years up to my death was suffering and darkness on April 3rd, 2016, before I checked out. I fell to my knees on that hotel room floor and promised the creator that I would do whatever I needed to do for this woman who had poured out her heart to me through her journals all weekend.

I would be bad in the eyes of everyone else in order to be kind and good to this precious human being named Natalie. I promised I would be God's agent of rescue in her life. It was me all along. I was the one called to do this thing, this big scary thing. I was going to divorce John's ass. You can get my book on Amazon.

It comes in paperback, kindle, and audible formats. I'm the one who reads it on audible. All the scary little gods. That's all I have for you for this week. Until next time, fly free.