

# The Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 340 - He Looked Perfect on Paper: Maile's Story

**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:** What if your dream marriage turned into your worst nightmare and no one believed you? Because he looked perfect on paper. Maile thought she had found healing and love. But behind closed doors, it was emotional manipulation, spiritual gaslighting, and escalating violence. Today you'll hear how one Christian woman went from silenced and stuck to free and thriving.

Her story will challenge what you think you know about abuse and give you hope if you are stuck in your own silent prison.

Today I have with me a survivor. Her name is Maile. She's been part of my programs for many years. Maile and I have met up at Butterfly Bootcamp a few times, um, which is a, a kind of a meetup that we do for all of the members in Flying Free and Flying Hire. She is part of an amazing group of women in the Southern California region, uh, who are, who have been members of Flying Free and Flying higher.

And, um, my daughter and I went to a wedding down there a couple of years ago and we got a chance to meet up with those women and see what their group is like. And it was so much fun. Maile is like such a spark in our programs and I'm really, I was really excited when she agreed to tell her story for the Flying Free Podcast.

So, and she's also been on a couple of the divorced Christian Woman podcast episodes as well. So if any of you are listeners of both, you will. Um. You'll, you maybe will recognize her from over there as well. So welcome Maile. Thanks. Thanks for

**Maile:** having me. It's, it's such a privilege and my favorite part is I get to hang out with you for a bit.

Yay.

**Natalie:** Yay. Yes. I know these and these interviews, it's like, it is just kind of like hanging out with a new friend. Well, you're not a new friend. I think you're an old friend, but. It's so much fun. I love it. And, and honestly, the listeners love these survivor stories. They eat them up like crazy. I was just talking about this with my daughter.

She's like, oh my gosh. People love hearing the stories because they, it shows people what's possible. They see people who were, they hear the stories of how people were so stuck and so lost and so confused and in so much pain. And then to be able to see what's possible down the road for them gives people so much hope.

So I'm really grateful for your being willing to come on here and share your story. Alright, we're gonna dive in. Why don't you start off by telling us when you first noticed something was off in your re Well, first of all, how many years have you been divorced now?

**Maile:** Um, I've now been divorced this summer

**Natalie:** will be three years.

Okay. All right. So you've been out for three years and, um, you have one child that you shared between the two of you

**Maile:** and actually I, excuse me. Oh yeah, we don't share him. He is from a previous marriage, so I've been divorced twice.

**Natalie:** Okay. Oh, nice. So you, you are also then in the divorce twice club. Yes. It's amazing sorority.

Yeah. Seriously. Um, for those who don't know, I just, just joined that club in March of this past year, and I'm not telling details about that whole thing 'cause it, it's not, it's not important, but I mean, it's important to me, but it doesn't have to be important to everyone else. But, um, okay. Okay. I, I probably knew that at some point, but I spaced it off in my brain.

Um, so, okay, so we're gonna foc, are we gonna focus on your second sit, your second situation? Yes. Okay. All right. So why don't you tell us. Um, how, how you first noticed that something was off, something was not quite right about that relationship.

**Maile:** Okay. So, um, I can tell you about that first relationship, the first marriage very quickly.

Okay. I was already in my thirties, early thirties when I met my son's dad. Um, and we were divorced within a few years. It was pretty brief. We were separated for the very first time when he was, he, my son wasn't even walking yet, so very young anyways. Um, the best thing about that, actually, it's a blur.

Sometimes it feels like a blur, but the best thing about that relationship was my son. And I love being a mom and I love seeing him grow. And he's 17 now and he's just growing into this amazing, creative, strong young man. So, um, that was the end into that chapter. Fast forward when he was about six years old, um, I got remarried or married to someone else.

We'd already been divorced for several, quite a few years. Okay. And I was already in my thirties by now. I was like 39 and we met in August and we got married at Thanksgiving. Oh wow. That's a whirlwind romance so vast. I don't recommend it. But when did I first feel or sense that things were kind of off?

I would like to say maybe within the first year, but when I get super honest with myself, it was even in the dating. In the dating those first two months. Yes. Yeah. There was so much. Now that I understand there was so much love bombing, um, so much wanting to be together all the time. Um. My ex wanted to be together all the time.

It was like we started dating and we saw each other every single day. And, um, it was just overwhelming. But at the time I took that as like very flattering. And he was, uh, a Christian. I was a Christian. We were both in ministry and both educators. So everything looked great. We both had sons from previous marriages.

Uh, so I thought it would be awesome, you know, we were just in this place of healing and, um, recovering from our past relationships. So I thought it would be really healthy, but there was a lot of moodiness on his part. Um, he would just stonewall and disconnect so quickly if he was upset. And I noticed that if he wasn't happy, it was like nobody could be happy.

And he wasn't at that time aggressive. He would just go so quiet, like slip into depression like so quickly if he wasn't happy. And so I noticed, um, I noticed things were off when he would disconnect if we had a disagreement on something. But I also noticed that he had brought up a couple things that I hadn't shared with him.

And now that I look back, or later, I looked back and I think he had read through some of my journals. Oh, wow. And um, I felt like, wow, maybe he just really wants to get to know me. But some of those journals were from when I was in Celebrate Recovery, so I had been going through the steps and some of them were like very raw entries.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Well, and those, that's pri that's your private, like it's okay to, if you chose to share those things, but if you didn't, that's your private, that's definitely a crossing of boundaries. A violation of your privacy.

**Maile:** Absolutely. And so when I would discuss some of these issues or he would bring them up, um, he would be like, that's not what you, you don't know, that's not what happened.

I'm like, how do you know what happened? You weren't even there. But he was like, dead set on. No, it happened this way. And that's how I really felt like, Hmm. I think he went through my stuff.

**Natalie:** Wow.

**Maile:** Um, two days before we got married, he had gone through my email and found, and, and he must have searched the name of someone I had dated before, just very briefly.

Dated before, way before. And he showed me and he was really upset. It wasn't anything inappropriate, it was just like, Hey, how are you? And it wasn't from during the time where we were dating, it was from like months and months before. And he said, that's it. I don't wanna get married. It's over. And, and then he just went silent.

And I was like, should we talk to someone about this? We didn't talk to anybody about it. We just like hashed it out for uh, for a couple of hours. Anyways, we got married. Well, and that

**Natalie:** was actually, that was evidence that he had no problem with snooping around your private stuff. So when you have a feeling that he probably read your journals, you also have that feeling, but you also have evidence that he was not above snooping around your emails, which why, you know, so that was his, he basically showed you, this is my mo.

I snoop. I can read your private things and I have a right to that, to doing that. He had no respect for you.

**Maile:** No.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Maile:** And gross. We went, we got married. Gross. Yeah, I know. We got married. And then on the, on the honeymoon, um, he had me change my phone number because in our talking in the honeymoon, we had talked about how um, sometimes people from our past come back into our lives, maybe just an acquaintance or someone we dated.

They don't know that you've moved on and gotten married. So they're like, Hey, how are you? And that you let them know, you know what? I'm married now, I'm happy, blah, blah, blah. So I, we were kind of sharing that back and forth. But when I shared, yes, somebody had recently got in touch with me that I knew from before, and I explained to him, I'm, I'm married.

And he was like, oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know that's that. So we were on our honeymoon and he was like, that happened. You need to change your number. And so on my honeymoon, I changed my phone number. I remember calling my family and saying, by the way, I've changed my phone number. And that was that. And that was also the end of like my own personal social media account.

After that, he didn't have a social media account. After that, moving forward, we shared a social media account.

**Natalie:** Okay. So he right on the honeymoon, basically, he's taking control of your life. You are not an adult autonomous adult anymore. Now you do. Now you're, he's in charge.

**Maile:** Yes. So I definitely felt like something was off.

Yeah. And I couldn't, even just in talking about this and, and thinking about this prior to sitting down with you, I could feel that anxiousness. Yeah. Yeah. Have tools now to just regulate, but. It, it just continued throughout the honeymoon. I remember even on the way home, driving home from going away from our honeymoon, we were, you know, I thought I was in a very safe place and that he was a safe person.

So we had been talking about past trauma growing up, what, what our childhood was like, and I shared with him that I had been abused by someone, not my immediate family, but a outside family member growing up. And he had too, I mean, we had kind of connected on that and I don't know the details, but

just these are the things that we've gone through in our counseling and our therapy, because we had both already been through some counseling and therapy, and I shared that with him and we were talking about that and he was like, I didn't know that happened.

And now I understand gaslighting. I didn't know at that time, but he said, I didn't know that happened. And I was like. Yeah, you did. We talked about this and he said, well, if I would've known that it happened, I wouldn't have ever gotten married. Unbelievable. And he was like, whoa, we have now been married like four days, five days.

He's like, yeah, I, I, I wouldn't have if I knew that and I, you wouldn't lose any time. And then he just would go quiet. I mean, we have had road trips where, from Southern California all the way to San Francisco. He would not speak and he would just, it was very manipulative.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Yeah. I just wanna jump in and say, um, for people who are listening in any relationship, and I've observed this, this is, this is a fact.

I mean, you can go online and look at, look this up. And I've observed it even in my older children when they're dating, there's a honeymoon stage in every relationship that's between nine and 18 months. Like where. Usually people are on their best behavior. Everything seems good. There's a lot of chemical, you know, hormones and all the good stuff is going on, and it's, it's usually not the time that you wanna make a decision to, to spend the rest of your life with someone during that time.

This is not to criticize you. Most people don't wait, you know, like this is the time that the relat all relationships feel the best. This is like the golden, this is like the rom-com moments and the golden, you know, parts about a, any relationship. But after that honeymoon period is over, that's when you start to see, and sometimes it can glass, it can end sooner, but usually, you know, nine to 18 months is average.

After that honeymoon period is over, that's when you start to see the real person, the, the real. Human on the other side starts to show up their true values, their core, you know, their, so if anyone's listening to this and maybe is starting a new relationship or thinking about getting into a new relationship, just be aware of that and give it time.

Give them time to show you who they really are. Maybe they really are as amazing as they look on paper. 'cause it sounds like your guy looked great on

paper. But you don't, you won't know until you let, until you let the story play out and get past the point where all of those, that initial amazing honeymoon stuff is, is over and the real relationships start settling in.

And I, I've seen this cycle happen over and over again with my older kids and, uh, the relationships that have lasted. Are the ones that get through that honeymoon period and then go beyond that, and then it just settles. You know what I mean? There's just something that kind of settles about the whole relationship and you just know this is a person I am truly safe with, but you really don't know that until then.

So, um, all right. So, but I, I, I'm just so amazed that as soon as this guy hooked you, like he was very predatory Maile as soon as he hooked you in and those, and, and he was testing you a little bit even before you got married. No, I just want people to notice that he was testing to see like, can I hook this bait?

And when he saw that he could, which was not nothing bad on you. Usually the people, the, the people that predators try to go after are people who are kind, loving, empathic. It's all of these amazing qualities about you that make you hook, which is. Just so sad and tragic in some ways, because then it makes you, it takes people like us and it makes us go, well, maybe we shouldn't be like that.

Maybe we should be more skeptical. Maybe we should be more, um, you know, less vulnerable. Maybe we should be All the things that make us great material for amazing relationships can also then, and, and when we give those things to a predator. But we don't know, you don't know that you're dealing with a predator oftentimes until it's too late.

So I'm just saying that not for you, Maile, you're out, you're dating, you're, you know, well, actually we can talk about that later, but you are, you're starting over in your life and, but I'm, but I just say that for the people who might be in a relationship right now that they're seeing, like if you're listening right now and you're noticing, oh, my word, I'm recognizing some of the things that Maile went through.

Don't dismiss that. Don't ignore that. Pay attention to it. It's so important to pay attention to that stuff. Okay. Maile, oh, go ahead. I'm

**Maile:** sorry. No, I was gonna say, it's so important, it was very confusing in a sense where I wasn't not a walking Christian, I wasn't just Flying by the seat of my pants. I felt like, oh, I had prayed about this.



We both felt like, oh, this is such a blessing. And also there was this purity culture burden. Yeah. Even in the late thirties, we were both 39 to not live together unless we were married. Yeah. So there was a transition in his job, and you know what? Let's just, let's get married. We don't wanna live together.

We don't wanna just. Sleep together. We really wanna build a life. We love our kids, we wanna have a family. You know what, I think this is what God would want.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Do it. That's a perfect example of I think, why a lot of Christians get married actually. And the Bible even there's, I think there's a verse. It doesn't it say it's better to be married than to burn.

So I've heard, I've heard people that are like, yeah, look, we should get married in the church that I was in when, where I met my first husband, there are a lot of couples that at that time, that got married that are now divorced, that kind of got married under that mentality and, and with those beliefs. Um, but those, those kind of marriages are not, we think we put a Christian spin on it.

But ultimately those kind of kinds of marriages can be really problematic And, um. I don't know. We won't get into a discussion about all of that in this story, but it is definitely, it is definitely a, an issue. What can you tell us what's now, as the relationship prog, how long were you married to him, by the way?

Um, from start to finish, it was eight

**Maile:** years.

**Natalie:** Okay. So during those eight years, what were some of the ways that you were emotionally and spiritually abused? And The reason why I asked this question is because I want people who are listening to see all the different ways that abusers abuse, they, you know, not just your story, but the other stories that we bring in here.

I want people to see examples like real life examples. So they, they see that it's, there's not just one size fits all. Every abusive individual is different and has a different mo and has a different way of doing things. And you can even profile your person to see what, what it, what their particular bent is.

So tell us about yours. What were some ways that he took advantage of you and co. Controlled and coerced you?



**Maile:** Well, there was definitely always the emotional abuse and now that I am much more educated and I understand, I've been through some things and your resources have been incredibly helpful. Life changing anyways.

Um, the emotional abuse was always there and I really can see that it was in, um, controlling our time. Um, if he wasn't happy or things weren't done, it was extreme. There was extreme moods, not necessarily in the beginning, like violent and aggressive, just moodiness, like coming home and not even saying hi, no eye contact, silent treatment for me.

And sometimes the kids for like multiple days, not just a couple hours, but like multiple days until like he needed something. Yeah, so there was a lot of emotional, um, I wasn't hanging out with friends as much anymore. There was a lot of criticism towards my friends and my family. Not initially, but as time went on, that's definitely how there was emotional abuse.

And then I could see it kind of spill into, and I was thinking about this like in like an iceberg. This was all underwater. Then it became more spiritual, verbal. But in spiritual, in an example would be like, my parents have been married for 50 years. They're amazing believers, and I, I think they're like very authentic believers.

And he would say like, your mom would never talk to your dad like that. Or Your mom would always just let your dad do, make the decisions. Don't you wanna be like a, a marriage like this? Don't you wanna have marriage like theirs? You know,

**Natalie:** and you're like, yeah, I sure wish you were like my dad.

**Maile:** Yeah. He's like your mom.

She submits. I don't understand why you just can't submit things like that. Yeah. And, um, you're not putting your marriage first. It was always that a criticism of, well, you know, you're not putting your marriage first. But really, I think it was like he wanted to be, first he was very jealous of the kids' time and attention didn't understand like, why is homework taking so long?

You sit down and do homework with them. Then he's like, you know what, it's homework is taking so long, it's taking away from our time to hang out. I'm like, who hangs out with their spouse Monday through Friday during those prime time? Eat, take showers, um, do homework time,

**Natalie:** nobody. Right, right. There's other things to life, like it's not just about you dear.

Yes,

**Maile:** so there was a lot of that. That was the emotional, but then it became verbal and then I didn't understand there was different types of physical abuse. So then it started to get physical and it was like sprinkling here and there. I still feel like this was like the bottom of the iceberg, and it wasn't until like things reached the surface and were like visibly physical that I started to really just die inside.

I was probably dying along the way, wilting, but by the time it got like physically, visibly physical, I was like just dead inside.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Wow. I'm so sorry that that happened to you. What did you, you know, we survivors have different ways of coping and surviving in situations like that. What do you, what do you see when you look back on your former self?

What do you see yourself doing in that situation in order to survive or to try to fix the problem that you think is your problem? And were those strategies affect, were any of those strategies effective? And why or why not?

**Maile:** Um, some of the things that I did were, I just tried harder, um, worked harder, tried to keep things cleaner.

Um, just became a very much yes, yes kind of person. I wasn't thinking for myself. I felt like I was, I would lose myself for, not have my own back or just make compromises of my time or what I wanted to do. I said no to friend things. I said. To the point where like nobody was really asking me to go do anything anymore.

And not even like coffee. 'cause they just knew like I probably couldn't. And, um, I wasn't going to as many along the way. I wasn't going to many as many family things or I started to show up by myself. So those were ineffective things. And also

**Natalie:** I, although can I jump in here and just say you were trying to keep yourself safe though.

You were trying to keep his abuse from escalating. Mm-hmm. And that was how, that was how you did it. That's how you have to do it when you're in a relationship like that. So I just wanna acknowledge that.

**Maile:** Oh yeah. So in that way, less effective, but it wasn't effective in making him go change or get better.

Yeah. It wasn't effective that way. Yeah. And um, one thing that really was not effective was when I met him where he was. So if he was argumentative, I've fought back with the same amount of. Aggression. Or if he cussed, then I would cuss. He broke something, then I would break something. And that wasn't the kind of character I had.

I didn't have those dynamics in other relationships where as he had had those kind of relationships with other people, not talking romantic relationships, even just friendships like falling outs, you know, having conflict with friends and then you have a fallout and you don't talk anymore. I didn't have those kinds of things in my friendships or my family, so I was trying to meet him at that and it was not effective.

Okay. And what really wasn't effective when it was for the marriage was when I started to really work on myself and find healing for myself. That became, that was very effective for me, but it wasn't effective in the relationship. Things actually got worse. Yes.

**Natalie:** As they do. Yeah. Because they, they want you to disappear and be a dead version of yourself.

And when you start coming back alive again, they can't have that. So they escalate. Did his abuse escalate then as you worked on healing yourself and Absolutely.

**Maile:** I really feel like as I went to, I went to counseling, actually, this is interesting. I went to counseling. The kids were in counseling. Everybody was in counseling at some point, except for him.

Yeah, he wouldn't go. But, um, as I worked on myself and as I got healing for myself, I became much less tolerant of certain behaviors. And if he didn't wanna go to church, then I would go to church for me. And if one son didn't wanna go, I would take the one that wanted to go and we would go and we would still do our thing.

And I just had to, because I knew inside. If I didn't, I would just wither away. And I could see that even physically, I used to get like a lot of hives and a lot of allergies during that time. I had alopecia, I had, my hair had been falling out. I just had a lot of headaches. I was constantly inside like anxious and I didn't even realize it.

It was like, I felt like that frog in the pot, on the stove that just acclimate with the temperature of the water, not even realizing they're boiling.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Yeah. And I, I want to, I wanna draw that out too, that this kind, that abuse, our bodies do react to it. Our bodies almost as if there is a pathogen that's entered our bodies and it is trying to get rid of it.

Our bodies release chemicals like cortisol and uh, adrenaline and things that can cause and, and. Histamine that things that can cause our bodies to react in very physical ways to abuse. So if, if anyone's listening and they are having chronic health problems in their relationship, there's definitely a correlation between the two.

**Maile:** Yes, absolutely.

**Natalie:** There's a good book called The Body Keeps the Score by Vessel, vessel VanDerKolk that talks about this if you're, uh, if anyone's listening and wants to read a book, that actually goes into that in greater detail. So what, what made you decide to get out then? When did you, like, how did you get out the courage to actually think about leaving and, and was there any feeling or sense of like, gosh, I've already been divorced once, um, this is so humiliating or shameful that I would go through another divorce.

Was there anything, did that ever cross your mind?

**Maile:** That did and there was even gaslighting in that sense because. If we had conflict and we were having a sober moment, we're like, you know, this is not working out there. It was like, well, Maile, like we got married not to get divorced and we are gonna work through this because we, we don't wanna be divorced again.

And I remember him telling me like, I, meaning he, I don't wanna grow old by myself, I don't know about you, but I don't wanna grow old by myself. And now I'm thinking back like, did you expect me to take care of you? I mean, yeah, I understand we take care of each other, but it, that's a whole nother story.

But, um, it was really confusing and I didn't wanna be divorced again. I really felt like this was my real marriage because of the length of time. It had been longer than a very brief first marriage. And I just. I really wanted it to work. And I was walking, you know, I, there was never a time that I rebelled against God and my relationship with the Lord.

So at that time I had mentors who had told me, you know, you just need to hang in there for the good part. And the marriage is like sandpaper, you know, it's just wrestling through it and then the edges will be smoother and you gotta get to the good part. The first five years always suck. Oh my

**Natalie:** gosh. Okay.

You know what the, so whenever people in the forum are like, well, he's being so nice now, I always put a picture of the abuse cycle and I say, so tell me, look at this picture and tell me where in the abuse cycle you are. So you were literally getting advice from people that were saying, just wait. Yes. So yes, there's, so there's an abusive part to it.

Maybe they wouldn't use those words, but just wait for the nice part of the cycle and go around again. Just keep going around the circle. We're here cheering you on as you go around and around and around until you go insane. That is absolutely crazy that people give that advice.

**Maile:** Yeah, and even like believers that I respected, that I was very close to, would share with me, you know, you just need to hang in there for God's blessing.

I'm, you know, I would look at their marriages that were just also unhealthy on the outside. They were very Christian and very Sunday going to church, but on the inside, behind closed doors, it was really unhealthy and those women were telling me, you just need to hang in there. Wait for God's blessing and God will bless you if as you endure that.

**Natalie:** What does that even mean? If you ever wondered like, what does that even mean, mean God's blessing? Like get specific. I want, that's what I, if someone said that to me now, I'd be like, tell me exactly what you are talking about when you say God's blessing. It's just some nebulous cliché that we say. Or is there like a substance to what you're saying?

Because I would say I'm pretty blessed right now and I've been divorced twice and I can feel the love and the approval and the amazing presence of Jesus

Christ in my life like crazy. And to me that is the best blessing on planet Earth. That to me that is, and I've got that whether I'm married, divorced, not married, I've got that all the time 100% of the time.

So I'm just curious to know what they're talking about. What, what's the blessing for you? Like what does that mean to you? I guess I just have to throw that out there. 'cause this kind of stuff just makes me like what in the world? My brain just wants to explode.

**Maile:** I know in a way I already did feel blessed.

Like I never didn't feel God's peace. Yeah. I never disconnected from the Lord. Yeah. In times, for example, in times where after college and I experienced backsliding going out and partying and you know, I didn't feel that absence of I walked away, I've rebelled against the Lord. So I, I thought the same thing was what blessing am I waiting for, for everything to be fine One morning.

Yeah. I was waiting for maybe the choir to start singing and music to Oh, you know? Right. Just didn't happen. So how did I get out? Yeah. To me. So things really started to, uh, escalate during COVID, I think because just being home always together, it was like very sobering to see each other. Go through also a hard time up close per in person face-to-face.

We were living also in an apartment and um, and you had two kids that were school age, right? Two age, yep. Two kids that were school age. Yeah. But then my stepson had left, he was just done, he was 17. He went back to live with his mom and I understand. Mm-hmm. So we had one at home, middle school, mine, and we were both teaching online at home.

Plus we had a, a, a child, a teenager at home, online. It was very, very tight, very close quarters. But during that time, I also somehow kind of stumbled along your podcast, um, probably through Instagram. There was a questionnaire, like 10 Reasons or. Take this quiz, see if your relationship is healthy or is it abusive?

And I took the quiz 10 outta 10. I was like, wow, this is my life. But I didn't do anything about it at that time except just start to listen to the content. And it really started to like, loosen up my thinking. It loosened up. Um, hearing butterfly stories, hearing testimonies, and starting to just, I, I listened to every episode of the free podcast from the beginning, and I just felt like inside I started to change.

I started to just get curious like, Hmm, what if things could be different? And someone had mentioned on one of the episodes. What do you, what do you think your life would look like five years from now? And I literally folded a piece of paper in half, and this is what I thought it would look like if I stayed, and what it could be if I wasn't in that situation.

I made, I started making lists because I needed to see for myself, it was very sobering to put it on paper. Hmm. And I had a lot of time during COVID. Yeah. I was teaching at home. We didn't go anywhere hardly. Ca our school district in California stayed closed for a long time, so, wow. I made like, why I wanna be married, why I wanna stay here, why I don't, what am I afraid of?

And

**Natalie:** it helped a lot. That COVID time was, it was the community, our community exploded during that time because the, because of exactly what you just described. Now these women are, they've been living in denial. Not because they wanna be in denial, but just because it's the only way you can emotionally cope, right?

With D you know, it's so overwhelming to like, wake up and realize what's actually going on. But w but when COVID hit you c it was too painful. The pain got greater than the ability to maintain and keep it on, you know, keep that ball under the water. It just got impossible. And, um, and then people were reaching out because it was, because everyone was online.

They were reaching out online, like, I need help. I need help. And figuring out that there were ways to reach out online secretly without letting their partner know about it. Um, it's one thing to go someplace, you know, where you're going physically, someplace every week and your partner's gonna try to figure out, you know, where's she going?

But most of the time, you can keep your online, you know, if you're careful, you can keep your online business. Private and separate and get, get some help. So I, I just think that's interesting. Um, I, you're the second interview in the last couple of weeks that has said the exact same thing. COVID was, COVID was a catalyst.

At

**Maile:** that time. You had a wait list and you were only opening up at certain times for Okay for me to come into the group. And I was like, I'm gonna get on



that wait list. And in the meantime I would just put on my headphones and just listen to content. And it really, like I said, it started to loosen up my thoughts, helped me to listen to my thoughts, and it helped me to kind of step out and look at what the situation was like.

And things got quiet. It was very quiet. During COVID, we weren't in the hustle and bustle of everyday life, just stuck at home. So I was able to see and look at my situation a little better. Yeah, but it wasn't getting better. It was actually getting worse in the home.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Right. Okay. So then did you get into Flying Free then?

Eventually I

**Maile:** did. I got into Flying Free and all of this happened around the same time. Okay. Got into Flying Free. We were home, but um, things got really physical more than ever. Wow. They, we had definitely had physical abuse along the way. Did he hurt your son as well? He didn't physically, but emotionally, I think just his absence and his moodiness and yeah, being very condescending.

It did hurt him and Oh, for

**Natalie:** sure. And did he observe any of the physical abuse on you, perpetrated on you?

**Maile:** He didn't, I didn't share with him until just a few years ago and. But he wasn't surprised. Okay. Because my ex had been very physical with his son, very physically. Oh, they would, they would just, uh, argue and like then end up wrestling it out, knocking things over, and it was like having another teenager.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Yeah. Oh, that's so gross.

**Maile:** Yeah. Pair a shirt and, you know, somebody would end up storming off, slamming doors, just a lot of that. Breaking phones and broken doors like we had had, um, broken hole in a door. Uh, marks on the wall were where he threw a phone and it would just mark the wall up and then also break the phone.

Broken locks, because I. I was in the bathroom needing a minute, taking a shower, and he was just so mad. He just let me in or I'm gonna break the door. And broke the door. Yes. He was

**Natalie:** never diagnosed with, and he never went to to get like a psych workup or anything.

**Maile:** He did actually. He had been in counseling, but you know, you can be sitting in the chair and not do the work.

Yeah. He even did an intensive outpatient two week program through our insurance twice. He did that where he took off a work and he would be there all day and there'd be groups and there'd be meditation and then there would be teaching and it was a great program. I actually ended up doing it myself and I learned so much, so I couldn't believe that he would go through it twice and not, yeah, anything.

But I think he can sit there and not really be doing the work. Yes. Oh, for

**Natalie:** sure. For sure. That's why, that's why when, when, when Christians say, um, you know, oh, if you just waiting for the blessing, maybe one of the things they mean is, you know, he'll change eventually. Right. That is so rare, is very, very, very rare for an abuser to change.

So it's so rare that it's, it's like, why would you hold, hold out your hope for the unicorn? That's probably, you know, that yours is a unicorn. He's not, he's most likely just like every other abuser. Okay. I have a question before we, 'cause I, another one that I wanna ask you about is like, I'm always interested to know what the hardest thing was about leaving and then what the most transformative thing was.

But before we do that, I wanna, I wanna ask you, you've been listening to the Flying Free Podcast 'cause a lot of people think, well, I can just get what I need from the podcast. I get so much and we do try to put, as, you know, pack as much value into this podcast as possible. Um, 'cause not everyone can, you know, afford \$29 a month, but, um.

What would you say is the difference, or at least that you noticed in joining the program versus what you had been, you'd been bingeing on the podcast. Was there much of a difference? Did you feel like you got more out of the program? I mean, what was it worth the extra \$29 to you? Like, can you describe your experience with that?

**Maile:** Yes, it was so worth it. I had gone through all the podcasts and I also could tell that there was much more in the coaching because I, in the podcast, I wasn't listening to coaching, but I had heard about that there was coaching and I

just knew that there was also connection with other people and I was starting to get, because of COVID, very comfortable with.

Forum online. I had been teaching remotely for the first time in my life, so I realized, oh, you, you can have relationships with people. Yeah, I have a relationship with 25 8 year olds online, so of course I could connect. So I, I, I saw that there was a huge difference. And at that time, I had also listened to your book.

Is It Me? I went through the workbook and I just felt like there was a lot of value for me, and it was definitely a, a smorgasbord. I've heard you talk about that before. It was like a buffet. I have a tendency to not finish anything, uh, uh, many things that I start. So I didn't go from course one, course two all the way through, and I was still getting so much.

I would glean an episode from here and get some knowledge from there, answer a few questions in my workbook. Go to the next chapter and then maybe go back, maybe not. And in the past I would be like, well, it's not gonna work if I don't do A through Z consecutively, so I'll just quit. Yeah. As my perfectionist struggle.

But I felt like I was getting support in my own messy kind of way, even if it was only 80%, you know, I wasn't doing everything a hundred percent. Sometimes I did it 2%, but I was. Feeding myself.

**Natalie:** Yes. And, and we, we do that as humans, even with food, actually sometimes we are, we don't feel very hungry and we just need a little bit.

And then sometimes we're starving and we really need to sit down to a big meal. And, um, and you're right. I, I wanna say to, if I can just to give an update, 'cause things have changed. We've changed the program quite a bit, probably since you joined. And one of the things that's different, just so people understand, is um, actually by the time this episode is released, we are gonna go back to an application only way to get in.

We had it open for the last probably eight or nine months, just an open, uh, anyone could come in at any time. But what we're seeing is that. We're seeing some things that we, we, we don't like. One of, one of the things that we're seeing is that we're not able to vet people as well, and we want to be able to, so we ha are having people, um, complete an application again now.

And, um, you have to complete that application and then go through a little waiting period and then we invite you in when if we feel that you are ready and, and we look at your application and feel like you're a good fit for the program and for the community. Um, and that's also how we keep our community.

Like our community is amazing. Uh, I mean the, we call it a kaleidoscope 'cause a kaleidoscope means a flock of butterflies. And it is this, it's such a safe place and a beautiful place and there's so much collective wisdom inside of that community and so much support and love for everyone exactly where they're at.

And we wanna keep it that way. So that means, you know, vetting people and bringing and having people go through an application process. But also we don't do live coaching anymore. Like we used to, I do do that with Flying Hire, which is sort of an upgraded, an upgraded program. But with Flying Free, um, there are seven years worth of coaching sessions, a weekly coaching sessions, and in each session there's two or three coaching issue like topics.

And so that's like hundreds and hundreds of hours of coaching archives, and they're all on the same questions get asked over and over and over again. And so we decided instead of raising prices for Flying Free, we'd keep the price the same and just give everyone the whole library of coaching sessions.

And, um, and you can listen to them on a private podcast. So li you can consume them as if like you're listening to this podcast. But it's a private podcast. Not everyone gets to hear it. Um, only members do. And then, um. And then we also, they're findable by topic. If you go into our website, you can look them up by topic and find coaching sessions on the things that you are struggling with, whether it's parenting your relationship, you know, dealing with what, whatever the ca case might be.

So, um, I wanted to give that caveat. Um, and I will say this too, that. The, the, the a percentage of people that actually showed up to the live group coaching was usually the people that wanted to get coached that day. And then everyone else would listen to the replay anyways. So it was, so, it was like, you know what, we we're just gonna give everyone hundreds and hundreds of hours of sessions when you join.

You get everything all at once, and you just, like Maile said, you can kind of pick and choose which things you want. And that's just the coaching that does not include the courses and the bonus workshops. We've got hundreds of hours of, of material like that as well that you can access. And yes, we, but we will hold your hand.

It's a forum, so I actually am reaching out to you and private messaging you on a regular basis to see how you're doing to ask you if you need any direction. We have a community support director who will hold your hand, and we have other coaches inside the program who are more than happy to help you, and it's all \$29 a month and for \$290 a year, you also get the book and the workbook that Maile was mentioning, um, in digital format as part of your, um, membership.

So, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt your, oh no, it's interview. I just wanted to clarify some things that may have changed since you were a part of it so that no one comes over to check it out and then goes, wait a minute. That's not what Maile said. Yeah,

**Maile:** it was all just invaluable, to tell you the truth.

I only went to live coaching a few times. Very rarely. It was always the replays and replays of replays. Sometimes I wouldn't even look at the date. I could just see in my Apple podcast that I didn't listen to this coaching session. So I listened to it. Yeah. And um, very few times did I go live and yeah.

And that was normal. That's actually really normal. So much out of it, I would do it again. It was more valuable than any counseling, any \$150 an hour session with a counselor that's paid before. It was just, it's just, it was invaluable and it still is. Now that I'm in Flying higher, I still am listening in daily to something.

It's like eating something. I need to eat something. I don't even know what I ate yesterday. I can't tell you what I listened to yesterday, but I know I listened to something.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Well, and we learn by osmosis. We don't have to take notes on everything and process everything. Oh. I just like washing myself, always washing myself with truth and with new things and I just, my brain will pick up on what I need.

I trust my brain and my body to pick up on what I need in that moment, and the rest gets digested out as waste, but it'll come back around again. If I needed that, then it'll come back around again. I just feel like God is so generous to us and he is never gonna leave us in the in the dust. He's always gonna be pouring out his generosity and his.

Goodness to and is truth to us if, if we just have to open our mouths like little baby birds and take it in. Okay. So tell us what's the hardest thing that you, that

you experienced about getting out and also what was the most transformative thing for you?

**Maile:** Okay. The hardest thing about getting out, well, how I ended up getting out real quickly was when I feel like the iceberg was visible, uh, was when he had hit me so hard twice that my whole arm was bruised up and it was totally uncalled for.

I'm not gonna get into all the details of the conversation, but it wasn't like we were arguing or fighting. We all obviously weren't getting along, but I had just said something and he just walked away and I was like, Hey, come back here. I'm still talking to you. And I remember I ha and grabbed his shoulder and he turned around and he punched me.

Oh my gosh. So hard. And I was like shocked. I was like, that hurt. And he was like, you know what? I told you, don't ever put your hands on me. I was just defending myself. I was like, whoa. And he was a big guy. He was almost 300 pounds, almost six feet. It's terrifying. Yeah. And I was like, oh my gosh, that really hurt.

And then he started just continuing to walk away and I said, I didn't even hit you or grab you. I just went like that and I did it again. And he said, you want another one? And he punched me again. And I was like, at that point I was like, oh my gosh. And I wasn't fighting back. I was like literally in shock.

And then after that he said, you know what? I'm done. I'm gonna look for a place I, I. I don't wanna live here. I want a divorce. I'm gonna start looking for a place. And for the, and he had to roam that out all the time. It was very manipulative. But for the very first time I said, you know what, me too, I'm gonna start looking.

And I did the very next day I started. Did he,

**Natalie:** did he actually do that? Or was that just another

**Maile:** empty threat? Empty threat. How many times did he pack his bags and they'd be sitting by the door? Yeah. And she would be like, so are you gonna change? Oh my gosh, are you gonna change? What are you gonna do differently?

Otherwise I'm leaving. And the beginning, it was so heartbreaking, the kids would cry. And then after a while it would be like, the kids aren't even crying,

we're all just doing our thing. And he's packing and nobody was, yeah, nobody was taking the bait. So that led me to get out. And I think the hardest part, I think you had asked about the most challenging part of getting out.

Was having to just stay laser focused on getting out. Meaning I started looking for a place, I made a call to a friend who I knew was living in a, in, in the housing authority department of the city. It was low-income housing, but there was this neighborhood that it was mostly single moms. And I just called my friend who had moved out into that after her divorce into that area.

And she said, let me make a call. 'cause I just said, it's really bad. I'm, I'm ready to leave 'cause it's physical. And she said, okay. And that was it. She just made a call. The woman called me and she said, this is what I need from you. I need pay stubs. I need, um, your tax papers. I need, um, I. Any pictures if, if there's any pictures of abuse, if you have a restraining order, dah, dah, dah, dah.

She's just like, I need your son's report cards. I need, she just gave me this list and it was like overwhelming. So I think the hardest part was just to stay laser focused. Yeah. Getting out. And all of this happened within a week. I was just running around getting paperwork, birth certificate copies, faxing them to her.

All of the things I just blindly, but not really blindly. I just trusted that I needed to go through the steps to get out and I really felt like this is my chance. And that was a hard part for me because I was at this place where emotionally I didn't feel ready to leave, but I knew I had to leave and it was my chance and it was, and I just needed to go through those steps.

So I think that was really. Hard, but we had been separated. We'd never been formally separated, but he would pout and go stay with his mom for a week and then I'd get pissed off and I'd go stay with my parents for a week. And you know, we never really separated, separated, but I felt like this time I'm not going back.

Yeah. Wow. So that was a hard part and I kept it a, a secret going through all the paperwork until I knew that for sure I was gonna leave. And I remember getting a call. She said, okay, we have a spot for you. Um, can you come in and sign a lease? And I said, sure, absolutely. I'll come right now. All that happened in like 12 days and I didn't say anything to him.

I called him at work and I said, Hey, I found a place. He was like, okay. I said, did you? He said, no, I haven't even been looking. And I said, well, you said you're gonna be looking and I'm looking. And I found a place and I signed a



lease and he was at work. I went home and I packed just the essentials for my son and I to go stay with my mom and dad, and I went, because I didn't wanna go back.

I was scared. I mean, not only was my arms still all bruised up, which of course like a good girl I covered, but yeah, I was gonna say, did your, did your parents see that? No. I took pictures and I even had just so happened to have a doctor's appointment for my allergies, uh, during that time. But I did have my doctor take a look at it.

Just for record. Yeah. I remember my doctor saying, do you wanna talk to a social worker? And I said, no, I'm moving out. I'm getting out already. But thank you. I just wanted to document this.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Maile:** Um, I just had to, I, it was kind of like being described. It was described to me as this, like, there's been a death, a loss, and I'm not emotionally ready to process it all.

I can't, but I need to plan services. I need to plan a funeral. Yeah. And the grieving, I just knew, you know what, that will come later. And I had been listening to good content, you know, I felt like my stuck thinking had been diluted quite a bit. So there was hope. And my son was really happy to get out. He, I know he wanted me to leave.

I know he wanted to not be there. He was unhappy. I saw him withering away. Yeah. So I felt like, um, those were some of the challenges of getting out initially, but within that separation time, the process of filing and the divorce being final, for me, a challenge was not going back. That was one of the hardest things for me to not go back because sprinkled along there, there were a lot of great times.

I felt like it wasn't all bad. Yep. And well, of course it's not, remember, it's a cycle. Yeah. It wasn't all bad. I mean, like physically, um, I felt like God had restored so much sexually. Like the, we were, I, I was fa we were famous for like kiss and makeup. That was our bandaid for. Everything, every conflict, let's just spend time together, be intimate, kiss and makeup.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. And it was just bandaids all over the place. But we never really dealt with anything. Yeah. Putting layers.

**Natalie:** So your body had a, your body and brain had an addiction sort of cycle going on too. So the nice part and then the bad part. And then you, we get into routines and our body and our brains just kind of naturally wanna keep that normal routine even though it's unhealthy.

**Maile:** And

**Natalie:** that's a routine that you had to break out of emotionally, is that what you're saying? Absolutely. And I think it's hard to do

**Maile:** that. Yeah. I started to do that towards the end and that's what escalated things, because I was no longer playing by our old playbook.

**Natalie:** Yeah.

**Maile:** But when I got out, it was still really difficult.

Yes.

**Natalie:** Yeah. I'm so glad you said that, because people are so shocked by that when they go through it and they don't understand it, and they wonder, maybe this means I'm not doing the right thing.

**Maile:** Absolutely, yeah. And he didn't want a divorce. He wanted to reconcile, even though we had both already moved out to our own places within that year of being separated and everything getting finalized, because in California it does take a while.

You know, he still wanted to see each other and like, I was lonely. I wanted to see each other too. And it was just, it was really hard to just stay laser focused on, like I said, getting out.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Yeah. And I wanna say here too, that that's also very normal, that abusers, uh, you know, for the sake of anyone who's listening, abusers rarely want to get a divorce unless they, unless they're having an affair and they wanna be with their affair partner, that'll sometimes happen.

But. Abusers want to maintain control over what they perceive to be long something that belongs to them. You are a thing, you belong to them, you are, you, you've provided a lot of value in their life, right? And why would they want, why would they wanna leave that behind? They want to keep that, those perks that you give them.

So, and then you've been groomed and programmed in your body and your brain to continue to go through that cycle and offer that to them. And so when you break free from that, they're usually, that's why in the, in Christian circles, it's usually, um, I did a podcast about this. Valerie Hobbes did a whole research study on it.

It's usually the woman who more often than the man, the woman, the abuse victim will file for divorce. And it's because of either adultery or abuse or neglect and abandonment and, um, and abuse is way up there. So, so, but it's so interesting to me that, you know, in spite of that fact. Many religious communities will vilify the woman 'cause she's the one who filed.

And they'll actually, uh, they'll actually collude with the abuser in the idea of, yes, let's keep the marriage together, let's keep the woman in the abuse cycle where she belongs. It's just, and it just sends the exact opposite message about who God is.

**Maile:** Absolutely.

**Natalie:** Yeah. Okay. So, but you held steady. What was transformative about that whole thing for you?

**Maile:** Um, honestly, I think for me on the inside, everything I was learning in Flying Free, I think made a huge difference on, I feel like my transformation inside, it wasn't just one thing, but if I had to think of one thing. It would be having a support system, even if it wasn't weekly counseling, or two or three times a week, where I'm checking in, going to an office, sitting in a chair.

Not that traditional kind of counseling, but I was learning how to manage my thoughts. Uh, I learned about the model. Um, I was learning about internal family systems, um, which really helped even in just regulating my emotions, I was learning to listen to my son more and see where he was at. I learned how to not try to fix things for him, that everything's gonna be okay.

You're gonna be fine, but listen to really listen without judging of how he was struggling the way he felt. And along the way, I guess leading into the next question, what was transformative was. My relationship with my son I didn't realize was broken. And we were both so withered away. I felt like there was a lot of restoration with that.

My relationship with my parents, uh, improved. It was never unhealthy, but it was just kind of, it started to get really absent because they had good, healthy

boundaries and they didn't wanna be around that, even though I know it was hard for them to watch.

**Natalie:** Oh, yeah.

**Maile:** And, um, I think those, that was something along the way that was, those are things along the way that were very transformative.

Yeah. Learning how to, um, be more self-aware, learning more about my real, true, authentic relationship with God, with Jesus. That. It wasn't about what it looked like on the outside. God wasn't gonna be mad if I got divorced again. I didn't at all feel any kind of condemnation. I probably felt like a little bit of shame at times, but at the same time, nobody was shocked telling me, stay with it.

Hang in there. It's gonna get better. Because by this point I had changed so much. Mm. I, I wasn't even like my, my usual real self wasn't like this. I wasn't, I was frazzled, stressed all the time. Yeah. Impatient. Yeah. Just, um, always chasing something, trying to fix things for everybody. Uh, I just didn't have that peace.

Yeah. So as soon as we were no longer living there, there was peace and I felt like I could heal.

**Natalie:** That's amazing. I think my favorite part about people's stories is, is that relationship healing piece, especially for moms, how their relationship with their kids, uh, can't, not with everyone, but I think a, a lot of people, we've heard a lot of stories inside the, inside the programs with people, but relationships with their kids that were strained and kids that even grew up in those abusive environments, um, where there was a lot of gaslighting and lying and just confusion about who God is.

They, they are, as we heal, they begin to heal and they begin to see truth. And then, and then secondly, our relationship with God, that we get to get back to our roots. That we get to get back to who God created us to be and feel His presence. His presence is always with us. We get to experience it in a way that like it's truly life giving instead of riddled with, oh, you know, it sounds like you really had a solid understanding of who God is.

I, I really struggled with that and a lot of women do, where God truly loves us no matter what. No matter what we can be, we can go through all kind, make all kinds of mistakes and that does not change God's love for us or acceptance of

us. Yes, maybe your church will excommunicate you and, and not want you around anymore, but God never, ever abandons his children and, um, to see people's relationships with God heal.

It changes everything. Okay. We're gonna end with this. Is there one piece of advice that you would give to, to our listeners, to the, I mean, if you can picture, like, when I'm doing a podcast, I always picture a woman. I always picture a woman in her car driving with her kids and she's listening and she's just, you know, a shell of herself, but just grasping for whatever straws.

Or I picture a woman listening in her kitchen while she's, you know, doing the dishes or just going through the motions of the day and just feeling so lost. And I picture that one particular woman when, when I'm doing these episodes. So picture her in your mind's eye. She's real. What would you tell her if she's sitting there thinking, I wonder if this is possible for me.

Could I ever get out?

**Maile:** I would say. You're gonna be okay. You are gonna make it. If this is the path you choose, God will totally be with you. If you choose to stay, God will totally be with you. Yes, I really feel like there's would be, have been peace on both sides, but I also would say to just start taking steps in that direction, I felt like if I took steps in this direction and I really should be staying, the doors would close and I would just, it wouldn't be the time where I need to stay or you know, and I understand some people need to stay for several seasons or maybe forever, but that there is peace even in the staying.

For me, I chose not to stay and I. Got to the point where there was no peace even in staying. Yeah. And as far as getting out, I would share with this person that it really is like that roaring, rushing, dramatic river that you need to cross, that you can't see all the steps across. Some rocks are slippery.

It's dangerous. You might get wet, you might slip and fall, but one step at a time, you make it across and make it through. It's a process, and as many times as it's great to hear other people's stories and, and listen to other content from other people, nobody's, nobody's exit, nobody's way out is gonna look the same.

That's right. That's right. It's be different. And one way is not better than the other. It is hard. That is the only common denominator that it is hard. But there is peace and it is possible to make it through leaving and things aren't totally perfect and easy now, but there's much more peace and much more joy and I that I feel like is invaluable.

Yeah. Are finances still hard? Yeah, they were hard before, but there was fighting. Now it's just hard and myself. Right,

**Natalie:** right. Which I think is worth pointing out and noticing. Right. It's a different kind of a hard,

**Maile:** yes. Decisions are still challenging sometimes making decisions, but, um, there's peace because there's not conflict in making those decisions.

Yeah. And um, it was worth it. There was not a lot. Do I? There's only certain much amount I could do to get healing in the situation. As a matter of fact, a friend did tell me that it's really hard to heal and get well in the environment. That made you very sick.

**Natalie:** Yes. Yep. I like to think of it like a pond.

Like the pond is toxic. It has toxic waste in it. It's really hard for fish to stay healthy in a toxic pond. You have to move the fish to fresh, clean water so that they can get healthy and start thriving again. Can they live in a toxic pond? Sometimes they can live, probably won't live as long, but they, they can survive, but eventually they end up just dying.

**Maile:** Yeah.

Yeah. Maile, thank you so much

**Maile:** for

**Natalie:** being on the Flying Free Podcast. If you, um, if you enjoyed Maile's story and you're curious to know a little bit more about her, she is on two episodes of the Divorce Christian Woman Podcast and who knows, maybe she'll be on in more on season two, depends on if, if she wants to volunteer or not to be on the panels.

But, um, and then she talks more about her life, uh, post-divorce, which is kind of the, what the whole point of that podcast is. What does life look like even if you're not divorced and you're wondering what would life look like on the other side of divorce? That might be a good podcast to just covertly check out if you want to.

Alright, thank you so much again, Maile, and thank you so much for listening and until next time, fly free. Bye.