

The Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 345 - Breaking Free from Narcissistic Moms and Spouses—Without the Guilt Bound by Blood or Vows

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: Is it ever okay to walk away from your spouse or even your own mother when they're toxic? Christian women are often told to honor your parents and submit to your husband no matter how badly they treat you. In this episode of the Flying Free Podcast, I sit down with Christian counselor and author Chris Reese to unpack the spiritual and emotional battle many of us face.

When we wake up to abuse, not just in our marriage, but in our families of origin too. Let's talk about the courage it takes to say no more.

Today I'm talking with Chris Reese. Chris is a Christian counselor, an author, and a speaker who helps believers break free from toxic relationships and codependency biblically and practically. She's the author of *Breaking the Narcissist Grip* and host of a fast growing YouTube channel. She has over 476.

Thousand subscribers. Yeah. Oh my gosh. And you, so you don't know this Chris, but a few months ago, it was like last fall or early winter and I started thinking that I really need to up my YouTube channel games. I've had this podcast for over six years and I've. I do is just post the episode on YouTube and I don't do anything else.

Mm-hmm. It's just bare bones. And so I was talking with a couple of in real life business friends of mine. They actually live by me and we get together once in a while. Um, one of them is the minimal mom, Don Madson. I don't know if you know who she is. Are you familiar with her? I don't, no. Okay. Well, she's also got a very large YouTube channel, and they were telling me you should go to

Chris Reese's YouTube channel and see what she's doing with her thumbnails, and then just take notes.

And so I did. That's actually how I found you a few months ago. So when you reached out recently to see if we could have a conversation, I was like, Hey, I saw you. It was kind of fun. So Oh my goodness. That is fun.

Kris: What a blessing.

Natalie: Yeah. I'm glad we can connect here on the Flying Free Podcast. So welcome to the podcast.

Thank

Kris: you. Yeah, thanks for having me, Natalie. I greatly appreciate it. I'm honored to be here.

Natalie: Yeah, so today I wanna talk about this very common problem that I'm seeing among Christian survivors of emotional and spiritual abuse, and that's that these women, when they're waking up to abuse in their marriages and learning about all these abusive patterns, it begins to dawn on them that these patterns.

Or they thought these patterns were normal, they start recognizing them because they had actually grown up experiencing them in their families of origins. Yes. And in particular with their mothers. So now there's all this unraveling that they have to do in their marriage relationship, but also addressing these abusive, familial relationships can be so overwhelming, all of it at once.

Mm-hmm. Particularly when they have these religious beliefs or programming that's informing all of their decisions. So, okay, so first of all, sometimes in the waking up process, we feel the need to get some space. From those who have consistently harmed us and are still harming us, right? Mm-hmm. And they're refusing to take accountability or responsibility for that harm.

So can Christians, what is your thought on Christians walking away from a toxic parent or a spouse? Is that a sin to do that, or are we called to just keep on enduring this kind of treatment?

Kris: Oh, Natalie, that is a loaded question. Dealing with a toxic parent or a partner is like, it's like standing frozen at a crossroad and you know what's going on.

You're, you're finally, your eyes are finally open. You're seeing the behaviors, the tactics, the um, the, the residual effects that has already taken place on you. Yeah, but now what do you do? Yeah, so we're standing frozen at this crossroads, and both paths look equally troubling and uncertain. Yes. If I leave, am I sinning against God?

Am I giving up on somebody? Am I not helping carry bearing one another's burdens? Am I not forgiving if I stay? Do I have to resign myself to a life of misery and possible abuse? So that road becomes really paralyzing. And unfortunately, one of the decisions that many make is they, they make a decision and then they second guess it.

So if you could imagine now standing at this crossroads and I'm like, okay, no, I'm not tolerating this abuse. I am, I am free to leave. And you go down that road and about a quarter of the way down you're like. Ah, but I feel guilty. And then you start to turn back around again and you, you own that responsibility.

You, you get sucked into the fear, the obligation, and the guilt. We call that the fog. And you start down the other road again. I am gonna be the one that's gonna restore this relationship. I'm gonna do everything that I can. And then you had enough and you can't take it anymore. So we end up going down back, down this road.

So it turns into this back and forth, back and forth. And here's what we need to do. Just press pause.

Natalie: Hmm.

Kris: Because what's happening is we've got a, a vital decision to make here. It's not just as simple as saying, am I sinning against God? So if I'm not, then I can go. If I am, then I can't because let's, this is so complex.

I hope you don't mind if I begin to unpack this a little bit. No, absolutely. I get it. And then sometimes these, these little unpackings start to lead down a little bit of a rabbit trail. But if, um, if I have the liberty, I'd love to just absolutely go where the spirit is leading. This is such a loaded.

Question, and it is such a, a burden for so many women. Let's start to break this down when it comes to a toxic parent, because it's a bit more straightforward, scripturally, there's no covenant, but there is the command to honor and that can actually trip us up. Yeah, because in Exodus, uh, 20 and 12, it says, honor your father and mother so that you may live long in the land.

But here's where we start to trip. Now remember, we're going down that crossroad, so I'm gonna honor my mother and father, but I'm starting to get tripped up down that road. Why? Because I'm confusing. Honoring with obeying, I'm confusing, honoring with I am 44, not four. Like the relationship is very different here.

So we have to recognize that the parent, in this case we're, we're talking about whether it's the mother or the father, has to begin to recognize that that relationship dynamic changes as well as the child ages. I cannot begin to tell you, Natalie, how many times I've heard parents say, you are the child.

I'm the parent. You will listen to me.

Natalie: Yeah.

Kris: And as a child, as this person's child, technically you're like, wait a minute, I'm, I'm 42 years old here. What are we doing? I'm 52. I'm 62. At what point am I my own person? At what point am I allowed to go live my life, the life that God has entrusted to me? So is it a sin to walk away from a toxic parent?

Well, the short answer is no. I. Yeah, but the longer answer is, are we confusing, honoring with obeying? Are we confusing, honoring with giving into every single request so I can honor a toxic parent from a distance simply by not speaking ill of them speak simply by even just honoring the title. We'll go back to, um, the presidency.

It doesn't matter where we stand on on political beliefs. We honor the title of president, whether or not someone agrees with who's in office. So we have to bring honor to that person. But if, if the mother or the father is causing such distress, who is not actually aligning with what the relationship should be at this point, I'm four.

I'm not four, I'm 44. So how is, this is actually taking place, so I'm gonna digress just a little bit. What usually ends up happening? And bear with me 'cause we're gonna get into the husband in just a second. 'cause it's a little bit more nuanced when we're dealing with the the parent. It is typically a lifetime of issues that have now been bottled up and are like a pressure cooker ready to explode.

Natalie: Yeah,

Kris: you're finally starting to see the lies, the manipulation, the twisting, the victimhood, all of these things that have taken place. And usually people will come to a point where they're either like, I've had enough. I can't stand this woman. I'm done. I'm gonna set my boundaries. And boundaries usually mean I'm never talking to you again.

That is so extreme. That again, we can't answer the question, am I sinning? But the question is more, am I going through the process the way God would have me go through it? Matthew 18:15 says, if a brother sins against you, go and show him his fault just between the two of you. If he doesn't receive it, bring somebody along.

If that doesn't happen, bring it to the church. If they still don't receive it, treat them as a pagan so we can't have titles. Trumping toxicity. So

Natalie: can I just interject something here too, please. When I think of honor too, I think of respecting another person's right to be who they choose to be in life.

So if you have a parent who chooses to be that way, you are honoring them by, by saying, okay, okay. You get, have the right to be that way. Um. I'm not gonna try to control you. I'm not gonna try to change you, correct. I'm not gonna try to make you be a better person or show up better for me. I'm not gonna try to make you be a better parent, right?

I'm gonna let you be who you choose to be. And also, I wanna honor all the people in this story, and one of the people that, including myself, is me exactly. So how do I honor myself if I give you space to be who you are? And then I say, well, and I'm not the kind of person who spends a lot of time exposing myself to this kind of treatment, right?

So therefore, how I'm gonna honor myself is giving, giving us a little space so that I, I don't have to spend a lot of my time dealing with. How you choose to live your life. Yes,

Kris: exactly. Exactly. And, and the, the same is gonna be true now for a spouse, but now it's gonna be a little bit more complex and nuanced because you've got a covenant involved here.

So the one thing that. Nobody likes to hear there is no cut and dry. If a parent is toxic, walk away. Um, because let's, let's be honest, some people's level of

toxic tolerance is higher than others. And I don't, and, and this could even be in a good way, meaning like I Well, in toxicity

Natalie: is on a spectrum as well,

Kris: right?

Exactly. Yeah, it's exactly right. So, you know, at what level of toxic is mom or husband, and at what level of healing in this toxic journey am I, so am I tolerating toxic because now I've got trauma, bonds, codependency, other dysfunction of my own, or am I tolerating this toxic toxicity because I've Grown, healthier because I'm able to now look at the all the aspects of you, the good, the bad, and the ugly, which let's face it, Natalie, we all have that.

Natalie: Yes.

Kris: So am I able to still come alongside of you in your toxicity? So that's why I wish I could say that. It was just so easy to say, this one's toxic. Walk away. This one's not. Or, or no. You have to stay prayerful and careful. Yeah. Is where we have to take that journey. And as far as a husband is concerned, um, again, we apply Matthew 18:15, I gotta bring this to him, I gotta bring to the church.

A lot of times people take divorce, which should be a last and absolute bottom of the barrel resort, and they make it the first. Yeah. I don't deserve to be treated that way. I do. This isn't right.

Natalie: Yeah. I do have to break in and say, 'cause that's mainly who I'm working with, is Christian women in emotionally and spiritual abusive relationships.

And what I'm, what I've seen in the last decade, and we're literally working with thousands of women, is, that's not typically the situation though. What's typically the situation with Christian women in particular is that they are overly careful not to like, they do not wanna get a divorce. So they've not only brought the situation to their church.

Once they've done it again, yes, and again and again and again over some of them over decades and just been told and it's not been taken care of, and because they think that they have to have their church's stamp of approval on their being done with the relationship, they will just continue to hang on to the stay instead of realizing what you said earlier.

This requires wisdom. This isn't a black and white thing. It requires wisdom. To discern in this particular situation with these particular dynamics and these, this religious community that I happen to be in at this point in my life,

Kris: which by the way is not always biblically accurate.

Natalie: Yes, exactly. I need to make a decision that's Holy Spirit based on what is best for me and my kids right now.

And, and that is why many people, you know, I think Christian women are. I don't, I don't see them jumping into divorce. I see them actually hanging on on too long, much longer than they really need to, but because they're so afraid of that. But I remember, I just, I think the reason why that triggered me is 'cause I remember when I would come, when I would try to get help, people would always quote those verses that Matthew 18, you know, you need to take her to the church.

And I'm like. I did, do you know how many times I've taken it to the church? Like I have covered my bases and even at the very end when I finally filed for divorce, I was excommunicated for my church. Um, that was what they threw back at me.

Kris: Yes.

Natalie: They were like, you didn't listen to us. And I was like, well, you didn't listen to me.

And I tried for years and I, I have to now, I just, I have to walk away from my husband and, and my church. I have to walk away from you because you're not representing Jesus Christ in, in my family at all. So, yeah. So anyway, I wanted to interject that 'cause I know if that was a little eh, inside of me, it was probably, I, I could see that being a little bit, eh, inside of some of my listeners as well.

Kris: Absolutely. Yeah. And I'm, I'm so glad you did because that is the flip side to it. We either leave too quickly. That's it. God wants me to be happy I'm out of here. Or more. The case is we stay too long.

Natalie: Yeah, yeah.

Kris: So, you know. Is divorce a sin? Well, we can go down a whole other, we, we, we won't go down that at this point, right.

Which we have. We've covered

Natalie: that in other episodes. Right. So we don't even need to go there. But yeah. So

Kris: a lot of times what a lot of these women need to consider is separation. You know, and not separation as the world would have separation, where it's basically just, okay, I'm gonna do my time. This is my, this is the formal step towards divorce.

But the separation in the hopes, in the hopes that this man would turn around, that the, that he would, he would come to himself, that there would be some Damascus road experience and. That marriage could be restored, but

Natalie: do you see that though, in your work with people? Do you see these men when, when their wives are separating from them, do you see them having that Damascus road experience very often?

Kris: Unfortunately, no.

Natalie: Yeah, I was gonna say, I don't, I've maybe seen it like on one hand I've seen it a handful of times on hand. Yep. Hand, you know. Exactly. I have seen it. It's not, not out, out, out. It's not impossible, but I think it's really, really rare. Yes. And I think. I think because in in our Christian culture, we just have this such a belief in miracles.

Yep. And we're not realizing, yeah, God can do miracles, but you know, God could also make our world a place of peace and rest if he wanted to. Yes, exactly. And instead like he gives us free, free choice and he is giving our abuser, our abusive of partner free choice and our parent free choice as well.

Because exactly he's honoring us. That's how he respects and honors us. By giving us free choice. So we have to just be honest with if this person is not likely to change. 'cause they haven't changed in 30 years.

Kris: Right.

Natalie: Well, you know, then what now about what does

Kris: wisdom say to do? Exactly. Exactly.

Natalie: Yeah.

Kris: You know, sometimes God gives you the grace to endure and to work through it.

Other times he provides the strength to separate. And that is going to be a very prayerful and careful decision for the individual. And I am certainly not in the business of shaming somebody who's at their wits end. But what I do, and I know we'll probably talk about this a little bit, is if we can begin to just focus on not only.

What's going on inside of us and where do I need to now grow and improve and heal, but also keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. Yes. He is the author and finisher of our faith.

Natalie: That's right. Amen. Okay, so what about when the other person is, 'cause we see this a lot too. Um, especially when the wife or the woman begins to set those boundaries.

Just pretty simple boundaries like even might be. You know, we can't stay in the same room together. Um. I need, I need to have some space from your criticism. I need to like get my head clear. Um, but the other person then when they begin to see that their abuse target is slipping away, they will often be, or like even if, if you talk about a parent, you know, but I love you so much and I only do this for your good and I'm only trying to build our relationship by making you go come to holidays.

Everything

Kris: gets amped up.

Natalie: Exactly. Or they either get angrier or they start to love bomb you and start to, you know, put on the syrupy sweet thickness. Um, or they'll tell you, now you're hurting my feelings. Or I've had people will say, yeah, my partner said that I'm actually, um, it's domestic abuse for me not to have sex with him anymore, even though he's been raping me sometimes when I'm sleeping.

Mm. So, uh. Or telling you that you're not being a good daughter or you're not being a good Christian wife, or, so how do we align our faith with the choice to create this distance? Or how do we even think about forgiveness in these situations? Like how often are we supposed to forgive and move on and just let them continue to rape us in our sleep?

I mean, you know. Yeah. What are your thoughts about that?

Kris: When we think about, and you bring up such a great point, Natalie, because so many people confuse forgiveness and boundaries. If I forgave you, I can't have boundaries anymore.

Natalie: Yeah. And if

Kris: I have boundaries, then I must not love you. And forgiveness and boundaries not only can coexist, they must coexist in every single relationship, healthy or unhealthy.

So if we can think of our, our heart. Or, or our body like a fortress, like this sacred temple. This temple is hours to protect and guard, and you would never think of letting anyone just barge through your front door and ransack your home,

Natalie: right?

Kris: Yet we often allow toxic people to begin to run rough shot over our most precious and intimate spaces, and they do this.

Through one of the, this infuriates me a scripture. Twisting.

Natalie: Yeah.

Kris: And, and here, here's what I want people to keep in mind. When you're having an argument or disagreement with somebody and they're coming back with a, well, you're being a bad wife. Well, you're not being a good daughter. Number one, consider the source.

Where is this? Advice coming from Secondly, does this advice only ever work in their favor?

Natalie: Yeah, exactly.

Kris: Because what happens is we're, we're, we're told in Proverbs 4 23 to guard your heart. And your heart is the foundation of that emotional and spiritual being, and it's our responsibility to protect.

Boundaries aren't just a good idea. They are an absolute necessity. So forgiveness can coexist with boundaries. I can forgive a toxic parent and let go of past hurts, but I don't have to come over every Sunday for dinner,

Natalie: right? I can

Kris: forgive my husband for using and abusing scripture, but I don't have to sleep in the same bed.

When we cross the line into abuse, which if we break down abuse, what is it? It's abnormal use. You don't get to just disregard your call to scripture and hold the spotlight on my call for scripture, because when it comes down to scripture, it's supposed to be a mirror for each of us, not so we flash it in someone else's face.

So I wanna make sure that I am upholding my biblical responsibility as a wife, as a woman, as a daughter. But at the same time, my husband needs to be doing the same. And this is where we get caught oftentimes. Well, you're supposed to be doing this well, you're supposed to be doing this well, you're supposed to be doing this instead.

Let scripture be your mirror for me. And nowhere in scripture does God say you need to forbear under abuse.

Natalie: Yeah, that's right. That's right. Okay. So what are some of the most common manipulation tactics that you are seeing coming from, and you, you use the term narcissistic a lot, so I mean, we could go down that rabbit trail too, because I don't use that word a lot, only because not everyone is diagnosed with NPD.

Correct. Um, however, there are specific behaviors that you would say, you know, these behaviors fall under narcissistic behavior. Correct. I, I stay away from it in my work. And you, and mostly I just refer to it as this is emotional abuse, this is spiritual abuse and manipulation, this is control, this is co, you know, coercive control.

I use terms like that. I don't, like I look back and the people that in my life, uh, that I would say had behaviors similar to that, but I don't think either of them or any of them, I should say were actually narcissistic, however. They were very harmful to me and their behaviors were behaviors that narcissists would, you know, they also have those behaviors.

Right, right. Okay. So anyway, what are some of the most, uh, common manipulation tactics that the, let's say a mother or a spouse would use in a Christian setting? In a Christian home,

Kris: there's two that I see so often. Number one is victimhood and number two. Scripture abuse. So whether it's the the mother or the husband, now you start setting boundaries and you start saying, like you said, you know what I, I cannot be in the same room with you while you're yelling at me.

From now on, if you start yelling, I'm gonna have to hang up the phone or. You know what, mom, you're no longer allowed to just come over to my house whenever you feel like it, I ask that you would give me a phone call. A lot of times, like you said before, the, the tactics now escalate, whatever worked before.

So whenever you start setting boundaries, you can expect whatever tactic has worked in the past is now going to be on steroids. Yes, it, they're gonna pull out all the stops. And if you can stand your ground, I know we're going down a little bit of a rabbit trail here, but if you can stand your ground and still hold firm, not in hate, not in fear, not in frustration, but knowing that God has given you the wisdom and the strength to be able to say no to evil.

And that's, let's call that what it is when someone is trying to manipulate you, whether it's through a victimhood or scriptural abuse, it's manipulation. Yeah. And that is not from God. God does not manipulate us. We do know someone who does, and that's the enemy. So when the enemy is operating through someone else and you just stand your ground, James four, seven, submit yourselves to God.

Resist the devil, and he will flee. I promise you that that tactic will stop, but get ready because they're gonna move on to another tactic.

Natalie: That's right.

Kris: Because a lot of times these toxic, whether we wanna call them narcissistic, just plain toxic, emotionally immature, unstable, dysfunctional, whatever label we wanna put on them, they are, they're lazy.

Yeah, they wanna take whatever tactic has worked in the past and just apply that. And now that's why you're seeing such anger. That's why you're seeing, uh, such frustration come from them because they're like, my gosh, darn it, this tactic isn't working anymore. Yeah. And now you're sending me back to the drawing board.

And instead of coming to themselves and saying, well, wait a minute. You know, maybe that wasn't very godly. Wow. Wait a minute. Maybe I'm not

honoring her, or maybe I'm not loving her as scripture calls me to. No, no, no, no. They don't spend their time in self-evaluation. They spend their time now figuring out how they can go back to the drawing board and get what they want from you.

And the two things that take place is they play the victim and they will twist scripture against you.

Natalie: Yeah. Yeah. I like to think of it as they're just putting on a new mask to see if this, the other mask didn't work, or that their masks in their toolbox aren't working. So now they're like trying on a brand new mask that they've never tried before.

So a lot of times women will say, you know, he's completely different. Like, what happened to my husband? And I'm just like, he's just using a different mask. Is it working? Is his new mask working? Yes. Like you, you get to decide if that mask is gonna work on you or not. Exactly. And if it works, he's gonna just keep doing he'll, he'll just keep using that mask.

Kris: It's exactly right.

Natalie: Yeah. Um, but the victimhood thing is so true too. Be it's like a great, uh, way. It's like a great gauge to figure out if they're actually getting better or not, because. If you are, if you give pushback or if you say, please don't do that, or, you know, that really bothers me and I don't, or it looks like you came over into my yard and trampled all my roses, you know, figuratively speaking, right?

And then they act like hurt. That just really hurts my feelings when you say things like that to me.

Kris: Why would you accuse me of that? Exactly.

Natalie: Now, you know, nothing's changed, right? That's their mask just coming off and now you can see it for what it is again, and then you, then you can just go, okay. It's when what I think happens is, especially like I've seen myself do this when, when I want there to be peace, I will do whatever it takes to create peace, and that means I won't.

Enforce my boundary. It means I won't say no because I know instinctively I know if I do, I'm going to get that kickback and I don't want to experience that. So yeah, we can placate and play the game. Yes, and make it, you know, decent,

especially if they're wanting to play that game. Right. Yes. But that's not how you know.

Yeah. And that's just pretending that everything is all better now. Yep. If you wanna know if it's really all better. Then don't play the game and say no, just say No, no, I'm not gonna do that. You wanna go out to eat? No, I really don't want to. You wanna watch this movie? No, I really don't want to see what happens and see what happens.

Exactly.

Kris: But like you said, it's, it's very difficult for some women who. Either they're struggling with people pleasing or codependency, or I just so desperately want my marriage to work. Yeah. That I'm gonna take whatever scraps he's giving me and I'm just gonna hope I'm gonna, I'm gonna hope that this is God turning him around.

I'm gonna believe that this is God turning him around and we don't want to test the waters.

Natalie: And we're,

Kris: we're right back to walking on those eggshells, like, oh, it's really good right now because we know it's gonna happen next.

Natalie: Yes, we do. You test

Kris: that boundary and they turn around. Oh, see now things were going great for with us.

You always have to go and mess things up. You always gotta make a big deal if something. And that should be your indication. But again, if there's not that that little girl that's not healed within you, if that's codependency, like I need you to be okay in order for me to be okay, then it's not okay when you're not okay, because then I'm not okay.

And then we go through this turmoil and, and.

Natalie: It's a, that's a great indicator too of where our identity is. Yes. Because if our identity is in how the other person sees us, whether it's our parent or our partner, then if that's where we're getting our identity and our sense of

wellbeing, then of course we're going to have to make sure that they see, well, think well of us and see us, and we're gonna have to play that their game then

Kris: Yes.

Natalie: But if our as Christians, our identity is in Christ. And if we're not willing to let go of getting our identity from this other person, we're never actually going to be strong enough.

Kris: No. To You'll fall into the trap every time. Exactly.

Natalie: Exactly. So anyhow, I know a lot of Christians, it's like, we always want us Christian women, we always wanna be doing the right thing.

But I remember when I realized I'm really not getting my identity in Christ. I'm getting my identity in my husband. Yep. And in what my church thinks of me. Yes. In what my family thinks of me. And. That is, that's why my life is sucks right now. Yes. Okay. And when I, but that's a

Kris: revelation that a lot of women don't come to and they don't want to come to.

Natalie: Yeah. Yes. So it's just that denial again. Okay. So what are the signs that we might be in a trauma bond with our mom or our spouse? And how do we begin to break free from that?

Kris: Hmm, that's a good question. It actually, it piggybacks what we were just talking about. If my identity is rooted in your approval, I'm likely gonna stay stuck in a trauma bond where one minute, um, there's this in intense emotional connection, likely because of love bombing, or maybe all the stars lined up, their tummy is full and they got a good night's sleep and they just happen to be in a good mood.

And, and, and, and this like the, um. The gambler in, in the casino where I just, I hit the jackpot. I won \$10. So there's, there's light at the end of this tunnel, so I'm gonna keep going. But that same person is the one who's actually causing the damage. Yeah. So the one who's causing the abuse, who's causing the damage, who did all of this destruction within you, you're now going back to them to make it right.

That's a trauma bond.

Natalie: Yeah.

Kris: Instead of recognizing, I may love this person, I may wish that it could have been different, but I can't keep seeking their approval. They cannot fix what they broke. And what happens is, so one of the signs that we're actually in a trauma bond is I'm addicted to their approval and I have this emotional confusion.

In that I just can't live without this person. If I leave, fill in the blank, you know, either I'm gonna be empty or, or something's gonna happen to them. So we feel responsible for them. But on the flip side, we also feel that they're now responsible for undoing what they've done. Yeah. And if, and even as I start to say it and, and I recognize trauma bonds, like many, many years ago when I first heard this, I'm like.

Chris, do you hear this? Like,

Natalie: yeah. Do you

Kris: hear how insane this sounds? You keep going back to the very person who's been disapproving of you and begging for their approval. Yep. And that's when the, the question flipped. I'm a little hard on myself, so I'll give you the question that I asked myself. What's wrong with you?

Natalie: Hmm.

Kris: Because my thing all this time was like, what's wrong with him? Him, him, him. This is what he's doing and what, you know, this is his problem. And if he changes this, and if he would just stop this and all that was true, why am I tolerating it? Yeah. That's what it really came down to. We don't attract toxic people.

We tolerate toxic people. Why am I tolerating this?

Natalie: Yeah. Yeah. It's like hanging. It's like, uh, you know how when little kids have their favorite teddy bear or binky or whatever, it's like, my favorite teddy bear is a porcupine. Yes. And I'm going to hold on tight, but the porcupine really hurts. So the more it hurts, the more I hold on tight to it in hopes that it will stop hurting me.

It's just not, it's gonna always hurt you until it's not gonna happen, until you finally let go of that porcupine. You will continue to be hurt. So then yeah,

you're right. What is it that keeps me hanging on to this porcupine? Yes. What do I need? What need am I not meeting? Yes. Inside of myself that I have to, that I think or believe, and what belief systems do I have in place?

Yep. That make me believe that a porcupine is going to actually solve that problem for me. Because I do believe that people can heal and I have watched it happen. Yep. When we talk about, you know, have you ever seen an abuser like get better? And we can list on one hand maybe the people that we've seen, but I have seen.

Hundreds and hundreds of women get better and change trans. Yep. All the victims

Kris: that you can heal. Yeah,

Natalie: 100%. Like the track record is amazingly successful. Yes. It is in your

Kris: favor. Absolutely. Yes it

Natalie: is. And so that's where your power is. It lies in you, not in the ability of your pastor or your parent or your spouse to change.

You are the one. This is your, this is your life and you are the one. Yes.

Kris: Natalie, if you don't mind, you had said something much earlier and it's getting triggered within me. I think a lot of women get very stuck in seeking wise counsel from the church, which we are called to do in the abundance of wise counsel plans succeed.

So, but a lot of times we also have to be prayerful and careful on where this. Advice where this wisdom is coming from because one of the things that I've seen more often than not is unbiblical toxic advice coming from the church. Yeah. I've seen that more often than not. Just give him more sex. Just submit gentle and quiet spirit and, and as if we're just supposed to spiritually bypass all of the harm that is actually taking place instead of truly intervening on behalf of that, whether they're abused or not.

I, I, I have difficulty using that word abuse because it can. It can cover so much, but yet it can also be very abused. So just, but for the lack of the abuse, the word abuse can be abusive. Yes. It's abused. Okay. Yes. But I think a lot of these pastors are, they're not trained properly in these type of situations, and they're spiritually bypassing.

No, you just need to forgive. Oh, and, and they'll look at a woman who's. Probably at her wit's end. Literally that lid of the pressure cooker is just exploding. And, uh, see, I think you might be the problem. Yeah, exactly. Do you see how you're behaving here? Which anger there? Exactly. Exactly. That's why he's not drawn to you.

That's why he's, and, and I do agree that we do need to own our part. Because none of us are ever perfect in this. I've been in my fair share of toxic relationships, and I have grown a lot through them and in them, and I thank God for the transformation. However, that I'm not in any one of those toxic relationships anymore.

Yeah. It doesn't mean that I stay. And that's where we need to be prayerful and careful. And even if that advice is coming from your church, it doesn't hurt to seek other whys. Biblical counsel as well.

Natalie: Right? Well, and there can be bi quote unquote biblical counsel that comes from someone who's secular, who understands.

'cause actually, I think the, yes, the mindset of a lot of religious, uh, religious culture is, and, and by the way, I am a CA practicing Christian, but a lot of the religious culture is a very works and performance based mindset and religious. Pharisaical mindset and that kind of mindset is not rooted in Christ.

It's not rooted in grace. It's not rooted in freedom and love, and that is the exact mindset that Christ over and over and over again in his ministry, dismantles and criticizes yes. And says, this is evil. This is darkness. If you have this mindset, because my, I've done everything for you already. It's already done.

You are free. You are loved. You are 100% forgiven. You. I've saved. The salvation was already bought for us. Yeah. Christ did it all. So we don't have to do anything. And yet what we do is we do what the Pharisees did and we layer on all of these performance things. Yes. Especially in a patriarchal culture. We layer them on women in particular and give them the emotional burden of burying all of the sins of their own sins and the sins of their husband and their children.

Right. And it's just too much. It's too much. I, if I could go back, 'cause I was very angry towards the end of my 25 year marriage, I was angry at my husband, angry at, and angry at the church. That just kept. Pushing me down and pushing me down, and I wish I would've, but they would say, you're so angry.

There's, you know, there's so much sin on your part and this is probably why you're in the situation. It's like, I wish I would have said to them, you. That's absolutely right. I am angry. Yeah. I would have to have no pulse. To not be angry. To not be angry, angry, angry by injustice and mistreatment of anybody, including myself.

Yes. And, and what I'm curious about. Is why you are not angry about this as well. Mm-hmm. What is it inside of you that tolerates this kind of treatment of women and children? What's going on in your relationship with God that you tolerate this? That's what I, you know, but I didn't know, I didn't think you could speak to people like that, but that's what I would say to them now.

And, um. Yeah. And then am I still angry? Yeah. There's a part of me that's always going to be angry about that, and yet I don't feel that anger every day. I don't live in that anger. I live in a, a more healed state and a more loving state. Good. But, um, although I should be careful, I don't wanna say that anger is not loving.

'cause I think anger actually provides the impetus for us to actually. Look at all the people in the story again and go, okay, there's one person in the story that needs help and nobody's helping her. And I think I'm gonna help her now. You know? Yeah. My anger is giving me enough energy to to rise up now into courage.

Yes. Yeah. And courageously rescue this person that has my name and so anyway. All right. Let's get, let's get back. Let's like, re it back in. Why is it so much harder to set boundaries with a narcissistic mother or spouse than with. Someone that, you know, maybe a, an acquaintance or some of a, a, like, not a real close friend, but a, a friend from church.

Kris: Yeah. That always, uh, boils down to the emotional ties. We have emotional ties to this person. I can walk away from this person at church. I might be sad. I thought we were friends. You turned around, you hurt me. I can go sit in a different section depending on how big your church is. But when we're dealing with a spouse.

And a parent. These are the people that we're supposed to love and nurture you and they're not. So now you have to come to a place where you're saying, okay, I gotta protect myself right now. I've gotta get past the, is that selfish part? And then every no that I say to them feels like a rejection to them.

That then gets bounced back on me. Yeah. So I'm now back in the fog, the fear, the obligation, the guilt for not meeting their needs. So here I go again. Now starting to second guess myself. Yeah. That's why it's so much harder to set boundaries with someone you love and you just, if you find yourself saying they should or they shouldn't, you're struggling with boundaries.

Well, my mother should understand, well, my husband shouldn't be doing this. Yes, that's probably true, but putting that aside, you now have to step up and say, what am I going to do to protect myself?

Natalie: Right.

Kris: If let's say, for example, my husband's yelling at me, which he doesn't, but. I'm not gonna stay in this room while you're yelling.

I'm more than happy to have the conversation. Let's do it when calm prevails. Yeah. They don't take that well. This is like rejection. You're abandoning me. You're walking away. So if I'm now struggling with, okay, I need your approval. I, I want this to really work, I'm now gonna start to tolerate this. Yeah.

More. And we have that expectation put on us from society. I mean, what's the saying? Blood is thicker than water. Yeah. So yeah, family is supposed to, family's family. They're just supposed to do whatever they want, you know? That's your sister. How many times have you heard Yeah, but that's your mother. Yeah, yeah.

But that's your sister. And we're, we're, we're allowing that, that toxicity to, to Trump the title, or I should say the title trumped the toxicity and it's so unhealthy, but it's because of those emotional ties. And then we have these expectations. Number one, the expectations that are coming from them.

You're supposed to just, you're, you're my sister, you're my daughter, you're my, this. But we also have societal expectations.

Natalie: Yeah. Yes. You know. Exactly. They're your family,

Kris: so it's much, much harder.

Natalie: Yeah.

Kris: And then on top of that, they manipulate emotions like masters. They,

Natalie: yeah. Well, especially if they see that that's a hook that we have.

Yes. Right. Um. These are deeply embedded, programmed beliefs that we get from our families of origin, from our culture, you know, wherever that might be. And we all, you know, many of us have different kinds of cultures, but there's always some kind of thread like this and from our religious communities. Yes.

So, um, yeah, it's hard to, you know, to deep, to deprogram from those things. We can do that. I like to think, you know, there's always going to be a part of me that on some level still believes those core things. So when I'm confronted with those beliefs internally, they don't externalize so much anymore because I, bigger parts of me are now controlling my life.

Mm-hmm. I can have compassion for that part of me who still believe, who still is doubtful about that, and also recognizes just a part of me and just go, that's just, that's a belief that I used to have. I don't have that belief anymore. And so I can understand why that part of me feels a little bit guilty because that part of me still believes that, you know, I'm supposed to show up in a different way and just let people trump all over me, but I no longer do that anymore and that, and, and so I'm making my choices from mm-hmm.

An adult perspective instead of from that little. Girl, part of me who believes that. Yep.

Kris: Yeah. Yeah. And that's, you know, you touched on something really important. We can have the guilt doesn't mean we need to act on the guilt.

Natalie: I'm gonna cut off the conversation there because we just kept going for another 40 minutes.

We'll play the rest of this conversation in next week's episode, but in the meantime, if you would like to connect with Chris, be sure to check out her YouTube channel. It's Chris Reese, spelled KRIS. R-E-E-C-E and I'll put the links in her for to her brand new book and other resources in the show notes.

And of course, if you find yourself nodding furiously at the things that we were talking about and you want help unpacking what is going on in your own marriage, as well as getting tools and strategies for emotionally unhooking from your abusive spouse, go to join Flying Free dot com to learn how you can get the help and support you need in a way that is both affordable.

Effective in changing lives. Let that next life that changes be yours. So next week, come back and listen as we dig into what makes someone truly toxic, why many Christians feel trapped by guilt, and how gaslighting warps your sense of self. If you've spent years second guessing your reality, then next week's episode is going to give you clarity and a way forward.

We'll see you then.