



Wisdom for Survivors

FROM THE FLYING FREE PODCAST

Special 100th Edition Transcript

NATALIE HOFFMAN | FLYINGFREENOW.COM





HEY, SISTER!

The Flying Free Podcast began in January 2018, with the hope of educating and encouraging women of faith in destructive marriage relationships.

Two years and one hundred episodes later we have thousands of listeners from all over the world, and the voices and hearts of Christian women are rising to their God-given place of human dignity and honor.

This is a work of love birthed from a place of heartache and shame. Something only a loving, compassionate, and powerfully redeeming God could do.

I give you some of the best quotes from the Flying Free Podcast so far. Links to the full episodes are included in this special 100th edition transcript. (And if you want to listen to this episode, head over [HERE!](#))

Fly Free,
Natalie Hoffman



Introduction

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of Flyingfreenow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE HOFFMAN: It's here! Welcome to Episode 100 of the Flying Free Podcast! I am super excited to present this episode to you because it is a compilation, a little snippet, of almost every single episode we've had so far.

We've got a lot of ground to cover, so let's dig in.

Episode 1

BOB HAMP: If you've asked a few times and change hasn't happened, the next step would be deciding how you are going to manage your own life. In other words, the way that Danny Silk's *Keep Your Love On* describes setting boundaries. Boundaries aren't telling the other person what to do. They are telling the other person what you are going to do. It would be things like, "I've noticed that when I've asked for honor, it doesn't seem to come back to me. From now on, if you are not honoring to me, I'm not going to engage in a conversation where you're not honoring to me."

Episode 2

NATALIE HOFFMAN: I had to learn that, no, I need to live in the uncomfortable feeling that someone has maybe disapproved of me because I had to say no to something. Whether it is, "No, I can't buy that product," or "No, I can't work in the nursery," or "No, I can't take on this extra ministry responsibility because I have other responsibilities," the answer is no. It's not because I don't love you or don't want to help you, it's because I have priorities, and they don't necessarily include making sure that you get everything that you want from me.

Episode 3

BECKY FARRIS: Another hard thing for women is that we go to churches and your gut tells you there is something wrong here because that power-over is satanic. It is oppressive, and you can feel it in your gut when you walk in a church. Just like a mom can have an intuition that that guy is a pervert, you have to listen to that. The hard part is that you feel in your gut that something is wrong, but you look around and there are all these happy women. So there is something wrong with me because I am seeing things and nobody else is seeing it.



Episode 4

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Let's talk about what the purpose of marriage is, because there is a thing out there that says the purpose of marriage is to make you holy, it's not to make you happy. But did God establish marriage... When you think on the Garden of Eden, did God establish marriage for the purpose of making Adam and Eve holy?

RACHEL HARDEN: I don't remember reading that in Genesis. Did you see something about that?

NATALIE HOFFMAN: When God put Adam and Eve together and established marriage, they were already holy. They were perfect. They had never even sinned. The whole purpose was completely all about...

RACHEL HARDEN: ...being one flesh.

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Exactly. It was all about being together. It was fellowship. It was unity. It was enjoyment of one another, reveling in this wonderful relationship with one another and with their Creator.

Episode 5

JIMMY HINTON: In that passage that says, "Do not forsake the assembly," the word that is used actually means do not ignore those who have been hurt and oppressed. That is the sense of that word-the literal sense of that word. We've taken a literal translation of that and applied it to the American church model and said, "Well, forsaking the assembly means not going to church when the church meets on Sunday morning." That's not what it means. The heart of that passage is don't be the priest who walks on the opposite side of the road of the man who is bleeding.

Episode 6

NATALIE HOFFMAN: They have done images of the brains of people who have post-traumatic stress disorder and brains of those who have been on drugs. The same area of their brains are actually damaged. So it is a physical abuse.

Episode 8

NATALIE HOFFMAN: In a dysfunctional relationship, one or both partners are not taking personal responsibility. They are either putting the responsibility on the other person (which looks like shame, blame-shifting, denying, minimizing, excusing, justifying, controlling, and accusing) or they are taking all the responsibility on themselves (which looks like placating, appeasing, covering up, pretending, and overlooking.) In a healthy relationship, both partners can safely and freely offer feedback to the other one, and that feedback is heard, respected, and responded to.



Episode 9

CINDY BURRELL: They know how to present themselves as a sheep to the public, but these are wolves. They know what they are doing. Their actions are deliberate. The cruelty is a means of maintaining that power and that control over our lives. So no matter how godly you are, no matter how submissive you are, no matter how gracious and loving and prayerful you are, all of that gives him power.

Episode 10

RACHEL HARDEN: I had this view that anyone with the credentials was fit to do what I needed them to do. Instead of having that mindset, I think it is so important to look at people as individuals and watch what they do and how they interact with you instead of just assuming that since they have the credentials or they went to school...This goes for anything—counseling, or being a pastor, or anything. Just look at what they do. Look at who they are as individuals. Don't just assume that they are a good person because of what position they are in.

Episode 11

NATALIE HOFFMAN: The church often disciplines one of the parties. But the party that they discipline more often than not is the female who is bucking their system. She is usually the one who gets kicked out. Now this is a spiritually abusive environment. The answer for you personally is not to try to change others. That means we don't try to change the church. We don't try to change our friends and their worldview. We don't try to change our abuser and his worldview. The answer lies in being able to let go of everybody else, what they think, and what they believe, and to turn your focus back to Jesus Christ Himself and to you and, change yourself. Move away from the groups and institutions that are teaching a destructive worldview. This will involve some studying and reading. You can find resources on my website, flyingfreenow.com.

Episode 12

RACHEL HARDEN: The thing that strikes me though is that, looking back, I was mentoring other young Christian women or giving them advice. It was always from a place of, "You need to be doing this," instead of coming alongside them and helping them see things for themselves and just being a support for them. That's one thing I cringe about—using the Bible as a list of rules instead of a guide on grace and imposing that on other people. What that does is to negate the individual responsibility of that person before God and their individual relationship, and it puts you in the place of God, which is never where we are supposed to be. It imposes something on them that is the opposite of what God wants for us in our relationships.



Episode 13

NATALIE HOFFMAN: When we allow other people to come over into our house and yard, then we eventually learn that we need to take care of our own house and yard. So we need to ask these people to all leave now. "You guys can all go. Go take care of your own house and yard." Usually what happens is that those people are used to controlling you. They are used to telling you what to do. They are used to you meeting their needs. That would be you in their house and yard. There is lots of enmeshment, lots of crossing over of boundaries. When you establish those clear boundaries around yourself, you start taking care of yourself, you start letting them go, you stop taking care of their rose garden and start taking care of yours...People tend to get upset about that. They don't like that. You are upsetting the status quo. You're changing things up. The relationship dynamics are going to change. It's going to be extremely uncomfortable. It's a double whammy because you are already feeling guilty. You're not really sure if it's what you should be doing. Then you have this person who is mad at you. They are trying to reinforce that guilt and blame you when things fall apart—when their rose garden is no longer blooming because you're not over there fixing it for them. Or when they are feeling rejected because you won't let them come over and do whatever they want to do. They are going to be upset, and that is going to be hard.

Episode 14

NATALIE HOFFMAN: There are many reasons we choose to keep things status quo, and sometimes these reasons are good ones. Sometimes we have very little choice, especially when children are involved. But often we have more choices than we are willing to admit, and we may not be aware of our ability to change in small increments, slowly rewiring our brains, learning new skills and how to relate to abusive people and groups, and awakening to our own value as daughters of God. Change almost never occurs overnight. More often, it takes place quietly, in the small, imperceptible things we alter slightly every single day. This is the kind of change I'd like to challenge you to pursue. In this way, over the period of one year, five years, and ten years, you will change the entire course of your life.

Episode 15

NATALIE HOFFMAN: What other people are seeing when they look at this whole situation is a woman who is in fight mode. She might have been in flight mode before, but now she is in fight mode because she is fighting for her emotional and spiritual well-being. She is fighting for her life on a level that differs from fighting for your life if a tiger is running after you, but it is the same thing. Because she is in fight mode, she is desperately trying to survive. She's looking to the community to help her with this because we were not created to be alone. We weren't created to be loners or lone rangers. We were created to have community that would come together, support one another, and help each other through the hard times. But this is the very time that the people she needs most, the people she has poured her life into over the years, this is the time they abandon her. One reason they abandon her is because she's breaking down their comfortable structure that is the status quo by her truth-telling. Because she is fighting, they don't like it. It doesn't look very good. When women fight, our culture doesn't really like that; they don't accept that. What they are seeing him do on the other hand is...He has no scruples when it comes to lying, pretending, or faking, so he is coming across like the victim. He's crying all of a sudden. Where she has spent years crying on her bathroom floor begging God for help where nobody can see her, now she's not doing that anymore—he is crying. Only he's not doing it in his bathroom floor in secret, he's doing it in front of the people he knows are strategic to cry in front of. He's doing it in front of people he knows will feel bad for him when they see him cry. They will see her fighting, they will see him crying, and what are they going to think?



Episode 16

RACHEL HARDEN: What's even worse, Natalie...You're right. It is vile, judgmental hatred towards human beings, and it's worse because it's in the name of Jesus. They will say all day long that they are just doing what the Bible says and they follow the God of the Bible. But what they've done is looked at the Bible like a set of rules instead of to find out who Jesus Christ is and to find God's plan for humanity. They are taking those verses out, like they did in the Desiring God article on grief, that one verse in Thessalonians, and he's made an entire dogma or doctrine out of it about how you are supposed to grieve, missing the entire heart of God's purpose and plan and love toward the human beings that He created.

Episode 17

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Think about all the things that a woman getting out of an abusive relationship has to give up and surrender to God. She has to surrender her reputation. She has to surrender her children. She has to surrender her career, her life, her financial status, or her home. She has to surrender everything. She has to lie low. She has to surrender her friendships. She has to surrender...She's taken initiative to do what I believe is right in standing up and saying no to abuse. She has to surrender all these things to God. It takes a tremendous amount of faith for women to do that.

Episode 18

NATALIE HOFFMAN: There are so many layers of losses when you go through a divorce, especially as a woman of faith in a faith community. It is an extremely traumatic thing. Then, if you are the one who initiated the divorce, there's a layer of complexity to that as well because you didn't want a divorce, but it doesn't appear that way to anybody else. It appears that you are the one breaking up the marriage when in fact you are the one simply acknowledging that the marriage was never really intact in the first place and was being destroyed bit by bit on the inside.

Episode 19

SARAH MCDUGAL: Sacred acts of self-care are not about guilt; it's about permission. Here's a list of permissions: Giving yourself permission to not be everything to everyone. Giving yourself permission to slow down sometimes. Giving yourself permission to just sit and read. Giving yourself permission to just be mom instead of supermom. Giving yourself permission to say, "No, thank you." Giving yourself permission to take a nap instead of doing the dishes. Giving yourself permission to say, "Yes," when someone offers to help instead of letting pride get in the way and thinking that you don't need it. Giving yourself permission to set stronger, healthier boundaries. Here's my favorite. It's a huge one, and that is giving yourself permission to only carry your own suitcase of emotional responsibility instead of carrying someone else's.



Episode 20

NATALIE HOFFMAN: To have a healthy marriage, we needed to submit more. The key was simply that we needed to submit more, and if we would do that our husbands would then be better able to do what they are required to do, which is love us more. In other words, their love was predicated on our submission. Then, they would give a disclaimer and say, "He should be loving you too, but you need to focus on your submission, not his love." How did that work out for you? What is your current?...Do you have a great relationship now because you are submitting perfectly now, and your husband is loving you perfectly?

RACHEL HARDEN: Oh, I have a great relationship because the person I am with is a wonderful, godly, patient man, and he genuinely loves me and cares about me. And I feel the same way about him. That is why we have a really good relationship.

Episode 21

NATALIE HOFFMAN: So let's review the order of priority here. A victim comes forward for help. She needs to be emotionally, physically, and spiritually safe. That ought to be the number one priority. But the number one priority of the church is to save the marriage. The number two priority is to change the abuser in order to achieve the number one priority. So the abuser puts his energy into performing an act for the church, making it appear he has changed so he can regain his control over the woman. While he is doing this, he is also covertly planting seeds of doubt in everyone's minds about her, paving the way for the future smear campaign he will need to launch in case his plan doesn't work, and she leaves him anyway. The important point to remember here is that the abuser is almost always the one who wants to save the marriage. Think about it. Abusive men need to maintain control over their targets. It is a private and public affront to him to have his wife slip away, and he is all about image management and control. His agenda to hang onto his victim, "save the marriage," appeals to the church's number one priority, which automatically places him on the side of righteousness in their viewpoint. His goal and their goal are the same. Then, when they compare this seemingly noble goal of saving the marriage to the wife's goal—which is to stop pretending, stop covering up, walk in truth, set healthy boundaries, get away from the abuse, and pursue healing—they side with the abuser. In order to justify their abandonment of the victim, they need to do exactly what her abuser has done for decades—control and shame her. And that's exactly what they do.

Episode 22

RACHEL HARDEN: Just some general principles about giving narcissists information. It opens up vulnerability to you, which can be really tricky because you want to help them. We spent our entire marriages helping them, trying to make them see things, etc. So it seems like a good idea to give him all the information that we are discovering about things that are finally making sense. But unfortunately, because of the pathology of narcissism, they use information like a weapon and often, most of the time, against you. What happens often is if you give them books that talk about what narcissists do or anything like that, they will start using that language against you. It will make your life even more confusing.



Episode 23

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Statistically, kids do better if they have at least one parent or one adult in their life who is emotionally intelligent, who is empathetic, and who accepts and loves them wherever they are at in their journey. That child has a good percentage chance of thriving in their adult life.

Episode 24

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Always remember that the behaviors you see look like anger, disrespect, and rebellion. The Christian world will say, "Spank them! Spank the living tar out of them." But underneath all those behaviors, what you have is a person who is afraid, a human being who is crying out for unconditional love, validation, and acceptance. Again, that does not mean that you agree with them on something, it just means that you validate their experience. You listen. You care. You're empathic. This is what we need, and this is what our kids need too.

Episode 26

SURVIVOR: He tells me with tears in his eyes he uses videos of other women to make up for what I lack. He's so sad, so grieved about his failure, that there's no allowance for me to be angry. I must offer grace and forgiveness, so I do—at each new confession, each new failure, year after year. But his words ring in my ears as the comments about my weight, my size, my looks cut like a knife. His eyes above me, looking down, disgust pouring out. My body lying there exposed, examined, found wanting, disappointing, discarded. But later the cruelty, taken back, never meant, should be forgotten. Promises made; promises broken. A cycle repeating. If only I could be better. If only my skin could bring him joy instead of pain.

Episode 27

NATALIE HOFFMAN: When you confront them and give them feedback about their behavior, you are risking them coming back at you and saying horrible things to you—either blaming you for it, telling you lies about what they did or didn't do, or whatever. And that really hurts. But that's the only way you will really know that he has changed—if you confront, if you keep pressing. I've talked to other women who really believed that their husband changed, and usually within three months they are back again saying, "Nope. I guess he hasn't."

Episode 28

JENI B: My kids have one healthy home now. Rather than having one home (a "whole home," as in, it's not a broken home), only one place to go, where they couldn't get away, they couldn't hide, and they couldn't escape into themselves to get away from the abuse of their mother...Who knows if it would have turned heavily onto the children? It may have; it may not have...Rather than a place where they were witnessing absolutely toxic conditions every single day, now they only have to be in that environment part of the time. The other part of the time, since I chose divorce, I can give them a really healthy, positive, together family. My kids and I are a family now.



Episode 29

STACEY WYNN: It's interesting to me that often you are seen as a heretic just for saying, "I'm questioning things," or, "I'm wrestling with this issue." But in reality, I believe that is really what we are called to do because we learn when we wrestle and we come face to face with God in those moments and are able to ask questions of Him. He knows everything that is going on in our hearts and our minds. He knows when we doubt Him. He knows all the stuff about us. I got to the point that I would just have very real conversations with Him. When I was mad, I would tell Him I was mad. It sounds kind of silly, but in those moments that's when we are really able to connect in a new way. He teaches us something new, and He replaces lies with truth. All that is what helps us gain ground against the enemy. The enemy can be our husbands. The enemy can be people in church who are not telling us the truth and are not potentially filled with the Holy Spirit. It starts to give us discernment to be able to tell all these things: truth from lies, freedom from bondage, and all that.

Episode 30

NATALIE COLLINS: The reasons why somebody is abusive are two things. The first thing is because it is hugely beneficial. People don't want to hear this. Society doesn't want to hear it, and when we're being abused, we don't want to hear it. We want to believe that he must be some sort of tortured soul. We have this idea that "hurt people" hurt people. It's hard with our Christian narratives of sin and brokenness. But fundamentally, he's abusive because he gets what he wants. He gets whatever he wants; he goes wherever he wants; he gets sex on demand; he gets to have the status of being a good parent and being a good spouse without actually doing anything; he never takes responsibility; he gets to blame everyone else; and we all run around doing everything that he wants and take all the responsibility for anything that goes wrong. Who wouldn't want a life like that?

Episode 31

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Have you heard of the term "narcissistic fleas"?

RACHEL HARDEN: Yes, and I'm so glad you brought that up because I wasn't certain if that was a good thing to say. I don't want to compare people to dogs or something that gets fleas, but narcissistic fleas is a good term because you pick up fleas by being around a dog or something that has fleas. You don't want those fleas, and you can't get rid of them!

NATALIE HOFFMAN: The Bible even says if you walk with the wise you will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. So whoever you are hanging out with, the kinds of people you are hanging out with and spending time with, will have an influence on you. If you are living with, sleeping with, and having and raising children with someone who is foolish, negative, critical, and angry, that is going to rub off on you. It's inevitable. It doesn't mean that's who you are or who you would be if you hadn't been living with that person for so long. But that is going to happen. Those fleas are going to come on you.



Episode 32

CHERYLYN CLOUGH: I would say the first one of those is understanding your boundaries. Dr. Henry Cloud, the author of the book *Boundaries*, says that boundaries are where you begin and I end. If I don't know where I end and my husband begins, we can't have good boundaries. We both have to know the beginning and the ending of me and what I'm capable of. The issue with empaths is that we want to help everyone and serve everyone. We feel for them before we feel our own feelings sometimes. A narcissist loves nothing more than to find and target an empath—an empathetic person whom they can use to do what they want. Many of us who are empathetic have been used by narcissistic people.

Episode 33

GRETCHEN BASKERVILLE: It took me to the end of my first year to be able to smile and to be able to have a good belly laugh once in a while. At the two-year mark, I felt like I was turning a corner and that everything would eventually be okay. I was starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. It took me about three years to get back to at least emotional normal. I found this Bible verse that has become what I call my divorce verse. It's Psalm 71:20-21. It is the Psalmist speaking to God. "You have made me endure many terrible troubles. You restore me to life again. You bring me back from the depths of the earth. You comfort me and make me greater than ever."

Episode 34

NATALIE HOFFMAN: What if she's not able? What if she has small kids at home and her husband doesn't like her to leave the house much? What would you suggest for her to deal with the stress at home?

JUDY HERMAN: That's a good question. This is a journey of awareness for all of us. I'm sure some who've read your book got this punch in the gut feeling. It takes time to process, and people's level of readiness for leaving a relationship is going to be varied or leaving the pattern. We're talking about divorcing the toxic relationship patterns. This is actually a real thing where a woman is so beaten down and has perhaps even gone to in-patient hospitalization because her depression and anxiety are overwhelming. She's not ready to get out of that relationship until she herself is well. It's sad, but it's true. You've got to have the stamina with which to experience the push back, and not everybody is there. But they can be on this journey of being there.

Episode 35

GRETCHEN BASKERVILLE: What I've discovered is that when you don't fake it, when you are real, you actually have better ministry than when you fake it because people can tell when you are faking it.

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Yes.

GRETCHEN BASKERVILLE: I started running this single mother's group at my church. This was way back in 1998. I realized that I had a very special ministry as a divorce survivor. I had "street cred." Other divorcees would listen to me in ways they would never listen to a pastor's wife or a women's director. They kind of tune them out because "what would they know about my life"?



Episode 36

NATALIE HOFFMAN: There will be times in your relationship where you fall apart. Maybe your friend died. Maybe you just had a new baby. Maybe your child is sick and in the hospital. Maybe you are really stressed out because of work or because of some traumatic relationship at church. Things happen for whatever the reason, but they will not enter into that experience with you. They expect you to be on your “A” game 100% of the time, and if you are not, then you have failed as a human being.

Episode 37

STACEY WOMACK: Statistically, clergy are the number one place people go for help, but unfortunately, they are some of the most uneducated—not uncaring, but uneducated—people around this. Oftentimes, they treat this issue like normal marital conflict, but it's not the same. It's about power and control. Since it is so complicated and they haven't received training, oftentimes they become more concerned with saving the relationship than being concerned with the individual person and the heartache they are going through.

Episode 38

NATALIE HOFFMAN: What do these women do? They are scrambling, trying to save their relationships. What should they be doing instead?

PATRICK DOYLE: Practically speaking, there are two guiding principles I would really encourage. One is to work at being willing to appropriately assign responsibility, first and foremost. When you do that, it will usher you right into the process of grief. It is saying, “This relationship is untenable. That person doesn't have the capacity to care for me. They've turned on me. They've rejected me. They've abandoned me. They've said I'm wrong. They are unhealthily trying to help me, and I don't want that.” So as you appropriately assign the blame, which is going to heal you, you also then must do the work of grief. I'm saying this, and I will keep saying this because I strongly believe it—grief is the doorway to freedom.

Episode 39

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Surrender to the fact that this process is painful and there is no getting around it. You cannot escape it. If you try to escape it, or numb out...There are all kinds of ways that we as humans escape our pain. If you do that, you will not come out on the other side where you can be truly free and healed from it.

RACHEL HARDEN: Yes. The world is full of people who will not deal with their pain, so it spreads out to all the people around them in various ways. They can't help it. I think dealing with your pain, taking a deep dive inside yourself and allowing yourself to feel that pain, is one of the most courageous things anyone can do.



Episode 40

MEGAN COX: I hear that from women who say, "I felt like a prostitute." I think we need to hear that. We need to hear their voices when they say, "I feel like a concubine or a prostitute." I would even go a step further and say that not only might their marriage not be able to be saved, but it may have died a very long time ago. You just said something so wise about the abuser's agenda and the church's agenda being aligned in that moment, and now she is the outcast.

Bonus Episode

DAPHNE: For those who have been sexually abused, there is also a component of emotional abuse, and in churches, there is a component of spiritual abuse that happens even before any kind of sexual act happens. That's what grooming is. There is manipulation and using scriptures to maintain that position of power and control. I'm glad they had people there who really focused on that particular dynamic and named it as emotional and spiritual abuse.

Episode 41

ANDREW BAUMAN: Women don't want to know the truth because the truth has really dire consequences.

NATALIE HOFFMAN: It does.

ANDREW BAUMAN: I would rather be naïve and not feel the pain than know that my husband is cheating on me regularly and masturbating to other women's breasts. "No thanks! I don't want to know what he does at night when I go to bed because it hurts too bad." That is where it cycles back into the grief. We must have the courage to live in truth because God is truth. The more we live, the more we experience God.

Episode 42

SARAH MCDUGAL: If you feel afraid...I know, Natalie, you said that if you share a less desirable part or a different opinion and they get upset, that's obviously a huge red flag. But I think if you feel afraid to share that, if you instinctively keep back parts of yourself that are different from him, even if it's not a bad part but just a different part, that tells you it's not a safe relationship because you're instinctively scared to actually say who you are and what you think.

Episode 43

NATALIE HOFFMAN: It is a dead giveaway that there is a wolf hiding in sheep's clothing when they respond to feedback by making demands or by becoming defensive and offended in such a way that they begin to attack you. When they want things to be covered up or hidden, that is also a dead giveaway. Here's the thing about wolves in sheep's clothing. They are in sheep's clothing: they look like you; they talk like you; they act like you and all the other sheep. You don't know that there's a wolf in there until you give them feedback.



Episode 44

RACHEL HARDEN: I lived on dreams. I lived on hope for the future. That was such a big part of letting go of that marriage. I had to realize it is never going to be like that. He is never going to be the person that I thought he was or could be, and we are never going to be the happy family that I dreamed of being and worked towards being every day.

Episode 45

CHRISTY BAUMAN: That's why we still care. That's why it still matters to us. That's why when we are birthing a big dream in our life, it hurts. There is pain because we know there are times when we've birthed, and it has laid lifeless, and we've had to bury. Every one of us know those stories. Every human knows that story. But women are invited to remind us through their cyclical bleeding that it's only a season—that life and death and life always comes.

Episode 46

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Now, if you're still sitting at the very bottom of that pit, hoping against hope that a miracle will happen and someone will reach down and pull you up so you don't have to make that horrible climb, you're going to be waiting a long time. Here's why. Think about a butterfly trying to emerge from the chrysalis. It is during that struggle that the blood gets pumping through her wings, giving her the wing health and power she will need to actually fly. If you were to rescue her by cutting open the chrysalis to let her out prematurely, she would die! That's right. She would miss her opportunity to access the power she needs to do what she was created to do. Her inability to fly will cause her to be easy prey for predators, and she will not survive very long. So instead of thinking that God is unloving to not just pluck you out of hell and set your feet on a wide place, you can instead recognize His infinite wisdom in promising to be right by your side every step of the way—loving you, accepting you when you mess up and when you succeed, cheering you on no matter what, and then rejoicing over your first flight of freedom when that day comes. God will rescue you, just not in the easy, pain-free way we'd all wish for.

Episode 47

SARAH MCDUGAL: One thing that I keep reading about is that you put stuff in long-term memory—your long-term memory files are most open—just before you fall asleep. I've read about other homeschool moms who have their kids go over their multiplication tables in bed as they are falling asleep (they will have a chart on the wall by the kids' bed or something) precisely because that is what files it into long-term memory, and then your brain files the long-term memory into the short-term memory while you sleep and your brain files. So if you are falling asleep listening to scripture, listening to good books being read out loud, or that kind of stuff, it is going into your long-term memory where it can positively impact your thinking patterns.



Episode 48

NATALIE HOFFMAN: When someone has had an inner transformation, you should be able to press a pressure point in them. You should be able to press for your own autonomy and for your own voice to be heard. You should be able to show up as a whole person, and they will respect your space and your voice, they will listen and care, they will make room for you to live and move and breathe in their world, and it will be a beautiful, safe, healthy thing.

Episode 49

BECKY FARRIS: He said, “No, I have two doctors that said I’m sterile,” but he got me pregnant the first time. So he knew what the hook was in how to get me. With abusive parents, they told me that was my bed and I had to lie in it. That’s how I met my abusive husband.

Episode 50

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Either you could be a gold-star, quiet, obedient (to all the men in the club) woman or be a rebellious Jezebel. So there was no middle ground like Esther, Ruth, Lydia, Priscilla, or Deborah (to name a few). As long as you fit their mold and you got under their control, you were in like Flynn. But if you dared to open your mouth, to call attention to sin or corruption in your marriage or in your church, your head would roll. They’d jump all over you with accusations of being bitter, angry, unforgiving, deceived, rebellious, unsaved, etc. I’ve talked to hundreds of women who have gone through this. When this happens, it’s your wake-up call that the church environment that you thought was healthy is actually covering up a thick toxic lie.

Episode 51

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Even separation and boundary setting with people like this, we hope it’s going to wake them up, but it’s aesthetic outward change. A lot of times they do. It doesn’t sound like it’s made any difference to this particular man in his life. But a lot of guys will think, “Oh, I don’t want to lose my target, so I will go through the hoops and make it look like I have changed.” But they don’t really change on the inside, therefore it is just aesthetic. Then, when the woman gets back together with him, of course it goes back to the same-old-same-old, and then she is faced with having to do the same thing all over again.

Episode 52

BECKY FARRIS: It seems to me that we women think that somehow pastors and churches have this power to give us permission. When you are talking to your pastor next time, I want you to mentally think, “I am equal to him. I’m only asking him because he’s more well-versed—he has more knowledge.” What you will find is that you will instantly think, “Wait a minute. No, he’s not! He has no idea about anything of what I’m talking about.” So why would you go ask him?



Episode 53

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Eight years into our marriage I write, “I’m wiped out, Lord. I feel I must be toward the end of what I can bear.” I read that and think, “If only you knew the years and years that are still ahead of you.”

Episode 54

NATALIE HOFFMAN: When we live with a toxic person, they are telling us lies about ourselves and we are running those lies through our head thinking about them all the time. Then, because they are repetitive, we believe them. When we believe them, we have feelings and emotions attached to those beliefs. We feel ugly and stupid. We feel that way not because someone told us we were ugly and stupid (even though they did) but because we believed that about ourselves. It’s so important that we get this because you are not going to get yourself back because someone else gives yourself back to you. You are only going to get yourself back when you reclaim yourself.

Episode 55

MEGAN PAROCHA: That is the best way to approach those situations. The narcissist wants you to get angry and to get you to react. They want to create this chaos because that’s how they maintain their control. It is so hard when they do it to your children. That’s the hardest. It tears at your heart.

Episode 56

GRETCHEN BASKERVILLE: You mentioned you were told not to “gossip.” But the truth of the matter is that one of the most healing things after trauma—the trauma of being in an abusive relationship for a long time—is telling your story to safe people because the way you stayed in this abusive relationship is by covering it up and hiding it. That destroys you, your psyche, your sanity, and your physical health. It’s time to start telling your story to safe people.

Episode 57

SURVIVOR: When you get to the point where you see value in yourself and you’re not going to take this one person—even if you’re married to them—you’re not going to take this one person’s viewpoint of you as gospel because it’s false. It’s all a lie, anyway.



Episode 58

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Now, is our anger mixed with sin? Well, probably; we're tainted creatures. But that doesn't mean we should never feel that emotion or let that anger put feet to our conviction in order to set captives free. Do you think those who fought against the atrocities of slavery, genocide, or the murder of pre-born babies did or do so with smiles on their faces and warm fuzzies filling their hearts? Come on, you guys. We're not in heaven yet. Life is messy. Throwing a floral rug over it is not going to make the mess go away.

Episode 59

POLLY HAMP: Maybe because it was fresher, I wasn't so young, and I had a lot of life experience. The pain seemed greater, especially within the religious world, and the amount of people and a church family that I lost along the way was very painful because I didn't know how to function and they didn't know how to relate to me. So I laid the ministry down and healed some more after getting a divorce.

Episode 60

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Let's pretend you've been brainwashed from the time you were a child to believe that if you wore the color red that you were blaspheming God because Jesus shed His blood for us. Just pretend that's one of them. Then you would grow up and even when you heard the idea that it wasn't true, if you wore red you would still have this conscience-driven response that, "I shouldn't be doing this. I feel so guilty. I'm rebelling," because of how you have been brainwashed with that idea. That's what I believe—that a lot of Christian women have been brainwashed with these false ideas about what these verses are saying, and that's why they feel this conviction, this fear, and this guilt. It's completely false. It's not rooted in reality. The opportunity is there to rewire their brains, to find out what the Bible really says about these different things, and then to live that out in a healthy, positive way that brings you emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

Episode 61

SURVIVOR: When the abuser came along and I fell in love with him, that was like getting hit with the wave, like when I was a little girl. I got hit, and I fell, but I got back up. The second wave was massive, and that was my church family, religion, and man-made tradition. When I was rejected by those...When the door was open, I was there. I lead women's retreats and all those things. When I was rejected by them, when it knocked me down, I almost didn't get back up. I swallowed so much salt water and I had so much sand in my bottoms, I couldn't get up. I almost drowned.

Episode 62

NATALIE HOFFMAN: He's not a happy camper, and he's going to work hard to make sure that his target emotionally pays for stepping outside his definition of who she is.



Episode 63

GRETCHEN BASKERVILLE: One of the most powerful things...I don't know if you saw that article in Christianity Today, February 4, 2020. It came out and the graph at the very bottom of the article showed how badly evangelicals are doing with divorcees. We have demonized divorcees so badly that they don't want to come to evangelical churches. Now they do show up in droves, but a huge number—twenty percent—do not, just because of the negative messaging they get from the pulpit, from Christian authors, and Christian radio broadcasts. We are shooting ourselves in the foot if the evangelical church wants to grow.

Episode 64

BECKY FARRIS: The problem in our marriage is that there was \$3 in the bank, the lights were going to be cut off; we were going to be evicted, and when I asked him to help me figure it out, he would stonewall, say nothing, and look at me like I was insane. Instead of going to the one who was causing the problem to figure it out, I had to take control and save my home (just like Abigail; I was married to a fool) and save my kids' lives by getting a job and paying the bills.

Episode 65

SURVIVOR: He wasn't always abusive. He knew how to draw me out. He knew all my deepest fears and secrets he would later use against me to hurt me or to gain points in an argument. Once, he said it was no wonder that I had lost my best friend because I was a horrible person. Another time, he said it was no wonder that my natural father abandoned me. I was only two at the time.

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Wow.

SURVIVOR: I remember looking at him and thinking, "That's just pure evil talking right there. That doesn't even make sense. Obviously a two-year-old doesn't do anything to deserve to be abandoned." But that's the kind of abuse that I experienced.

Episode 66

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Now, what if you're a wife and your husband is not asking you to sin, he just doesn't agree with you on things. How do you come to a final decision on something when you've reached an impasse? Let's come at this from a commonsense standpoint. Let's set aside the whole husband/wife thing for a moment and pretend we are talking about two humanoids. This can be two girls or two boys, it could be a boy and a girl. They can be a variety of human colors. They can be roommates, siblings, co-workers, board members, whatever. Let's say these two humanoids don't agree, but a decision must be made. There's only two of them, so a majority vote cannot be taken. They are equals, so there is no bigger or better human that gets to make the decision. Oh, dear! There's no simply, clear-cut quick answer to this. This is a conundrum! We are wringing our hands and panicking. What do we do?! We can solve this with mutual respect, mutual interest, mutual goals, mutual honor, and mutual concern. Mutuality. Is there going to be a compromise? Yeah, probably.



Episode 67

DAVE ORRISON: Whenever we have something that is difficult, the desire to have a system or a formula to make it easy is strong.

NATALIE: Yeah. And when people make that promise and say, “Here. If you do this, this, and this you will be growing kids God’s way.” Well, I want to grow my kids God’s way, not my way, so I’d better do those things.

Episode 68

DAVE ORRISON: Narcissists aren’t necessarily malignant. They don’t hate you. They just don’t care about you, which, by the way, is the right definition of hatred. The person who can look at you and not see you and use you for his own purposes, that’s the real hater. Love takes the risk of opening to another real person.

Episode 69

BECKY FARRIS: This is a side note, and it’s a funny I will share with your audience. My daughter is in college, and she takes a lot of Bible classes. She said to me last night, “Do you know what the definition of heresy really is, mom?” I said, “What’s that, honey?” She said, “It’s just thinking for yourself, sometimes.” It’s funny because really to stand up for yourself you must start recognizing that some belief systems that you have that might not be right or are belief systems that actually harm you.

Episode 70

SURVIVOR: Every woman will come to a point where they say, “I can’t do this anymore.” I came to that point.

Episode 71

NATALIE HOFFMAN: God made us to be strong, noble queens. We are royal daughters of the King of Kings. So let’s take our places by Him and make choices for our lives that are driven by His word and His direction. You guys, that’s not always going to be pleasing to everyone around us. Jesus had a lot of disapproving folks who were clucking their tongues behind His back. How did He handle that?

Episode 72

NATALIE HOFFMAN: The first paradigm shift that I had to realize—that I was an adult and I wasn’t a child, but that I was still living as an emotional child. I realized that I could make my own decisions, and I didn’t need the validation or permission of anybody else. I didn’t need the permission of my parents. I didn’t need the permission of my husband. I didn’t need my small group leader’s permission or the leader of the ladies’ committee at church. I didn’t need my pastor’s permission or the elders’ permission. When I look back on my life back then, I was completely and totally living for the opinions of everybody else. I could not make my own decisions.



Episode 73

BECKY FARRIS: It's taken five years, but I've slowly—not completely—but slowly weeded most of the toxic people out of my life simply by going back and saying, "Trust, but verify." Don't feel this weight of needing to trust someone who is not trustworthy.

Episode 74

SURVIVOR: What I've decided is that over the years I was just grasping for hope. I just needed hope that it would get better, that he would find love for me, or find something favorable about me to bring out kindness. What I was really doing was treating hope like it was grace. If I hoped enough or if I worked enough, then God would give him the grace to be different.

Episode 75

NATALIE HOFFMAN: I stopped living for other people and trying to win their love, approval, and acceptance by being who they wanted me to be and finally found who I really was. I now live out of my core values, out of the core of who I am as a human being, in my identity in Jesus Christ. There are going to be some people who really enjoy me, want to be my friend, and want to have a relationship with me—and we will enjoy that. Then there will be other people who don't. They want a relationship with me that is conditioned on my being someone that I am not—someone who they want me to be. That is power over another person.

Episode 76

BOB HAMP: Because His guidance comes from His presence and our connection to Him, not from our interpretation of information. The dilemma with the knowledge of good and evil is that it puts our interpretation in charge of what's right and what's wrong. So if people in power are in charge of interpretation, then people in power can say divorce is against the Bible, women should submit to their husbands meaning that they should be subject to their husbands, and on and on. The interpretation of the map becomes the result of whoever is in power's interpretation.

Episode 77

RACHEL HARDEN: My ex-husband would tell me what I was feeling, and it didn't match up with what I knew inside. But I trusted him so much, and I thought he was just this brilliant person, and he knew me so well that it was just really confusing.

Episode 78

SURVIVOR: What that reflects of our long-term marriage is that decisions had been made repeatedly where I only get five percent of the story, I get little bits and pieces of the truth, and sometimes there are even omissions in those truths like he is twisting it. But then the result always is that he is going to do what he wants to do with no regard for how that would impact me emotionally, spiritually, and mentally.



Episode 79

NATALIE HOFFMAN: We are extremely powerful in this world. We don't even know the power of a woman because our world and our history...Satan has used so many tools to crush us down into the ground. That's why I think that this work on our own personal lives is so critical to our world. We may not see the full impact of the work that we do on our personal lives, but I guarantee that it will not be for nothing. The model that you will be for other people when you get strong, for your kids, or for your grandkids—maybe not even for them, but for other people—is going to reverberate into eternity.

Episode 80

ANNE RESSLER: I notice it more in people who have grown up in more legalistic traditions where it is very authoritarian, very performance driven. Often that set up is attached to family of origin stories which makes that feel normal where performance is what is valued and performance is how you feel love and acceptance. I think there are so many core lies that settle in attached to family of origin experiences. Sometimes they are even the setup for getting into abusive relationships or marriages and even spiritually abusive systems.

Episode 81

DAPHNE: What I've come to is a place of looking at forgiveness as something that is for me. It involves another person or another group of people to the extent that they did something wrong against me. But forgiveness is really me saying, "That can't control me moving forward." It's not even about justice for me because I feel if I say, "Hey, I'm going to forgive them so that God can give them justice," then it is still about them, and it's not about me and my commitment to move forward in my life.

Episode 82

ROBIN: But the best thing for me is that I can walk into my bedroom at night, and I am not afraid.

NATALIE HOFFMAN: That's huge. Wow. So basically you get to be like a grown-up adult now?

ROBIN: Yeah. I can make decisions for myself. Sometimes it's hard because I think, "Oh my gosh, what should I do? I don't have anyone to ask." But then I think, "Just calm down, Robin. It's going to be okay. Whichever way you decide, it is still going to be okay."

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Yep. You grow into that skill and you become more and more confident as you get more time under your belt after getting out.



Episode 83

NATALIE HOFFMAN: I like to think about this like a chess game, that God can play an infinite number of chess games all at the same time. He knows all the moves. There is no move you can make that is outside of His knowledge or ability to continue playing chess with you. People can't figure this out, of course. God is infinite. He is unfigure-utable. When they try, it is only because they are not really trusting that God has got this. I'd like you to consider the idea that maybe trusting God means living your life in freedom and love because you know, you're 100% sure, that He's got your back.

Episode 84

WENDY HERNANDEZ: Just because you are making a stand, finally, for the first time in forever, doesn't mean that you are a bad person. It means that you are fighting for your life first and fighting for your children second. Just because you are being strong doesn't mean that you are bad or that you are going to go to hell. It doesn't mean that. It means that you are standing up for your rights as a human. I see women really living into their fear instead of living into who they really are.

Episode 85

DAPHNE: Ultimately, it doesn't really matter if you can define whatever it is as abusive because I feel that thinking you must define something as abuse can be harmful because people tend to take it to their partner. Or if they are in a religious environment, they will try to take it to their pastor or biblical counselor and say, "I think this is abuse." Then you can get into these arguments and back and forth about the definition of abuse in trying to figure out if it is abuse or is it not. Ultimately, that doesn't really matter. You still have the choice. If you are in a relationship and there are patterns of harmful behavior to you, you can decide to do something different—to walk away—whether or not someone else would call what is happening abuse.

Episode 86

SURVIVOR: The one counselor told me I had magical thinking because I was still at the point where I wanted to be married to him, and this counselor told me he wasn't going to change.

Episode 87

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Remember, you've told them a million times already. They're not going to go out and work on themselves and their own behavior. They're not going to do it because they can't. They live in an alternate reality where you are a Lego character in their universe. You're not allowed to be you.



Episode 89

DAPHNE: You brought up the Jeremiah 17:9 scripture — “The heart is deceitful above all things and is desperately wicked. Who can know it?” That scripture was used so much to teach us to discount our emotions and our feelings, which I think goes a long way in perpetuating the system of spiritual abuse.

Episode 90

PATRICK DOYLE: Because of the profound level of subtlety that is embedded in the emotional abuse process, the abuser isn't hitting you and leaving a black eye. So how are you going to prove it? I always say it is the death of a thousand cuts. If we looked at one of those incidents, one of those cuts, we might say, “That's not that big a deal.” And it truly wouldn't be. But when you look at a thousand, you're looking at a pattern of profound destruction.

Episode 91

NATALIE HOFFMAN: It's impossible to be free when you give your freedom away. The scenario I just described is how the world seems to operate everywhere you go. Everyone wants to control everyone else, but nobody wants to do the one simple thing that could break the spell. And that is to control your own self. Nothing else, just yourself.

Episode 92

AMY MARLOW MACOY: There is also another set of people vulnerable to gaslighting, and those are folks who do have a good amount of self-confidence because some gaslighters can look at them and see a target or a conquest. They can say, “I don't really like that they are that proud of themselves or feel that good about themselves. I would rather take them down a peg.” They will start undermining that foundation of self-confidence by making the person question themselves or doubt themselves.

Episode 93

BECKY FARRIS: I want to say one more thing about servant leadership. I am the CEO of a company. I have a lot of employees. Am I a nice person? Absolutely. Would I use the word “servant leadership?” Sure, we can throw that word out. Why not? I make it a goal that when my employees are increasing their skill level as they work for me, so when they leave from me, they are better than when they came. Great. Few companies do that. But at the end of the day, I am still the boss. I can still fire. I can still tell you what to do. You are not equal to me. Does that make sense? You can say servant leader all day long, but that does not change the fact that a man can tell the woman and she must obey because of this idea of complementarianism.



Episode 94

NATALIE HOFFMAN: I teach the women in my program this concept of how an abuser pretends that the people in his immediate family are like Lego characters in his universe. When a child plays with a Lego character, he makes the little plastic character do and say what he wants it to do and say. Abusers do the same things with family members. The only problem is that real people aren't Lego characters. Real people have real opinions, ideas, problems, weaknesses, preferences, dreams, goals, etc. All those things are going to be different from person to person and from child to child because human beings are unique. This means that real people are not Lego characters. The problem is that when the abuser experiences his family members showing up like the real people they are, he has a little hissy fit because they aren't doing what he says they should be doing.

Episode 95

BARB SPANIER: Not only do we try to diffuse the bombs, but we also get blamed for the bombs.

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Yes!

BARB SPANIER: Even when we diffuse them, we hear, "Well, you didn't work doing this or this. In fact, could you do it better?" You don't even get thanked for putting the bomb out...

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Right. You are the reason the bomb was put there in the first place! So shame on you!

BARB SPANIER: Yes. And shame on you because you really should have done a better job at putting that bomb out.

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Yes. It's so frustrating.

BARB SPANIER: That is the systemic-ness of it in the family and in the church. That is the script that everyone is going by.

NATALIE HOFFMAN: Yep. And that script needs to change.

Episode 96

SARA RICHMOND: Because no one around me really understood what was going on, they went to saying, "You're crazy. This is all your fault. Here are 17 things you need to do to be a better wife." They set me up pretty well to believe that it was all my fault. There are a lot of ways they reinforced that which were so damaging to me. I think when I got out of the church for about four years I was floundering, wondering, "Who am I? What does God think of me? How do I deal with this self-loathing?"



Episode 97

STACY BROOKMAN: The research shows that writing and digging into that tough stuff, writing your feelings, and getting into those stories (we can talk about past or current tough stories), helps boost your immune system and boosts your emotional, physical, and psychological well-being. There is a wide body of research around that, so much so, they now have degrees in expressive writing therapy.

Episode 98

BECKY FARRIS: Becoming your own person should mean that you deal with your own problems. Part of this is that I need to push them to take care of their own problems for themselves and be as little involved as possible. That doesn't mean I'm not part of their lives. We have a get-together today with the entire family. I'll make a good dinner, and we'll sit around the table and enjoy each other's company; but that's it. If I have my neighbors over, I will not ask how every part of their life is going. That's not my job. That's not my place. I'm trying to realize that is how I need to treat my adult kids, because if I do anything else, it backfires.

NATALIE HOFFMAN: And there you have it! Happy 100 episodes to the Flying Free Podcast! I want to thank all the special guests we've had over the past two years. But most of all, I want to thank you, our listeners, for being part of this journey with us. You can't have a podcast without listeners, right? If you like this podcast, why not [leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts](#) so others can find it too? I hope you enjoyed our show today. Until next time, fly free!

Want More?

I offer a life-changing support and education program for women of faith in emotionally abusive relationships. It's called the Flying Free Sisterhood.

Learn more, read testimonies, and apply today!

www.joinflyingfree.com

"Thank you for putting the Flying Free program together. I have listened to all of your podcasts, read all of your blog articles and your book. When the invite came along to join the Flying Free Sisterhood, I had my doubts you would provide any new material. I was wrong. This is great stuff!

I can't wait to see what comes next! "

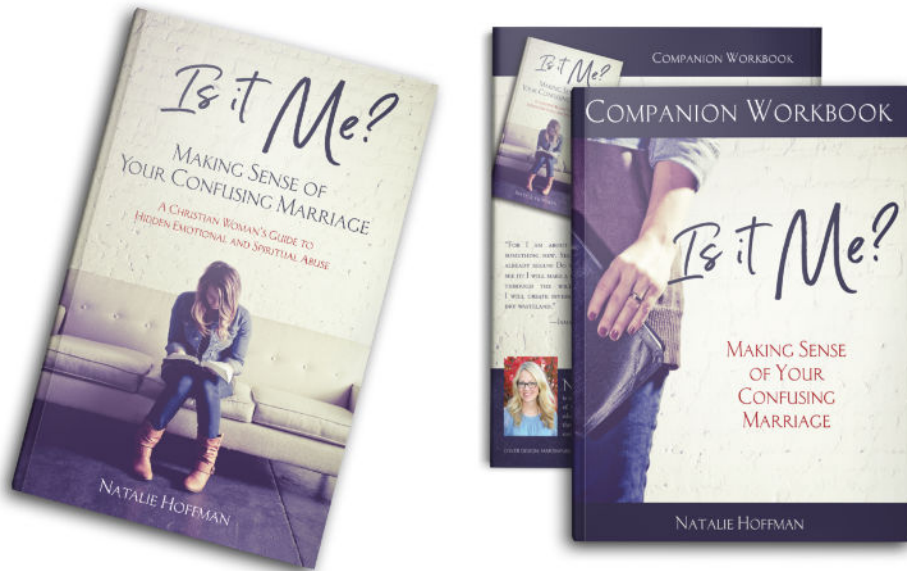
Flying Free Member



Is It Me?

Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage:
A Christian Woman's Guide to Hidden
Emotional and Spiritual Abuse
by Natalie Hoffman

Available in paperback, Kindle, and Audible formats on
[Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



"If there were PhDs to be given on the subject of emotional abuse, Natalie Hoffman would have earned hers ten times over. Natalie is remarkably knowledgeable and character-savvy when it comes to understanding the soul-death that occurs during the terror of emotional abuse. Furthermore, she brings the element of healing to the table. Any woman who questions herself while sensing deep, unrecognizable pain in her marriage should read *Is It Me?*"

Megan Cox

MAR Pastoral Counseling, Founder of Give Her Wings, Inc.



My name is Natalie Hoffman. I'm a mom of nine, educator, author, podcaster, professional certified coach, and life-long survivor of covert emotional and spiritual abuse. I know what it's like to crawl, and I know what it's like to fly free. My passion, education, and skill set empowers women of faith to go from one to the other. I've gently and compassionately walked this path with hundreds of women, and I'm ready to walk it beside you.

You're not alone anymore.