

HER RITES: WOMEN'S SACRED JOURNEY

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 279 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today, we are going to have a conversation with Dr. Christy Bauman. She's an author and psychotherapist who focuses on the female body, sexuality, and theology. What a great combo, right? Christy was a guest the very first year of the Flying Free Podcast on Episode 45 where we talked about her book *Theology of the Womb* which had just been released back then about how our female bodies reflect the glory of God. And today we're going to hear about her brand new book called *Her Rites: A Sacred Journey for the Mind, Body, and Soul*. Welcome, Christy.

CHRISTY: Thank you so much. I feel so grateful that you are having me on.

NATALIE: I'm excited to have you. We started talking right before I pressed the record button and then I was like, "No, we have to record this stuff. It's so good." I just want to say, I love your new book. I will just hold it up. I have the, what do you call that? An advanced, uncorrected proof copy? So it's a beautiful cover.

CHRISTY: This is the first time I'm seeing it. Do you know, I don't even have an advanced copy? I love this. I haven't seen the book. This is amazing. Let me just look at it.

NATALIE: You've got to be kidding. Okay, so here it is. By the time this podcast is released, it will be released. So you can actually buy this. It won't have the white border. It's got a white border because it's an advanced copy. It's this really rich and delicious mix of stories and history and poetry, really. There are so many things I want to say about this book, but why don't you start by telling us why you wrote this book, what inspired you, and what you're hoping that this book is going to do in the lives of the women who read it?

CHRISTY: I wrote this book for women, 100%. I have been seeing women for about fifteen years now, weekly, one-on-one, sitting on my couch, sitting in my therapy office, and I'm transitioning out of that role. Life has gotten to the end of that season. And so I wondered, how do I mark that? What do I do with this? And I felt like I needed to give people a book.

I had listened for fifteen years. I gathered all this research and I had heard all these stories and I saw these patterns and I thought, "Okay, how do I let someone sit with what I've learned in these hours and hours from sitting with women, what am I seeing that's cyclical, what am I seeing that's thematic, and how can I give them a template so that if you want to sit with me for a year and you can't, you do it through this book?"

And basically if I had a woman for a year of therapy, this is what I would take her through, the six rites of passage in her life. And I'd start at birthright and I'd end with legacy. So how are you born and how do you want to die? And what do we do throughout that process to be intentional?

NATALIE: That's incredible. I got that sense too. I was even thinking, "Oh my word, I wish I could take a group of women through this." It's so rich, though. This is not just a quick, one-month book study. This is a process and a working through things, like what I imagine you would do in your therapy office.

CHRISTY: And that's what my hope would be for just that. Theology of the Womb feels like it was a good book club Bible study, a good nugget around Easter, even, like this understanding of Holy Week and understanding of the female body and why she bleeds. This book feels like the lifespan, so it's the rite of passages, and every woman has been through one of these already or multiple, and so which one has she been able to mark or not mark, and it's a great invitation for building sisterhood.

This is the book that I'm hoping therapists take into their offices, pastors, friends just come together and say, "For the next year, let's do this. And once a month we meet and we're talking about it and then let's ritualize it and let's do these markings. You want to go and get a tattoo? We're coming with you. You want to go in the water and burn and spread your ash? You want to mark your body? We're going to do that and we're going to do it together." My hope is it's the best way for a woman to gather her voice and then bring it into relationship with whoever she's in relationship with.

NATALIE: Yeah, that's incredible. Okay, this is a question that was not on my list of questions to ask you, but we got into this a little bit before I pressed record, and I want you to tell us. I was saying to Christy, I really wish that we could get books like this into the hands of more women, and how do we do this? You're an amazing writer. This is really important stuff. It's like treasure. And so how do we expose more women to this? And then you shared something with me that I want you to share with the audience.

CHRISTY: Yes. So I had that same thought. And here's what I know is that another reason of writing this book is you have to be a privileged woman to come and sit in my office in a sense. You have to have enough money that it covers the cost of therapy. You have to be able to have that time. And so I'm looking for these ways to get this into the hands of anybody, anyone who says, "I want a more holistic view of myself. I want self-awareness," right?

And in the research of Theology of the Womb, what I found out is that women who

knew more about themselves at the end of their lives said that they lived a healthier life. And so I thought, "Okay, how do I bring women their own self-awareness? Well, a book sounds right. If you don't have the money for good therapy or you don't have the money to be in that lifestyle, then we're going to put it in a book."

And then I thought to myself, "Man, how many books do I have sitting on my shelf that I've started and not finished? And how many books have I either put on my book list or I've bought and then can't get to?" So then I thought, "Look, we're not going to stop there." So I took the money that I got from the forward of this book and I hired an artist that, she's actually my cousin, but she's an incredible artist, and we sat through the rites of passage and we worked through images and she drew these beautiful images. I mean, I have some of them.

NATALIE: Just a second. For people who are listening, if you want to watch the YouTube recording of this, she's actually holding up some of the images.

CHRISTY: Yes. And so my cousin went ahead and — I should just call her the artist — and she made these images for each of the rites of passage. The images are going to be in the book. I don't know if they're in your copy.

NATALIE: Yes. For example, this is the rite of exile. So there's one image, I think, for each rite. Are there more of them than that?

CHRISTY: There's just one that's for the book. It should be on the first page or something, but yes, there's one for each rite of passage.

NATALIE: Okay. So here's initiation.

CHRISTY: Yes. So that's right on. So we have these images and what we're hoping is that if a woman couldn't read through the entire book, she could actually sit with the image and journal what it evokes in her, right?

So what I've heard a lot of is that rite of exile. You see the image and all of a sudden you remember a moment where you felt yourself alone in the desert, in the dark, in the night, by yourself, leaving the tent, leaving where maybe there were others, and now you're by yourself.

So just being able to give women the experience if they don't have the time to read through the book is, could you use the images in an intentional way to be with yourself and become aware of what it evokes in you?

Man, I didn't stop there either. I was like, "I think we should put music to this." And that's a longer story. But I moved to this town and I didn't know anyone. And my husband had bought me a Christmas gift to do a creative writing session. It happens to be this Grammy award-winning, incredible musician who writes for Netflix originals. She writes all kinds of music.

And I sit down with her and I just tell her my dreams and she says, "Let's work together. This is going to be great." And I come and say, "Well, could we do a pilot and just try to write six songs for each rite of passage?" She says, "Let's just try." We wrote fourteen songs within seven weeks, and then we went through and decided which ones were fitting for the album. And so we just have one song for each rite of passage and we're calling them "listening parties."

So the album downloads on April 16th, which is her birthday, which is why we did that for her, and you can listen to the album. And what we would ask is if you don't have time to read the book, you bring up the images and you would sit with them while you're listening to the song. If you don't have the images, we just ask you to listen to the song, have your journal, and just what comes up whenever you're walking through or listening to those songs.

It's kind of written like *Sleeping At Last* did with the Enneagram songs. They did a song for each Enneagram number, and that's where the idea was, is therapeutic music. And so you can take this album to a bodyworker, to a massage therapist, and you can have it playing while you're getting body work done if you feel like you're in a safe place. And the idea would be that it's taking your body through those rites of passages with intention while your body's being tended to. So again, trying to make the experience for the masses. So my hope is anyone can have it however they need it.

NATALIE: That is so incredible. And music — I think it's so fascinating that you took these art forms, music is an art form, and then you've got the drawings, which is an art form, writing is an art form, and you combine it into this beautiful package. I can't wait to do it for myself.

CHRISTY: So my book tour is basically, if you see it called the "Her Rites Experience," it means you can buy the day of it. So May 1st is going to be in Waco and we have a yoga instructor who's taking you through the songs with movement, I'll be there, and then you're going to get the book and we'll have the book signing, then we're going to have an actual four-course meal where we're talking through the book, and the meal is rite of passage inspired, and so we're taking you through the senses of it all.

On the book tour, there are all kinds of experiences to whatever level you want to be part of it. In Austin, you're going to come in, you'll put your headset in, you'll go in like you're in an art museum, you'll stand in front of each image, you'll listen to the song as you're standing in front of the image. That's a free event. We're just trying to get it out there and let women really have an experience. My publisher would hate me to say this: You don't have to leave with the book. I just want you to have an experience of yourself.

NATALIE: Well, I say get the book too, because the pictures are in there and then plus there's so much amazing stuff in the book. I think the book is going to definitely enhance the experience. It's not a hard book to understand. It's easy to read and it's beautiful.

CHRISTY: And the book actually has the rites of passages written out for you to do them for yourself. So this gives you, in a sense, templates to do the experience yourself for you.

NATALIE: Yep. I'll read one at the end. I kind of want to give them an example of what a template might look like, and one of your examples. But first of all, Chrissy talks about the six rites of women. Is there a play on the word "rite" at all or not?

CHRISTY: For sure.

NATALIE: Okay, I was going to say, it seemed like that to me, but I just want to make sure that was intentional.

CHRISTY: Yep, that was intentional.

NATALIE: Yeah, so, "right," meaning like you're right to these things, but also like a rite of passage, "rite. So the first one is your birthright, and you wrote, "A birthright is your claim on how and why you came into this world. The moment you were born, you began the rite to belong to yourself," but she spelled it "rite," but for me, this was really profound to me and healing, even just reading this one sentence, because I never felt like I had the right to belong to myself. I was taught that I always belonged to someone else. To God, first of all, but also to my parents, to my family, to my church, to my school, to my husband, to my kids. My obligation was to all of these people.

But to myself, no. I was taught that was actually wrong. I had a sinful heart and who could know it? I could not belong to myself. I am not my own. That was drilled into me. So what does birthright mean for Christian women?

CHRISTY: Oh my gosh. That's the part that takes my breath away even as I was writing about it. It did feel a little bit sacrilegious. I'm always like, "Lord, why am I writing this stuff that makes me so nervous but also so free at the same time? So I don't know what to do with this juxtaposition."

But truthfully, it was because I would read in the Bible, and every man, firstborn, had a birthright. And it was passed down. If you weren't the first-born male, you didn't have a birthright. And that was also historical. It wasn't just biblical, but it was biblical, and that's what actually mattered to me. That's where I started to believe that God intended it also. So I had taken that in of like, "What does that mean for calling?"

And then that played into I wanted to preach, I wanted to teach, but I couldn't because I was female. And so, "Lord, what does that mean?" So I think it started there where I was reading and thinking, "Man, I don't know where my name is, even where my birthright starts." So I just started doing tons of research on it.

And what does birthright mean? Birthright is given as soon as we have a beating heart or oxygen, depending if you're going with a medical birthright versus a legal birthright, like in law. And so what we know is when a child's born and you hear their breathing, their voice, that cry out, once you have a voice, when it turns to having a right, our right to vote, is when we have a voice, societally or legally.

And so all of this started to make sense that I never knew what my right was, and it was because I never felt like I had a voice. But my first cry, my first cry out of the womb was when I got that right.

And so yeah, it comes back to what you're saying. I agree. I was taught, "You belong to God first. You belong to your husband. You belong to your family. I belong to my church. I belong to everything else before I belonged to myself." And it felt sinful. It felt selfish. It felt wrong. And then I'd come back to that, "Love your neighbors as you love yourself." And it would always dawn on me that I have to love myself, and to the deeper extent I love myself, I'm going to be able to love my neighbor. I'm going to be able to love my husband. I am going to be able to love my God. I am going to be able to love my children. And I was not taught to love myself because I actually didn't think I had the right to belong, to love myself.

And the rite of passage is that it's a journey. It starts with my first cry and it ends with my last breath. And that journey is what I'm inviting women to be back on is, "What was your first cry and what is your last breath going to look like? And do you understand that that's your rite of passage in this world?"

NATALIE: Yeah, I think in my own healing journey, that right to love myself, I would say that is the linchpin of my healing. It really wasn't until I learned that that I was able to actually do very, very deep healing. So very important.

Okay, the next rite is the rite of initiation, and you wrote this: "Initiation is the coming of age when a girl enters womanhood. It is the moment our naïvety is anointed by knowing." I just love that. I love the way you put words. I love words. So anyway, I just thoroughly enjoyed your book. I love the imagery. We're not going to talk about this chapter, but I just want to say to you, I loved the imagery of you as a girl floating in the water and all that water represents, all the metaphors that you use for water or the ways that water comes into play in our lives.

You mentioned some things, and I won't go into this — you'll have to read the chapter — but some of those things, my initial reaction was, "Oh, gross." I'm trying to think of an example. You gave amniotic fluid coming out or breast milk leaking or things like that. And I noticed that about my reactions and I thought, "That is interesting." Those are areas then for me where I need to heal my idea of what it means to be a woman, right?

So the third rite is the rite of exile, and I do want to talk about this a little bit more with you. I could really relate to this. It was strangely comforting to think that the exile that I lived through that I talk about in my book, *All the Scary Little Gods*, is actually something that God takes all of us through in one form or another to help us grow up into adulthood.

And you said this: "Exile is the season of leaving all others to find oneself until reaching the full stature of adulthood, a passage from living to leading well. Exile is a gift of space that allows us to see with eyes in ways that are not possible when others are around." That just blew my brain. So tell us, how does the rite of exile impact women, especially women who have been abused?

CHRISTY: Yes. And I think women who have been abused have no exile in such a deep place that they've probably actually learned how to make it a haven in some ways because they've been forced to be there for so long. So they've had to make it, in a sense, a safe place. But exile is where we also, like I said, it's quiet enough where we hear that voice that says, "This is not who you are. This is not who you were meant to be." And all of a sudden we realize that.

Now, exile starts with all the voices that condemn us. Exile starts with saying, "You can't belong to yourself. You can't love yourself. You have to love me. You have to stay committed to me. You have to be submissive to me." That's the voices we first go into

exile hearing.

And then finally, when we actually are with our demons long enough, we start to hear, again, that intuitive part that says, “We were not made for this. Wait a second. Other women aren't staying in this? Wait, this isn't what God said? Wait, this isn't who I'm supposed to be? I knew that all along. I'm pretty sure I knew that all along and it's that way out.”

And so exile is not a place that I love and it's not a place that I live in often. So I am actually an amateur to write about the rite of exile, I will tell you that. But I do know enough about it because of how many women I've worked with who have been in some type of invisible abuse that they can't articulate, whether that's spiritual, emotional, physical, however that is. And you can see it. They have been put into a place where they are isolated and siloed, and there's no one that they can reach out who will understand them. And so abuse sends us into a place of exile.

The kindness of God is that exile becomes a gift when we hear our own voice and we know the way out of it. And it moves us into the rite of creation again, right? And so that's that life/death/life cycle. It's like what was meant for death or what abuse or oppression meant to kill us in is as soon as we hear the life-giving part of us, that voice that we know is most true, and we're safe enough and brave enough to listen to it, and it's like that's the gift of exile in that moment.

NATALIE: Yeah, I love that. Even the picture, the art that was created of that woman walking into the darkness, I felt that way. I always think in pictures anyway, so when I was excommunicated, for example, or kicked out of my family of origin, I imagined myself being outside of the city gates. Like the biblical gates — you know how they had walls?

And you do almost think, “Okay, well, this is where my life is now.” Like you said, I thought that was fascinating — you said they end up creating, trying to create a safe place out there. And yet we were made to be in community with other people. I think what I've done — I'm going way off on a rabbit trail now — but I think what I've done is looked around — and maybe this goes along with the next rite, which is the rite of creating — I've looked around and realized I'm not the only one out here.

There are other people wandering in the darkness and we've found each other, and maybe what we're doing is creating something new, a new community or a different community or a place of safety. That could be a segue into talking about your fourth rite, which is creating. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

CHRISTY: Yeah. Now, what you're talking about is, I'm like, that's where you guys are erecting a red tent in the middle of the desert. And you're saying, "We will find a safe haven. We will find people a place to gather because we do belong together and need each other." So I'm like, yep — always the red tent is in the wilderness. And then either the women return back to camp or they go to the desert. And then you can come back to the red tent. It becomes that middle ground between the two. So anyway, I could go off on that tangent forever. I see myself leaving, but I'll stay with the Rite of Creation.

The Rite of Creation, I was particular because I wrote *Theology of the Womb*, particular around the research of the uterus and the cycle of the uterus. I wanted to talk about the Rite of Creation outside of that or in a bigger scope because women would say, "What if I've had a hysterectomy? What if I can't have children? What does that mean for me?" And I was like, "Yes." I'm always saying it's bigger than just having a baby, but if you're only talking about it in the context of having a baby, then people are confused about it.

And what I love about in the image is we have the woman and she's sewing her hair into the story cloth. So she's actually sewing this part of her body, her glory, as it's called in the Bible — our glory is in our hair — she's sewing it into her story cloth.

And I go into a lot about womanist theology, which are black female theologians who tell their stories that if we know historically, women don't often have land to give legacy on. We don't own our own land. Percentage-wise, this a new thing for women to own land. Well, even further back, womanist theologians would tell us that not only did they not own land, they didn't own their homes.

So what they owned is story clothes, is clothes, is what they would wear. So the apron, the coat, the afghan they would sew to keep someone warm. And that cloth was an artifact that would actually hold historical value. And so what they were creating was legacy in the cloth that they were putting on their children or that they were wearing themselves or passing down.

And so that was what I was talking about is the rite of creation is so much bigger than just creating a child. It's creating a storyline. It's a legacy of woman after woman after woman and anything that she creates. And I also talk about cooking and this idea of the recipe, and when we pass down a recipe, whether that's a formula that is creating how you set a table, what you put at the table, how you pair food together, how you pair a recipe together, how you nourish, and all of that is we know it in our bones, but we don't have a physical attribute to show for passing that down.

And that's a part of creation. The story of keeping creation cycle going is to pass down our recipes, to pass down our story cloths, to pass down our clothes to our children's children. So I wanted to go through that avenue rather than the avenue of the womb because I had kind of already tackled that in detail in the other book.

NATALIE: Well, and creating never stops. It's something that I've seen older women, empty nesters, and they are just beginning to create all kinds of new things. I mean, even just think about what you're doing. You've had your children now and you're still raising them, but you're also turning your focus to creating, to writing, to creating music, to co-creating art.

I know you didn't create that art, but your mind was creating with the mind of the artist, creating spaces for people, creating healing. It's like everything that we do is an act of creation when you stop and think about it.

CHRISTY: And women in particular, the rite of creation is theirs because we were given from the Creator co-creating rights. I mean, if our body doesn't tell you that, then I don't know what does. And so there's something where we have insight to creating. And if no leaf is the same, if no snowflake is the same, then each one of us creating in our own particular way with our best friend, me creating with my cousin as an artist, me creating with this woman for music, we're going to create little babies, so to speak, little things in the world that I'm not going to create anywhere else.

So you're right. I'm only beginning to create. What's true is like, sixty is really the age where you start to actually start creating because you don't have children in your home anymore. You have a little more financial stability in your career and you actually have the space and time to start implementing those things in the way you want. So I would say we probably actually should push the rite of creation... I mean, the right of creating we start practicing, right? I'm thinking sixty to eight is probably our golden years of creating.

NATALIE: Yeah. Now, I just want to talk about legacy too, because I love the way you talk about older women. We'll get to that in a minute. So the fifth rite is the right of intuition, and you wrote this about intuition: "Intuition is embodied knowing, which provides the roadmap through exile. When our body speaks, we can understand through a felt sense." This is so important for Christian women who've been told that "Your body is lying to you" all the time. Oh my gosh, we've been so gaslit.

"Intuition is vital to the strength of one's voice. Intuition, as a rite of passage for women, is integrating one's story to serve as a compass to navigate life's decisions." You guys,

this book is worth it just to get the definitions of these different rites. These are so powerful. Can you tell us how the rite of intuition empowers women who have been abused?

CHRISTY: Oh, yes. And so I think one of the greatest grievances in working with any woman coming back from an abuse story is that that's what gets marred the most. And I do think it's particular, and we can go into the anatomy of it all, but if we're talking about your gut region, if we're talking about your pelvic floor region, particularly if there has been sexual abuse where you're being entered in a way where there's actual physical pressure against that part of your body where you house your knowing self.

Another avenue of how that's targeted in the psychological realm is I think about the belly button. The mother wound is really hard to name, right? A lot of times we can name the father wound pretty easily when we're talking about our parents, or at least historically, that's what I've been able to see. But the mother wound, so where she was connected physically to you is your umbilical cord and it's your belly button. That is right over that pelvic floor area. So we're just talking physiologically right now, but it also stands for something.

And so it was so sweet. A client said this today — she works in naturopath and nutrition. And she said, "Anytime you're talking about the digestive system," she said, "anywhere there's pain, you always look north." And I was like, "That's so interesting." She was like, "That's the guide, like the compass as you go north." And she's like, "Everything starts in the brain hormonally for digestion in the gut."

And so when she explained this to me, I'm thinking, "Oh, that's so interesting." For the female, whenever your knowing place is targeted, whether that's by a mother wound, by a partner, there's abuse, whether that is sexual or verbal, however that's impacted — I could go into your throat being another way, your voice being addressed, emotional abuse, how this impacts you — whenever your body's targeted and it's the two passageways that center around your actual knowing place, then you're sitting there, maybe you're in another marriage or maybe you're in another relationship and someone says something and you think to yourself, "Oh wait, I don't know what I think. Are they lying? Are they not?"

And what you've realized is your intuition has been hijacked. You no longer know. And the most unkind thing you can do to a woman is make her not trust herself. If we can take women out, we'll do it by making them not trust their own intuition. And so then all they know is, "Okay, well, Natalie said this and she's trustworthy, so I can trust Natalie. But now I have to get Natalie's approval because she becomes my intuition."

"Christy said it — okay. Christy's pretty trustworthy, I see what she does." But that's still every one of us knowing our intuitive self.

And that's what exile does. We get quiet and alone enough that we hear a voice, and if we're really honest and really brave, we may not know how to follow it, but we know what it's saying, and we think, "Gosh, I'd be scared to death to say this out loud right now in front of my partner because I'll get hell for it, but I know what I know." That's our intuition. And whenever we're free to live out of that place, it is our compass. And when that gets out of whack, all of us gets out of whack.

And so you'll see anyone who's in recovery from abuse, they'll have those moments where they're in another relationship or another dynamic or they're in internal conversation with themselves, and they're saying, "I don't know, I don't know." And they have to ask someone, "Natalie, what's true? Christy, what's true?" And that's okay. For a moment it's okay to have a buoy, someone to hold on to for a second.

But where we're going back to is, if you really dig deep, you know what you know. If you really get quiet enough... And in the song, the intuition song, it's called "She Knows." "She knows, she knows, steady as the waves unfold, constant, like she knows."

And so I just say that to say that to me, the rite of intuition is where I think most women who have been in some sort of invisible or visible abuse, that's the rite that to me feels like them getting back their voice, their power, their knowing self because they don't have to ask anybody else for what's true. They don't have that filler, "I don't know, but..." They do know and they know that they know. And that to me is the rite of intuition and its fullness.

NATALIE: Yeah. Oh my gosh, that's so beautiful. And I can totally relate to that. You want so much to avoid that exile because it's so painful out there in the dark, and you try so hard to get people to, like you said, you reach out to other people and you want to stay in the club, the love club, but then you get kicked out, and you're right. That's when I started listening to myself and going, "It's because I only have myself to listen to."

I really have been thinking more in terms of partnership with God. We are in a partnership with God. It's not God out here and then us over here. It's no, we're partnering with Him in creating. We're partnering with Him in knowing. We're partnering with Him in all of these things.

But when you are alone like that and it's just you and your voice and the Holy Spirit,

that's when... And you will start hearing things. You're going to start hearing things that you have not heard before because before you were only listening to everybody else. That's why I think, you know how you said how sometimes you're scared to say something or put something out in the world? That's where that fear comes from. Because it's like, "I know this is true, but if I say it out loud, how will it be received?"

CHRISTY: Oh, a hundred percent. And whether that's me doing that on a podcast or even this weekend, my husband Andrew and I were teaching a marriage conference in Minnesota and there was a part where I was sharing and I kept my head down. I could not look at their faces. I had my husband right there blessing everything I was saying. There was nothing else I needed. We were in a church. God was there blessing everything I was saying, but my eyes, I couldn't look them in the eyes because I was so afraid of seeing them reject what I really wanted to say, my story.

And I do think you're right. I love that we're saying God's not out there and in there. Whenever I feel like God's whispering and I can't quite hear Him, I go to the Imago Dei, the part of me that God said, "Here, Christy — this is our lifeline between each other. And this is a part of me that I'm putting in you that makes you specific to you, and I want you to listen to that part." And that's when I say, "I'm listening to my own voice. I'm listening to the Imago Dei in me, that lifeline between God and I that is particular to how He created me." But yes, I think it's like that communication, but you're right. It's when I'm looking for the other to affirm that it gets so loud and vulnerable and chaotic inside.

NATALIE: Yeah. How I've come to think of it is those truths that you know deep down inside, your intuition, when you say them out loud, you will get rejected by people who aren't ready to hear those truths or who aren't quite there yet. But every time you say it out loud, there's someone out there that's going to go, "That resonates with what I'm hearing inside of me too." And then all of a sudden you have this incredible connection.

I love the analogy that Jesus gave of the yeast — the tiny little yeast speck of yeast — and then it joins with another little speck of yeast, and pretty soon it's bubbling up and it's growing and it's spreading. And so we have to be willing to open our voices and say the truth that we believe that God has given to us.

CHRISTY: Yes, and what I also love about part of the femininity that I've found in God is that those parts of me, I don't need somebody else to believe it, whereas when I felt like I was in the masculine parts of maybe the church or even when I did feel demanded to believe something and to go along with it, like these things, I'm like, "I don't need people to believe them. If it blesses you, if it comes alongside you, if it helps you love

God and love others better, then take it. But I don't need you to need it for me. I don't need you to believe it." And that feels so much more restful where it's like there's no demand here.

There is no demand. If it doesn't hit you right, if this doesn't feel good for you, please, please walk away from it. There is no pressure. And that part has been a really kind part of God that I have found a ton of refuge in, is where I feel like God's like, "No, there's no demand here. There is no demand. Do you need this right now or not?"

NATALIE: And how different is that from places that you've been in maybe where they've taught truth and they've basically said, "If you don't believe this, then you're not a good Christian or you're not a biblical Christian or you're not a godly Christian"?

CHRISTY: "You're not following our mission statement? You can't work here." That's, I actually think, what denominationally we've done in the church, is we've actually had more of a patriarchal or this sense of like joining into tribes. And it doesn't feel like the maternal or feminine part of just, I don't have that sense in me. I don't need someone to join me to make what's been true for me true or healing. Let it bless you if it does. And if it doesn't, don't worry about it. That's okay. It's very, very different than what I have experienced.

NATALIE: Yeah. Well, also, it's a more expansive view of God, even. God is powerful. If God wants to do His work in a certain way, He will, and if He doesn't, He won't. But we don't have to drive it.

CHRISTY: Right. I'm a servant of this. I'm in it. I just have to stay in relationship with God, and so this is what's helping me stay in relationship. If it helps you, bless you. If it doesn't, then it's okay.

NATALIE: Yeah, exactly. Okay, the last rite is the rite of legacy, and Christy writes this: "Legacy is the culmination of all a woman has buried and created in her life, her ancestry. It's when our names are last spoken from someone's lips." I just want to say this last section, I think it was my favorite section, mainly because I'm fifty-seven. I'll be fifty-eight this year. The older you get, you get these little health problems. They're not necessarily big, but you can see, "Okay, we're on a trajectory. My body is breaking down in different ways." I have to take different medications the older I get, I'm thinking more about my death and what I want to leave behind.

So I love the parts where you talked about your family, their legacy of money and land, which is maybe not a legacy of love, you mentioned. And I loved this: You talked about

this thirst that you had for love. And I think someone told you that you wanted this love from your father but that he only had a thimble full of it to offer you. So he loved you, but it was a thimble full of love. And so that's what he gave to you.

That was also mind-blowing to me because I feel like — I won't go into it —but I just could relate to that. And it helped free me up from... And I hope maybe this helps listeners get freed from trying to get the love that you need from someone who only has a thimble full to offer you. It's such a waste of effort.

And then you talked about birthdays. What is it about birthdays? My daughter and I have had conversations about birthdays and how they're always tainted with sadness somehow or tainted with expectations that never get met. Even if people do the things that we want them to do, you still go to bed that night and feel like, "That was not that much fun. That was not what I was hoping for." And then you feel bad for thinking that way. I love how your friend Mel also planned her mom's funeral. Can you just tell that story because I love it?

CHRISTY: All the stories you're talking about, I'm like, "Oh, these are great stories. This is so funny." The crazy part was when you're writing about the first chapter of birthright, you think you're going to write about birthdays. And originally when I wrote the book, I had all the birthday stuff in that first chapter. It made sense to me.

And then when I got to funerals and legacy, I did not think I'd be writing about birthdays. And I'm like, "This seems so weird, but it actually is fitting." And I think it's because there's a little bit with birth... It's right on that tightrope of it's the first breath, and it's going to then start the mimic of like, then there's going to be a last breath. And so there's something about a birthday that is those bookends. The rites of passage that are bookending this book, they're the big ones, right? They're the last breath and the first breath.

And so I think we can't not talk about birthdays when we're talking about funerals, and that just seems strange, but it actually makes sense that you're a little bit sad and you're like, "Well, why are we sad? We tried to celebrate." Well, we're celebrating, but it's never going to be as big of a celebration as when you first got here, and it's never going to be big enough because you're one step closer to leaving this world too, and we don't know when that is.

So there's just all these feelings going on internally that we don't have any words for. And then we're like, "Oh, and it's not even a big deal. It's fine," or "I was celebrated enough," or "We did enough for it." And there's just a lot of complexity around it that we

don't name, and it's really okay.

We tell our kids all the time, we're like, "It is okay — you probably should cry and laugh on your birthday. Both should happen. That's probably normal. That's what happened to us on your birthdays when you were born in this world. I cried a lot bringing your body into this world and I laughed a lot when you finally got here. And so that is probably what your body remembers of this day that we remember."

And so when we get closer to death, I think we don't know how to celebrate birthdays that are closer to death because there's even more pressure and you're getting to something that, on this side, I don't think we have very good mentors in how to die well. And so my friend Mel's mom, for her 70th birthday... She had a funeral file since her forties. Can you imagine? She had five young kids and she's got this file and she clipping out things that she sees in magazines and she's putting them in this file at forty years old. I'm trying to get my kids lunch packed. Who's thinking about their funeral?

But she was, and she's still alive. She is. And so she just was such a good teacher to me and then obviously to her daughter. And so Mel was like, "Well, anything mom's taught us is that she's so excited about her funeral. She has this file. We're going to make this happen. At least let her enjoy it." And I mean, they went all out. This was like a huge thing, but all of their family, friends, best friends all over the world flew in for it. They gave talks. They had the outfit that her mom wants to wear. They had it in the bed with a mask. They had a viewing.

They're amazing and totally weird. Like it's both/and, and it's incredible because it's so weird. And then you're also like, "But she got a gift that I hope I would like." And I just didn't know I would even like that gift. Because I can't even think about that. So you don't run toward things you don't want to think about, and yet there was a treasure missing by not running towards it.

And I love that there's this older, wise sage of a woman who says, "We face our death, and not only that, we're going to celebrate it. And not only that, I'm going to disciple all of you by giving you a chance to be at my funeral with me there. And I will disciple you in it. And I will receive the blessings and you will receive the blessings."

And the moment I think about is the moment that the women took Jesus's body from the cross into the tomb, and when they wrapped it and when they put the oils and they knew something. They knew something that women know. And I just think like, Mel's mom is showing me something she knows that is wisdom, and I want to learn. I want to learn. And this woman's daughters and granddaughters and great-granddaughters,

that story will be told and probably be emulated maybe for hundreds of generations because it's so wild.

NATALIE: Yes. And I think because now you're telling the story to other people, there are other people who are going to try it. Everyone wants to know that "There was a reason for my life, and I left something in the lives of other people that I've left behind." She got that gift of knowing what that was. She found out the kind of impact that she had on different people's lives. It's an incredible gift to her, like you said, but also an incredible gift to everyone who came and experienced that.

CHRISTY: And intentionality in the goodbye. And still alive — is probably going to live a long life. And I mean, many more years — she'll probably have many more birthdays. But I just love the wisdom that she was like, "I'm not going to miss out. I'm going to throw myself the party I kept planning. I'm going to throw it now."

NATALIE: I loved it. Okay, I have one last question. What would you say is God's legacy? Since we're talking about legacy through women.

CHRISTY: Well, I love when you say, "What is God's legacy?" And I thought, "God's legacy is us. And that is so incredible. Men and women. It's just us." And actually my husband and I were just talking about men's rites because my editor was a man, he's been reading it and my husband's reading it, and he's like, "Oh, it's making me think of men's rites of passage." And so it was just really beautiful to hear, but I'm like, God's legacy is us. And that's incredible.

For women in particular, I think we find whatever God's legacy is in the rites of passage. I think it's the passing down to generations of generation. I think it goes back for me — I don't know that it's my story — but it goes back to the red tent — a place where women upon women upon women for generations are all sharing what made their life the best.

And though I talk about in the book a side of my grandparents who had money and land, in *Theology of the Womb*, I talk about my grandmother who just loved me. Had no money, had nothing, but would sit with me in her rocking chairs in her kitchen and drink tea in the afternoon after school and would just be with me. And she accepted me and loved me no matter how I came. And there was something about her love that changed the world.

And I think women, our legacy, God's legacy through us, is that we sow and we sing love. And we do it again and again, and we teach people how to sing about it, and we teach people how to sew it, how to grow it, how to plant it, how to harvest it, and we

just keep doing that again and again.

NATALIE: I love that. So where can people find you now? You said you're moving out away from in-person therapy. Where can people find you? What's your next step? And then I know you have to go to a session.

CHRISTY: I am moving on. I don't do one-on-one therapy anymore. I do intensives with couples. My husband and I do intensives with couples. And then I do intensives with women. I work with three other incredible women and we do something called "Sacred Interruptions," which is seasonal. So every season we do a weekend with women who gather, and we feed them and do bodywork and do story work and all the things. So that's mainly where I'm doing therapeutic work still. And I'm writing more so that's becoming a little bit harder to be in those spaces otherwise.

But you can get me in a good 72-hour session if you come to anything that I run, and all that stuff's on my website. My book tour is going to be the best way to see me because I'm going to be trying to go places. I'm asking people if they want to bring me out. If they can get more than fifty people at a gathering then I will come and do whatever. I'll bring the art, I'll bring the music, I'll bring the book, and I'll do what I can to give the Her Rites Experience. So that's the best way right now to be connected to me.

NATALIE: Okay. And we will make sure that all the links are in the show notes to all of these things. So thank you so much, Christy, for coming on the podcast and sharing. This is a beautiful book. This was a beautiful conversation. Thank you so much.