

300TH EPISODE CELEBRATION

NATALIE: Welcome to a very special episode of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we are celebrating 300 episodes. That's almost six years of podcasting every single week without fail. At the time of this recording, I looked only at the Apple Podcasts statistics, and we have had over 2.25 million downloads and 33,000 regular listeners over that period of time. This is just on Apple Podcasts. It doesn't include downloads on Spotify or Amazon or any of the other popular podcast platforms. We are in the top 0.5 percent of podcasts worldwide.

And you know what this means, beautiful butterfly? It means that you are not alone out there. This demographic of women has to listen secretly. You can't always leave a rating or review or any kind of footprint of any kind. You can't just hop on Instagram or Facebook and share your transformation stories and then tag me because of the situations that you're in.

And these are all the typical ways that podcasts are shared and how they grow, but not this one. This one is growing in the underground. It's growing because of word of mouth. Therapists are telling their clients about it, women are telling their hairstylist about it or their neighbor or their friend from church. This is all happening organically under the radar, and I think that's amazing.

A flock of butterflies is called a kaleidoscope, and that's how I see all of us. We are this underground kaleidoscope of women partnering together to learn and spread the truth that women matter, that women deserve dignity, respect, and honor, and that is our birthright as daughters of God made in God's image. So thank you for being part of this family, this kaleidoscope of beautiful butterflies helping caterpillars on the ground realize their full potential and gain the vision that they were created to fly.

So speaking of kaleidoscope, I want to use this 300th episode anniversary to tell you a story about the history of the work that I'm doing, where we have come from, and where I hope to go in the future.

In the mid-2000s—and I honestly don't remember what year I started this, but—I began to blog. I was a homeschooling mom at the time and I loved to read and write. I've loved to read and write since I was a little girl. In fact, before blogging was a thing, I even published a little newsletter for moms and charged them \$1.25 per newsletter to cover the postage.

So when I learned about blogging, I immediately started one on blogger.com, but because I had been criticized by some of the pastor's wives at the church I was attending for writing about motherhood when my kids were still young because the idea was that you were supposed to be an older mother with older kids in order to teach the younger wives... Even though some of these women were my age, actually. But because they were pastors' wives, I think they... I don't know. It was a weird dynamic that was going on at that church.

But I felt awkward and insecure about writing online because of this criticism that I had gotten about my little newsletter, but I really, really wanted to help women feel a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. And I had been actually leading communities of women since college and using my writing and communication skills to do this when I was a single woman, so I couldn't understand why I couldn't continue to do this now that I was married and I had some kids.

So anyway, I started a blog called Visionary Womanhood. I know some of you are out there listening who used to read that blog. And I used that blog not for my own writings—I wrote a little bit—but mostly to share the writings of other people. It's kind of sad to think how I let the shame that others heaped on me hold me back from doing what I loved to do and really, what I feel like God created me to do.

But I really did not want to be disliked or scolded, and I figured, "Who could criticize me for sharing other people's writings?" This whole issue of trying to please everyone would eventually become a major battleground for me, as I eventually learned that if we want to change our corner of the world, we actually need to let go of what other people think about us. We need to give them permission to dislike us, to disapprove of us, and reject us if that's what they want to do.

But I was not there yet. So for a couple of years, I would just post links to other homeschooling mom blogs that I admired. And eventually, I got to know some of those homeschooling moms who were writing, and then I started to write articles of my own. I gathered some of these other female bloggers together and then we used my blog as a collaboration of writers.

So really, in a lot of ways, it was like another community that I had gathered around. They all contributed to Visionary Womanhood, and several of us even worked on two books together. Now, they were both very conservative books. One was about homemaking and the other one was about fertility of all things. Yes, I used to be a big believer in having as many babies as God would give me. That's why I had nine.

Now, as it turned out, most of the contributors of that book—it was called *Three Decades of Fertility*—most of those contributors ended up divorced many years later. And it turned out that a lot of us were just living in very abusive marriages and raising our children in those environments. And the next generations in all of our families are still picking up the pieces to this day. So that was the outcome. That was the fruit of formulaic living of just following rules instead of applying wisdom.

So as the years went by and I tried getting help, I was in this painful and confusing marriage that was like that even before I got married. But I was not getting the help that I needed even though I kept knocking on so many doors. I was only met with tremendous resistance and rejection when I would reach out.

So what I ended up doing was finding a lot of information in books in those later years. And these books began to shape the articles that I started to write on my *Visionary Womanhood* blog. And I was writing about things that really didn't relate to what the *Visionary Womanhood* blog was all about. And eventually, I just told the other contributing writers, "Yeah, you might want to not write on this blog anymore because it's really shifting and changing." And so I let them go, and then my blog began to shift from a blog about homeschooling and homemaking to a blog about difficult relationships and boundaries and dealing with passive aggressiveness and all of that.

Now, it was a slow and subtle shift that happened over time, but looking back, it really felt like just one day I woke up and realized, "You know what, my blog is not what it used to be, and I don't even believe anymore what I used to believe." Yes, a lot of the readers left. They were like, "What has happened to her? She's drifting away from God's purpose for her life. She's selling her soul to the devil," but many of them actually stayed. You know why? Because what I was writing about was resonating with them. They were like, "Oh my gosh, this is what's going on in my life too." And so anyway, I felt like I was finding the truth for the first time and starting to communicate it, and I was starting to be able to breathe.

So in 2014, my now ex-husband—he's my ex-husband now, but back then, we were still married—he moved out. We separated physically. My oldest son got married. And by the way, if you want to know the whole story, I wrote a book—I'll talk about that in a little bit—but it's called *All the Scary Little Gods*, and it's a spiritual memoir. However, I do talk about all of this other stuff too briefly. I'm giving you a few more details about this in this little episode about this particular point of time in my life.

But anyway, my oldest son got married, my husband moved out, and I was mostly a single mom to the eight kids who were left while also running a business where I made

and sold cold process soap. It was called Apple Valley Natural Soap. It still exists to this day. I sold it.

The next two years though, while my husband was living in an apartment and I was living at home with the kids, they are honestly a blur. I don't remember that much about those two years. I was trying to figure out whether or not my husband was going to change and come back.

What I do remember was mostly through a lot of emails, and I used those emails back and forth with people from my church to kind of piece together what happened during that time. And those details are in my book, and I'm not going to go into that here.

During that time, though, I kept writing on my blog. And after a year of taking classes to become a life coach, I began to take clients. And by the time I filed for divorce in April of 2016, I was starting to coach women who were regular readers of my blog and wanted help. I was still working in my soap business to pay for the kids' school. I had stopped homeschooling. I had homeschooled for twenty years. I finally stopped doing that and I put them in a little neighborhood Baptist school. And then I used the money from my soap business to pay for that. And I also used it to pay for my divorce, which, almost two years after we separated, I finally filed.

So I charged \$50 an hour to coach this handful of women, and I was able to help them create some shifts in their lives as they moved forward, and most of them ended up divorcing their husbands, their abusers, and create a new life for themselves as well. In fact, a couple of them actually went on to get further education and two of them are now coaches inside of the Kaleidoscope program that we have. So anyway, we were all just fledgling butterflies in the making.

In 2017, as my divorce dragged on, I had too many women who were wanting coaching, and I couldn't help all of them. So I started a little group and I charged, I think it was \$15 a month or something like that. Thirty women joined, and I called it Flying Free. Now my college degree was in secondary English education, and I love teaching. So I just started teaching them classes. Not English classes—I was teaching them classes just to educate them about emotional abuse and all the things.

And also I'm an avid reader. I read dozens of books every year and I just collect notes and just take in this information. And I just started teaching them everything I was learning and also I continued to coach them, but I was coaching them in a group. And then I did a monthly Q&A. And then I would also bring in one outside expert each month to come and teach a workshop on a specific topic, and I also would interview a

survivor each month to tell her butterfly story.

So at the end of 2017, my divorce was finally final after almost two years of going through that, and there were about ninety women, maybe, in my group at the time. I wanted to work with these women full-time, but I knew that I was not going to be able to do that and also parent all of my kids and also run my soap business. So I sold my soap business and I lived off of those profits while I built up my Flying Free community.

As it grew, of course, we needed better platforms to host all the things that we were doing together. I started out with things that were either free or very low cost. And as we grew, I began to purchase real estate on platforms that would actually be able to host things in more of an easy and beautiful manner.

So I also needed to hire contract workers to help me with the creatives and the business finances and the website design and keeping things running and answering emails and processing new members and canceling others. And then I also continue to take classes and training to hone my skills in coaching and teaching. And then I just would pass on the things I was learning to our community.

In the summer of 2018, I wrote my first solo book: *Is It Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage*. And at the very end of 2018, I started this, the Flying Free Podcast. And the listener base as well as the membership community has just kept growing.

In 2019, I wrote the companion workbook for *Is It Me?* and I was hoping to market it to women and encourage women to go through the workbook and the book with other women in local small groups, but then COVID hit. So I decided, "Okay, let's start running these *Is It Me?* small groups online," and we did that for a couple of years.

And I kept taking classes and trainings, and several women who had gone through the Flying Free program asked me if I could start something for divorced Christian women because they were getting divorced, and they were like, "Now what do we do?"

So I started Flying Higher for divorced Christian women, and I began to teach classes based on some of the things I was learning in all of the books and the classes that I was continuing to take myself. Things about self-leadership, accomplishing significant goals, getting unstuck, dealing with failure, building a career, starting a business, and all those kinds of things.

In December of 2022, I felt that it was time. It was time to write my spiritual memoir, something I'd been thinking about for a long time, but really didn't feel ready for up

until that year. Some significant things happened in my life that I write about in *All the Scary Little Gods* that summer that were very healing for me and really helped me turn a corner. And after those things happened, I really felt like God was saying, "Okay, Natalie. Now is the right time to dig into your past and tell your story."

So while I was preparing, though, and thinking a lot about writing a memoir, in the meantime, I'd been reading a lot of books about writing memoirs. I even took a class on how to write a memoir. I had also been reading memoirs just to see what they were like and how they felt and what they could accomplish and the kind of impact that they could have on a reader. And I read so many different kinds of memoirs and different styles and ways of doing it, and I became very excited to try it for myself.

So in January of 2023, I began to create a timeline of significant events that I remembered, and I did this by bringing out all of my life's journals—which, there were almost thirty of them—old pictures, everything from my childhood. I had some mementos, I had a bunch of things from school, all the way from grade school, all the way through college, and I began to look at these things and read these things. I had letters from my mother, letters from other people that I just went through and read everything and looked at everything.

And I began to create this timeline and write down all these things, these things that had shaped my view of myself, my view of God, and my view of other people. And a fascinating story began to unfold. It felt like all of my little parts inside were sort of struck with awe that I was actually going to let them talk. I was going to let them have a voice and let them say all the things that they had been experiencing in my life and that they had wanted to say. It was time.

So my sole focus in 2023 was simply writing that book, but it was a process. It was an emotional process, it was a spiritual process, and by the time it was finished by the end of 2023, I was satisfied that I had done my best and my story had been told, and *All the Scary Little Gods* was published in February of 2024.

And now I turned to address some of the issues that my growing community of butterflies was having, because we now had over 1300 members in *Flying Free*, and that's a lot of women. Some of those women had the capacity and the motivation to dive right into all the resources available to them. They would just drink in the weekly coaching on our private podcast, they took the classes, they participated in the live discussions, they asked questions in the forum, they learned how to run models and practice those with me each week and all the things.

And they were getting unbelievable results in their lives. We would have reviews and people would post their wins in the forum every day. Every day we'd get emails and wins in the forum that were just incredible. We still do, but here's the thing that just blew me away is that what took me years of learning and processing was now taking these women just a few months to get from point A to point B. So watching them blossom so quickly because of the information and the help they were getting, it was and is the greatest joy of my life.

But what about the ones who were so traumatized and exhausted they couldn't even open up an email, and their inbox was clogged and overrun to the point where their emails were bouncing? What about the ones who didn't understand technology and couldn't log into the membership site. And then we had a membership site, and we also had a forum where they had to create a login and login over there too, and both sites had passwords, and that's a lot. What about the ones who were scared to say anything in the forum because they were afraid someone might see what they wrote?

Those women were slipping through the cracks, and I wanted to figure out how to help them. No, I knew I wasn't going to be able to help all of them, but how could I at least make my program as easy and painless as possible so it would present as few barriers as possible to actually doing the program so that they could also get the results that we all want? Results like feeling better in our body, feeling more hope, more confidence, more clarity, more direction, more self-leadership, more control, more compassion? And how about less shame, less guilt, less overwhelm, less hopelessness, less anger, less loss of control?

So we decided to have everything in one place. All the courses, all the workshops, all the coaching, all the replays, all the live events, all the community interaction, all in one place. And I decided to call that one place the Kaleidoscope. So if you've been listening to the Flying Free Podcast for a long time, you'd probably hear me talk about the Flying Free Sisterhood and the Flying Free program, but now we are calling it the Kaleidoscope because a kaleidoscope is a flock of butterflies, and that's what we are.

So think of this special place, this special kaleidoscope, it's where all of us butterflies get to build our own family, our family together, our own community. But also, I want women to learn about their own inner family, their own parts, the parts of them that argue inside and that have been programmed in certain ways, the parts of them that are afraid, the parts of them that are badass, the parts of them that are rude, the parts of them that are despairing—to be able to build a family of parts inside of them as well as a family outside of them in our Kaleidoscope community.

So we get to learn together, we get to talk together, we get to get together, we get to help each other, support each other in the way the New Testament actually teaches for believers, in the way that many of us can no longer enjoy in our religious communities because they don't offer this type of support for women who have been marginalized in this way.

And we decided that since most of our members were using our program on their phones, it would be the easiest thing to have everything on one app, an app they can open up just like they open up their Facebook app or their Instagram app, but instead of getting a ton of ads and seeing things that cause us to feel less than or inadequate or worthless or a mess or seeing someone cross our feed that is someone who's been mean to us, instead of that, they get to open up an app that is life giving and solely focused on their healing.

In our Kaleidoscope community app, members are seen, heard, and understood. They don't have to worry about someone lecturing them or telling them that they don't know what they're talking about. They have access to six professional coaches that they can ask questions to and get answers on the same day.

They have access to live events like weekly coaching and monthly Q&As and butterfly gatherings. They have access to over 150 life giving classes and workshops that will educate them and help them heal that little girl that's hiding inside of them, and help to change their brain's programming so they can make decisions for their lives from a place of reality and truth instead of wishful thinking and gaslighting.

Most of them just pop in some earbuds and press "play" on a video and listen to the lesson or maybe a coaching replay while they're getting ready in the morning or driving to the grocery store. It's so easy. Some members just love to jump in and consume everything, and others just take little steps each week. I tell everyone that's all you need to do. Just take one little step each week. Anyone who does that can't help but make progress.

And when someone doesn't know what their next tiny step should be, they can private message me or our community success guide, Aimee, or even anyone in the forum who's been around for a while, and we will direct them to their one next tiny step. Nobody has to fall through the cracks. We do everything within our power to ensure that nobody gets left behind.

Now, that doesn't mean that someone can't join and never open up an email or never log in or never press "play" on a lesson. It's possible to do that, but we are committed

on our part to doing what we can do to make sure everyone has the best chance possible to create the next version of themselves.

When you join, you will be given a safety form to complete. And on that form, you'll see a picture that has nine stages of a butterfly journey. You will be asked to select the stage you think you're in, and then we can help you with where to go once you're set up inside the Kaleidoscope. Our job is to help you move from Stage 1 to Stage 2 and then from Stage 2 to Stage 3 and so on, until you're at Stage 9.

I wonder what stage you're in. Do you know what you can do to keep going and move to the next stage? I know what you can do, and I'll take your hand and show you when you join our Kaleidoscope family. We no longer require an application process because we have that safety form on the other side. So you can learn more about the Kaleidoscope and you can actually join today. All you have to do is head over to joinflyingfree.com.

And if you'd like to celebrate our 300th episode anniversary with me, would you do it by leaving a rating and review wherever you're listening on your favorite podcast app? I've been on the verge of getting to 1,000 reviews on Apple Podcasts for a while now, and I've promised myself a little tattoo if I get there. So you've got to help me get my tattoo before my skin gets too wrinkly, okay? All right. That's all I have for you today. Thank you so much for being on this journey with me for 300 episodes.