

WHAT ONE YEAR CAN DO IN THE LIFE OF A WOMAN

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 308 of the Flying Free Podcast, and happy new year, beautiful butterflies. My mission is to unlock cages so women of faith can fly free. To kick off 2025, I want to tell you about some women who were very different people one year ago at the beginning of 2024. Their lives were dominated by thoughts like, "I'm stuck. I'm overwhelmed. I can't do it. I don't deserve anything. I'm a bad wife. I'm a bad mother. I have no hope. I'm a bad Christian. I suck. Nobody loves me. I'm unlovable. I have failed in my life. I have so many regrets," and their bodies were filled with feelings of guilt, shame, anger, frustration, exhaustion, anxiety, and fear.

But something happened in 2024 that changed their lives, and over the course of the year, these women dropped over 550 testimonies in a space in our private forum called "Drop Your Wins and Successes." And they shared in that space how their lives were changing as a result of the hard work they were doing inside of Flying Free and Flying Higher.

Once a week, I send out an email to all of our members and I share one of these success stories. And today, I want to share some of the best ones with you. I did remove all of the identifiers. So nobody is going to be able to know or be able to tell who these women are. Here we go.

Here's the first one: "I just completed a year in this program and did the self-evaluation. Here is where I was then versus now. Then, I wanted to see my situation clearly, discerning what's truth. I wanted to decide for myself if it's worth staying in the relationship, where I want to be in my relationship with my husband, and the steps I need to take to get there. I didn't feel very compassionate or generous toward myself, and I had difficulty regulating my emotions. It was difficult for me to recognize covert abuse immediately and respond in an appropriate way." Okay, that was her then.

"Now, I learned to detach from the relationship just enough to see clearly in order to discern truth. Through the courses I took and all the coaching I listened to, in addition to learning in the forum, I have been able to stop reacting, see the truth of what his actions were telling me, and for the most part, stop playing into his mind games.

I went from being 40% sure that I wanted to divorce my husband and watching that internal percentage rise gradually every month or so until I am now 99.9% sure. And thanks to Flying Free, I know the steps I need to take to get there and have started taking them one step at a time."

By the way, I just want to interject here. I don't tell people that they should get divorced, okay? Some of these testimonies, a lot of the women did end up deciding that they wanted to get divorced, and some of them actually did get divorced, even just in one year—less than a year. They were divorced. However, that's not what the program is about. And there are far more people in the program that are not getting divorced or don't want to get divorced. They tend to be quieter, I think, and more in a learning mode.

What we do do in our program is help people to make that decision for themselves, and then we support them in whatever decision they make. We want to give that decision-making agency to each individual as they deserve as an adult woman. That's not my choice or anyone else's choice. It is each woman's choice and we give them that freedom and then support them in whatever they decide. So I just want to clarify that because you are going to be hearing some testimonies, and quite a few of them did get to worse.

All right, let me finish what she said, though: "I have a lot more compassion and generosity toward my younger self, doing some parts work on my own, and I've seen some progress here. Some of that generosity holds the space for myself so that I am okay, knowing I have a lot of change and growth to do with self-regulating. I am so much better at cluing into covert manipulation and abuse to label and see it for what it is so that I can take a step back before responding.

What is interesting to me is that from the outside, it looks like nothing has really changed. But on the inside, much has changed. I am on the verge of making some big decisions that I wasn't ready for a year ago."

Okay, so let's read another one: "It will be a year tomorrow since I joined Flying Free. I recently completed my one-year questionnaire, and what joy to see my progress in numbers, and I have just spent time reading my earliest posts. If you have enough in the tank and feel you can face it, I really recommend reading your own previous posts to help you see then and now.

And oh my, how I feel for my last year me, who, when I joined, was so confused and fearful living with my angry husband, and then a month later, we separated, but also how hugely proud I am of now me. I am in wonder at the courage, determination, honesty, openness, and willingness to face lots of pain and work out deep issues from childhood, my teens, twenties, thirties, and forties.

From being fearful of the steps I needed to take to now living each day, knowing the

truth has set me free, and amazingly, mostly, accepting my soon-to-be-ex-husband's way of being is all his, and I cannot change it, despite the massive circumstantial disruption that my children and I are in.

My self-literacy and self-compassion has also increased hugely. Yes, of course, there is more pain to face and process, but I have moved from feeling and acting trapped to deeply knowing I have choice and agency to choose good things for me and my children.

Yesterday I took the step to engage and pay a lawyer. I was so proud that I had been able to save up money to do this too. And I did so with only a fraction of nervousness. My desire to do it was strong and certain. I could hardly believe how I was gliding through the decision and then acting on it.

So thank you all. You are all such a beautiful circle of women. I especially appreciated reading the responses to my previous posts. Such compassion, wisdom, and insight. Thank you to those who have taken the time to reply and pray for me over the year. I look forward to continually learning from you all, and I say a global prayer for you all each day and weep when I read some of your stories as we carry the pain and projections of those who have broken their vows to love, cherish, and honor us. Big shout out, of course, to Natalie Hoffman for creating this safe, true, and healing space, and to all the coaches for their ongoing wisdom and care.”

All right, let's read the next one: “Like many of you, I was in an abusive relationship for decades. I stayed in it for so long because I thought divorce is a sin, that I made a vow, and because God hates divorce. I also believed what a Bible study leader on marriage once told me: ‘God did not create marriage for happiness, but for holiness.’ I also thought I was supposed to keep forgiving. I have since learned that forgiveness does not mean I have to live with my abuser.

What started me on the journey that led to my finding the truth about what God really said about marriage was my desperation to help one of my kids who was sick. The despair of watching this child die a slow death in front of me, despite every logical thing we tried, led me to a therapist who told me about narcissism and opened my eyes to the damage my ex's narcissism was causing my child. Moreover, I realized how my staying is damaging because my keeping the peace signals approval and inadvertently affirms the message that my ex was sending to my child in me.

I knew then that there was only one solution: divorce. However, I struggled with guilt and fear of disobeying God, and I shared that with a relative of mine. A few weeks later,

that relative heard about Flying Free from a friend and shared a podcast with me. Gradually, through this program and by reading or watching some of the resources Natalie shared with us, the Lord set me free with His truth.

As I wrestled with the idea of divorce, my ex decided to add financial abuse to his arsenal. I had no choice but to file for divorce to keep him from squandering the money he took when he cleared out our savings account. Looking back, I see that the Lord allowed that to happen to nudge me off the nest to fly.

In the middle of the divorce process, my job became more demanding and required me to work many hours of overtime. I could not have endured those stressful months without God encouraging and enabling me through supportive friends, as well as the Flying Free coaching sessions that I listened to.

Looking back, this past year was super crazy and challenging, but the last several months post-divorce have been the best months for our family. This first Thanksgiving and Christmas season as a new family were the best holidays because we are experiencing what it is like to have a safe, loving, and healthy environment. I am no longer connected to my church and my ultra-conservative family of origin, but I have joy and peace that passes understanding.

The best part is watching God heal my child. Although my child still has a ways to go, they are much better both physically and psychologically. Post-divorce, I have been continuing to listen to as many classes and group coaching as I can, and sharing what I am learning with my kids. So I feel as though we are moving towards health and wholeness together. I cannot thank God enough for this community, for Natalie, and all the resources available through this program.

Here's another one: "A year ago, I joined Flying Free after reading Natalie's book, realizing something was wrong with my marriage. I knew something was wrong, but my husband and our marriage counselor convinced me that the real problem was mostly me, and if I worked on my communication skills, things would be great.

I knew it was wrong then. I tried to communicate that to our counselor, but she told me I would regret not giving him a second chance. I wholeheartedly regret not listening to my gut and giving him several more years of a second chance. He did all of the same things that broke my heart back then.

Last January, I started working on this program, reading all the books, journaling,

working on communicating with my children so they know I am 100% for them and that I'm working toward healing for all of us. I have shared many, but not nearly all of the struggles here, and gotten amazing advice. Some advice I took, some I wrestled with, some I denied even applied to me or that I needed, but I was wrong. I've so often felt like I haven't progressed and just spin my wheels around and around just like the abuse cycle.

Last weekend my husband went away on his own vacation, and I've been home with the kids. Here are some things that I have done and noticed over the week without him here. The kids and I not only have survived, we have thrived. I have done far less procrastinating. Our kids have not argued. We have all been picking up after ourselves. The house has progressively gotten tidier without actually having to focus on cleaning. I have read through Natalie's book and another book on leaving the abuse this week, and I feel it is actually processing inside of me. I can feel God's presence in the peace surrounding me.

I can feel the pressure of the cocoon. I am ready to go. I feel like I've outgrown the surroundings and I think my kids are old enough now to be able to survive the change and stand up for themselves too. I've had a glimpse of the peace that can be. I'm ready to stretch my wings and see where they take me, all thanks to Flying Free and this community of strong women. I know that if I had not come across Natalie's book and felt the nudge to join Flying Free, I would not be strong enough or awake enough to see the light and hope of a free future."

Here's another one: "It's been tricky at times trying to figure out my husband's beliefs because he doesn't quite fit the mold of so many men represented in the forum. He's a self-professing feminist sympathizer who doesn't try to control finances or what I do. In fact, you could argue I wear the pants because I take so much responsibility for the household and make so many of the decisions. He has also rejected Christianity for the most part, becoming agnostic. He likes to tell me I'm picky and infers I'm unreasonable about it.

But I have begun to figure out some of his rules for himself. Rule number one, 'I will only do it if I want to, when I want to, and how I want to if I feel like it.'

Rule number two, 'No one has any right to tell me how to do anything, nor to ask or try to persuade me to do anything I don't want to do, nor should they have any opinions on about what I do.'

Rule number three, 'I am the only one who is allowed to express displeasure or

discontentment or anger. No one else should express any negative emotions around me.'

Number four, 'My wife is responsible for our kids. I should not be held to a higher standard of behavior or expected to act like an adult with our kids. My wife needs to make sure our kids don't impinge on rules one, two, and three.'

My level of frustration has decreased since I started recognizing some of his rules because I just remind myself he's acting precisely in character. Why should I expect anything different? I still feel angry about it, but I am also able to say to myself, 'Why should I expect anything different?'

I wrote the question in another Q&A asking if my husband really believes that I'm as negative as he says I am or if that's just a tactic of abusers. Natalie answered my question in such a way, and with examples, that made this issue that I've been wrestling with in my mind for nearly thirty years suddenly become clear as day. I feel like Paul probably felt as the scales fell from his eyes. They finally fell from mine.

I cannot thank you enough, Natalie, for sharing your wisdom. You truly have a gift of both understanding and also how to teach and explain things to others in a way that we can understand. This one question and answer has changed how I view my entire situation. It has moved the needle for me in a huge way. Thank you, Natalie, for your kind and caring work. I know I'm in the right place."

Now, one of the self-evaluation questions that I send out to our members when they reach their one-year butterfly anniversary is this: "Think about your biggest problem a year ago. Is your problem the same today, or has it changed? And if it's changed, in what ways has it changed?"

And here's what one woman wrote and shared with us: "My biggest problem when I began was feeling stuck, and that problem is not the same today at all. I radically accepted reality over the past year. I did a ton of IFS and CBT work, and no longer am I stuck in old thoughts and feelings. I know that my thoughts are my programming and they can be changed, which changes my feelings, then. I don't enmesh with different parts of myself like I used to do. They used to run my bus."

And by the way, I talk about our different parts of us inside and how they're all in a bus in a different podcast episode that I will link to in the show notes. And then we go into much greater detail about that in a class inside of Flying Free. But anyway, that's what she's referring to.

"I clearly see and accept the abuse and place the blame appropriately and forgive myself. I grieve and I give myself grace. I give my children more space to think and feel. I've let go of everyone in my life and accept that they each have their own path. I know God is in me, not just seated in heaven. I believe He loves me completely and is providing and protecting me by giving me life, wisdom, grace, and steadfast love.

I no longer dismiss my bad emotions but integrate and honor all of my parts. I love them all and spend time with each of them daily to check in and listen and care for them as they continue to care for me. I am in charge of my bus." I love that.

"A year ago, I told my now ex that I didn't want to be married anymore. I had been in Flying Free for nearly six months at this point. I knew it was the right thing to do, but it was still terrifying. I'd never lived on my own, paid my own bills without the help of a roommate or family member, but there was this deep conviction that this was what God wanted for me.

After we were legally divorced and I was living in a new apartment with 50% custody of our child and nearly 50% of our household assets, things were tense, but I managed to keep the peace and keep my sanity. Then my ex asked if I would consider reconciling. I told him it would take a lot of work but I'd consider it, which I did, and came to the same conclusion that no, we are much better off as co-parents than married spouses.

In reviewing my notes, I realized how eternally proud and grateful I am to my past self. She was courageous in the face of so much fear and uncertainty. She asked and fought for what she knew to be right, and she was willing to do things on her own terms. I will forever be grateful for the Flying Free and Flying Higher women because getting out of this kind of marriage is truly like breaking out of a cult. For anyone teetering on the fence, know that you, too, can do hard things. God will not abandon you, so don't abandon yourself. The power of one year is incredible."

Here's another one: "My husband had cheated on me throughout our marriage. I even caught him with another woman. Even after I moved out and was now getting ready to file for divorce, it still hurts when I think about him with her.

Today, I decided to deal with the thought that was making me feel so jealous and betrayed. I replaced the thought, 'My husband might be sleeping with another woman,' with, 'My husband is sleeping with one of his victims.' This thought caused me to feel so much compassion for the other woman that I started praying for God to open her eyes before it's too late.

Two months in this program has changed my life. I listened to countless coaching sessions. My relationship with myself and the way I parent my children has changed dramatically. I'm addicted to the coaching sessions. I listen to three to six sessions on weekdays while driving to work. Thank you, Natalie, and all the coaches. You rock."

"When I joined Flying Free, I was confused, full of anxiety and doubt, and contemplating if I would really leave my marriage or not. I had so much self-blame. I was scared of my church elders excommunicating me, afraid that my husband might turn dangerous, and had no idea how I was going to make it financially.

But I was suffering from emotional, psychological, verbal, spiritual, and sexual abuse and sexual coercion in our marriage. I was brainwashed. I constantly blamed myself and thought everything was my fault.

Now my anxiety levels are much lower. My self-confidence is higher than it's ever been. I no longer care about what others think of me after my ex spread so many lies about me. I'm in my 50s, but I finally feel like an adult, able to make my own choices. And I discovered that I am smart, brave, and good at a lot of things. I recently moved and got a new start in a new state, and so far I'm loving it and enjoy being single and getting to know myself. I'm grateful for Flying Free.

I know now that God loves me so much, and He keeps proving He's there for me. I still have grief to work through, and I'll be healing until the day I die. But thanks to Flying Free and therapy, my thoughts are much less self-destructive, and I love myself so much more than I did a few years ago."

This next one is a little bit different. This person did not get a divorce. They are one of the very few people, which I can probably list on one hand... And some of those people actually have come back into the program. People that have left because they said that their husband had changed, they often come back a few years later, which is sad. But this one so far is doing well, so I want to read her testimony too.

"I love listening to all your coaching calls and both of your podcasts. I've shared your program with several friends and family members who were in similar types of marriages. I fully agree with you that it is a very, very small percentage of addicted and abusive partners who actually go after significant growth and long-term permanent change. I do have a story and a testimony that is a very beautiful, very fine, very special, and very powerful story about how my husband and I have started over and how different things are as we rebuild.

The reason I'm reaching out today is because I want you to know that your program is valuable for the 1% that do experience significant change and resurrection. It was a lot of the skills that I was learning, the camaraderie I was experiencing, the coaching calls I was listening to, the terminology that I was learning that really added to my personal growth and added strength for me to withstand my painful divorce and stay the course.

In my particular situation, my husband had to experience rock bottom and complete freedom of choice without reward and without further consequence for himself to decide what he was going to do and who he was going to become. If I had been vacillating or under clear, unsure, confused, embroiled in the emotional rollercoaster ride that was his entire emotional landscape for many, many years, I would not have been able to survive the season, and I would not have been able to stop from getting sucked back in.

What you are doing matters, and it is not harmful to healthy marriages. This teaching does not destroy healthy and happy marriages." She's probably saying that because that's an accusation that I've had in the past.

"The skills, confidence, self-care, wisdom, and peace offered in Flying Free and Flying Higher are a huge blessing. I can't ever truly know that things would have gone badly without your program, and I am a highly motivated learner with a growth mindset, so I might have cobbled together similar things at a much slower pace and with much greater effort. That is possible because I was on a mission to get healthy, but I can't ever know for sure if things would have turned out this well without you. I doubt it.

Because of you, I recognized abuse and named it. Because of you, I found out I was not alone on this journey. Because of you, I knew better how to express my situation to people who could help me. Because of you, I did not vacillate or experience extra anguish from my decisions. Because of you, I recognized health when it began to show.

I heard the difference between sweet talk and humility. The difference between minimizing and blame shifting versus true apologies. I could see the difference between words and actions. I stood strong as an utterly bereft single mother. I did not waver and I would not compromise. I got real results because I really decided that I would have real love or nothing at all, and I never could have done that uninformed and all alone."

All right, one more: "They said of me as a little girl that I always had to put in my two cents worth. Well, so be it. But I think this is worth a billion plus cents worth. No one in all my years on this planet has helped to make my hardworking soul more buoyant than Flying Free. No one in the last over two decades of rigorous and painstaking Bible

studies has helped to heal my spiritual blindness like Flying Free.

No one in almost four decades of covert emotional and psychological and verbal abuse has helped me identify it all clearly as evil like Flying Free. No one since I met the real Jesus somehow when I was a single digit has helped me bathe and bask in His cascades of love and grace and mercy like Flying Free.

I love this place here. My heart overflows with gratitude, tears, and joy because Flying Free has coached me to bask and bathe in pure love, cascading straight from heaven above like no other resource in all my life. Remarkable.”

I can't tell you how tickled I am to read stuff like that. That is remarkable. So what about you? Think about the things that you believe and the way that you feel in your body on most days. Do you want to be in that same exact place at the end of 2025 as you are today? You don't have to be. Imagine yourself posting about your own transformation a year from now. I would love to have you do this powerful work with me and with these other women.

If you are in an abusive relationship and you want to work on understanding that relationship, you want to work on boundaries, healing your relationship with yourself, recovering from PTSD, being a healthy parent, healing your relationship with God, and more, then go to joinflyingfree.com to find out more so that you can get started right here at the beginning of 2025.

We are not raising prices. We haven't raised prices for several years now, and that continues to make us the most economical program of its kind available to you. And if you have already done a lot of healing, maybe through another program, maybe through books you've read or other therapy or other things you've done, and if you're no longer trying to change your husband and spinning in that hamster wheel, but you are ready to focus on your own self-development, or maybe you are already divorced and you're rebuilding your life as a single woman, or maybe you are just someone who wants to move forward from spiritual abuse that you've experienced in your church environment or in your family of origin, I want to invite you to join me inside of Flying Higher.

This is my live mentorship program where I am taking interested Christian women along with me on my own self-development journey that I have mapped out for myself in 2025. So I plan to read twelve life-changing books. I plan to study some books of the Bible in a fresh new way. I'm going to teach some classes and whole discussions.

And speaking of classes, for the month of January, I am teaching a four-week class inside of Flying Higher called Wings to Soar. And this is where we are going to intentionally create a plan for 2025, your own personal plan, that will help you become the next version of yourself by the end of the year.

And we're going to be using my new butterfly planner which was a collaboration between myself and the Well Planned Gal planner company. You don't need to get the planner to be in the class, and you don't need to be in the class to benefit from the planner. But if you want to join me for the class, we're going to be meeting every Saturday morning, if you're in Flying Higher, from 11:00 to 12:30 Central Time.

Again, you do need to be a member of Flying Higher to participate in the class or watch the replay if you can't come live, but if you want to join Flying Higher with me even just for a month and get in on the class—you might want to stay though because it's pretty amazing—go to joinflyinghigher.com for more information about how you can be in the class. And by the way, all of our members get an amazing special discount on the butterfly planner and the butterfly planner bundle, which is so much fun.