



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 172 – A Guide Through Emotional and Spiritual Abuse with Natalie Hoffman

Vivan Mabuni, Elisa Morgan, and Natalie Hoffman

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Eryn: You're listening to *God Hears Her*, a podcast for women where we explore the stunning truth that God hears you. Join our community of encouraging one another and learning to lean on God through Scripture, story, and conversation at GodhearsHer.org. God hears her. Seek and she will find.

Vivian: Before we start today's conversation, we wanted to let you know that this episode is specifically about emotional and spiritual abuse in honor of Domestic Abuse Awareness Month. We want you to be aware that this episode will cover heavy topics like emotional abuse, spiritual abuse, and suicidal ideation. If you or someone you know is in an abusive situation, we encourage you to contact the Domestic Violence Awareness Hotline by calling 1-800-799-7233, or you can find their website in our show notes. I'm excited for our conversation today with our guest, Natalie Hoffman. And just to give you a little background about her — and we'll get to hear more of her story — but she is the author of, *Is It Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage: A Christian Women's Guide to Hidden Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*. And she is a mother and a grandmother, an educator, an advocate for Christian women who are experiencing emotional and spiritual abuse. So we're going to dive in. I'm just really, really grateful because this topic is so very important. And just even before we got recording, Natalie was just sharing just how she's passionate about helping Christian women be able to recognize and grow and really flourish and to have marriages that really do honor the Lord and flourish. So Natalie, we are grateful for you to be here. So welcome to *God Hears Her*.

Natalie: Thank you so much for having me. I am really excited about this conversation, and I think it's... it's an important one to have because I think there's a great number of Christian women who might be experiencing what we're going to be talking about today, and some of them might not even really be fully aware of it yet.



Elisa: You know, Natalie, that's such a good way to put it. You know, I've lived a long life, and it's only in the last couple of decades that I have seen this facet of what really is abuse become exposed, you know, and especially more in Christian circles. And I'm pretty sure everybody listening today, even though you may not think you have been impacted by this, I think you may know someone who's been impacted by this; so I just encourage everybody to put on your listening ears. Natalie, take us into... your first marriage is where I think you experienced this unhealth. Tell us about your marriage and... and how you discovered that something's off here.

Natalie: Well, I got married, uh, we were both in full time ministry when we met and I kind of got into the place where I was out of college and got to the place where I just really wanted to just follow God with all my heart. And I was not... I wasn't gonna date anymore. I wasn't gonna pursue romantic relationships. And yet I did want to be married one day and have children. So when I met my husband, and we started working together, I thought that God brought us together. And I still actually, even after all of these years and all of the struggles, I still believe that God did that. That was a viable path for me, and I chose that path. I chose to marry him. He was a new Christian, and I had grown up in a Christian home. And I thought maybe that was my calling, to help him to be the man that God was, you know, calling him to be. And I was going to be his helper, and I was going to be the wind beneath his wings and all of those good things.

Elisa: Now that's fair. I mean...

Natalie: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah. A lot of us go into marriage that way. Right?

Natalie: Yes. And there were a lot of amazing things about him that I thought that really met some needs in my own life that I was looking for from my childhood. Well, actually, even before I was married, I wrote in my journal at one point: "I think there's something wrong with this relationship because he doesn't take responsibility for any of his behavior." Now at that time, I didn't realize that's actually one of the number-one signs of an abusive relationship is that one person in the relationship does not take responsibility for their behavior. And then the other person has to carry all of the responsibility for the relationship on their shoulders. I didn't know that back then, but it was a red flag for me. But again, I... I wasn't aware, so I married him. And, of course, that particular issue just continued to get worse throughout our marriage. And I remember six months into the marriage, I thought, with this horrible, sickening feeling, *what if I made a mistake? I think I might have made a mistake.* But I did not believe in divorce. That never crossed my mind. My only thought was, *well, now I'm going to need to hunker down and make the best of it. And*



who knows God can do miracles, right? And I had a close relationship with God, and I really believed that God could do anything. And so, over the course of the next 20 years, I just lived with a lot of hope. I tried to get help numerous times from family, friends, church, different counselors. We did marriage counseling. We did a huge marriage intensive towards the end. I could check off all the boxes of trying to get the help that we needed, and nothing worked. I was pregnant with my ninth child, and I went to a hotel to get away. We had a big, huge altercation, and I went to a hotel and I spent the whole night crying, like just sobbing in bed. I never slept that whole night. And I actually... I was a month away from giving birth, and I actually thought what it might be like to just kill myself, to go into the bathtub. Nobody would ever know I could do it before anyone would ever find out. And I could just end it. And the only thing that stopped me was that baby kicking and move... you know, they're big when you're eight months pregnant. And I thought *I can't. I can't. I can't do this to the baby.* But just the fact that I was in such a dark place that I would even consider something like that is just... it speaks to the depth of despair that I was in. But that was the turning point for me. The next day I took my laptop, and I went to the local Barnes & Noble, and I started Googling every term that I could think of. I didn't Google "abuse" because I didn't know that that was... I didn't know about that. I wish I would have known that what it was was emotional abuse, but I didn't. So I Googled things like I knew my husband was passive-aggressive, or I had heard that term before, but I wasn't really sure what it was. So I started Googling that, and I started going down rabbit trails about passive-aggressiveness. And I found Henry Cloud and John Townsend's book called *Who Is Pushing Your Buttons?* Cause that's the other thing. I really wanted a Christian perspective. There was a little bit out there about this kind of thing in the secular world, but I was a Christian and I wanted to know: what does God say about this? And what would God want me to do in a situation like this? And so I found that book, *Who's Pushing Your Buttons?* And basically, it is a book about emotional abuse, but it doesn't use that term. It was the first time I had ever read anything that described my marriage to a tee. And I was just so validated and so seen when I read that book. Another book that I read shortly after that was Jan Silvious's book *Foolproofing Your Life*. And the interesting thing about that book is that I had had this epiphany a few months before. I'd been reading through the book of Proverbs, and all of the verses about fools — not all of them, but most of them — were jumping out at me, and they were describing my husband. And I thought. *Is it okay for me? Is it like a terrible thing for me to look at these verses and say, I think my husband is a proverbial fool.* I felt like I was betraying him to even have those thoughts.

Vivian: Or even being disrespectful...

Natalie: Yes!

Elisa: Yeah.



Vivian: ...or something like that. I'm curious before you continue. Just in this... in the midst of coming to that tipping point in the hotel, were there people in your life that were aware of what was going on? Or did you feel like you had to keep it in secrecy? What was going on in your community, and what was going on around you?

Natalie: Yeah. No, everyone was aware because I was trying to get help. I was actively... And a lot of Christian women don't do that. I don't know, maybe it's my personality or whatever, but I've always just been like, if I have a problem, I'm going to scan my horizon and my community and the people around me. And I'm going to see if they have ideas for me. I'm going to read books.

Vivian: Right, right.

Natalie: I'm going to do whatever I can to educate myself. They knew, but like me, they didn't know what it was. And because they weren't living it, and it was really hard to describe some of the subtle, like backhanded things. Like even trying to give an example here, it's very difficult because they're so subtle. The little backhanded things that they say, where they put the responsibility back on you. My relationship with my husband impacted my relationship with God. I started to view God, or started to wonder, *is God like my community? Does He... is He confused? Does He want me to be in a relationship where I am being mistreated? Am I really giving Him glory?* These are things that people were telling me. "Well, you can give Him glory in your suffering. You can, you know, learn how to be a ..."

Vivian: Iron sharpening iron.

Natalie: Yes! Oh my goodness, yes! All those things. All of those spiritual ideas, healthy in one context, but ideas and teachings that were used to actually hurt me. So they didn't know what to do except offer me platitudes, say they were praying for me, suggest that we go back to counseling for the millionth time. Nobody ever, ever once suggested that I separate or that I get out of the relationship. And that's not even... that's not even something in my own work that I tell people that they should do, but I do give people permission that if that is what they believe that they should do, then they have permission to do that.

Elisa: Can you get in and tease apart a little bit about what are some of the symptoms of this kind of abuse? You know, what can you look for? And how are they different from just like what you're saying, "iron sharpening iron" in the good way? How are they different from normal conflict or confusion in a relationship?



Natalie: Well, like I said before, if you wanted to boil it all down and make it super, super simple, it's basically when one person doesn't take responsibility or puts that... all the responsibility for the relationship on the other person. If a person who's in that kind of relationship, a survivor, tries to confront them or bring up their behavior or bring up a problem, they will do one of four things. They will either, first of all, deny it. They might just say, you know, they might just gaslight you and say, "well, I never said that. That never happened. You're just making that up in your head." Or, number two, they might minimize it and say, "what is the big deal? You're just making a mountain out of a molehill," or "you're not trusting God." The third thing that they might do is justify or excuse it. Well ... this actually happened. "Well, if that lady in front of me hadn't slammed on her brakes, then I wouldn't have rear ended her. There was nothing I could do. I'm the victim here." Or, number four — and this is a big one — blame you for it. "Well, if you hadn't been late, I wouldn't have had to drive so fast and gotten a ticket, so it's all your fault." There's that putting responsibility on the other person. So refusing to take responsibility for their behavior is the number one sign that there's something... some kind of abuse taking place. And it's an uneven power dynamic where one person is taking very little to no responsibility. And then, because of that, you're never able to resolve any conflict in that kind of relationship. So the only solution to get peace in that relationship is to agree with the abuser on some level, take responsibility for his and your behavior, and then sweep it under the rug and move on. So, that's the number one sign.

Elisa: So good. Yeah.

Vivian: I know you've used the idea of not taking responsibility, but if you could define emotional abuse and spiritual abuse for our listeners, just to kind of know those terms, because I think... I'll just speak for myself. Sometimes using the word "abuse" just adds a weight that feels like it's just taking things to a whole other level. Like once you start to use words like "abuse," it lends a weight to the situation that does require a response that's a little bit different than, *Oh, marriage is just hard*. So being able to have a clarity to know when a threshold has been crossed, where it's like, *okay, this is a pattern. This is something that is ongoing*. It's not just a fluky, someone who didn't get any sleep and, you know, was stressed out and was dealing with so much loss and completely blew a gasket. But it's not... it wouldn't be considered emotional abuse; so if you could help us understand that a little bit better now, we'd really appreciate that too.

Natalie: Yeah. Yeah, it's chronic, first of all. So it's not like the, you know, we all have a bad day. It's not like that. It's a chronic and repeated disrespect and disregard for the other person. And also it's hidden. So other people can't see it. It's very difficult to explain. And then spiritual abuse would just be using God or the Bible to control or manipulate someone else to make them do what you want them to do instead of what they choose to do. Or to condemn them or criticize them for their ideas or opinions or thoughts. It's



really an inside annihilation of another person. Honestly, when you're in a relationship like this, the most predominant feelings for women who are in relationships like this is they feel confused, and they feel a lot of emotional pain. And they don't always know why. I can tell you from ... I've been remarried now for almost seven years. I have never once been confused in my healthy relationship, nor have I ever experienced emotional pain. I mean, yes, you know, we might have a disagreement about something, but it's not this chronic ongoing every-single-day burden of emotional pain and walking on eggshells. And my current husband respects me. He sees me. He honors my opinions. We don't have to agree on things. And he completely respects and honors that I have a perfect right to have my own thoughts about things and vice versa. It's mutual.

Elisa: Can you go into that word “confused?” That is so good. I get emotional pain. I get that It's like, *I don't feel seen. I don't feel heard. I don't feel understood. I'm alone.* I can go there, and I think we can understand that, but “confused” in a relationship. Help me understand. Can you give me an example?

Natalie: Yeah. Well, I think one of the reasons why women are confused is because they're being fed information from their abuser. He really gets inside of her head and projects his view of her. And honestly, a lot of it is his view of himself, his own shame, that he projects onto her. So she begins to see herself and her identity through his eyes, and it's confusing. There's so much cognitive dissonance there between what she believes to be her true self versus what he is telling her that she is. As far as the Christian aspect of it, when you have your intimate partner doing that to you, and then you go outside of the relationship to try to get some confirmation or some validation of what you're thinking. And then they collude with your partner or with your husband about what's going on, now we've got major confusion. Now we've got complete loss of identity, confusion about *who am I? Am I really the horrible person that my husband says I am? I need to keep my house cleaner. I'm a failure in that area.* As women, we already struggle with self-criticism and defeat in those areas. But when you've got a spouse that is also telling you that you're not enough, and you're not doing enough, and you're not making him happy, and you're demanding too much from him if you ask him to take out the trash or help out a little with the kids or whatever. Now, that can be so debilitating and destructive to a person's... who they are inside. It is the... it strikes at the core of their identity. If we are struck down there, then all is lost. We lose our sense of purpose in life. We start wondering: *why did God even create me? Am I worthy of love? Maybe not.* And a lot of Christian women maybe have grown up in homes where they were told, where that was already taught to them, that they're not really that valuable, or they should really be seen and not heard, or they're too dramatic, or they're too much.

Elisa: Oh, yeah, right. Yeah, so, you know, maybe a phrase that we could use here is “crazy making” ...



Natalie: Thank you! That sums it all up!

Vivian: You know, I appreciate even in the title of your book, *Is It Me?* I think that generally women do wonder. And in the places that I've come across this, it's like the women are the ones that are trying to get counseling, trying to get like individual counseling, cause maybe it's me. And then trying to get the husband into counseling, like, "can we work this through?" I'm struck with how hard women work to want to make ...

Elisa: Right. Yes.

Vivian: ...a marriage and a family thrive, really. Like that's the environment, like what's being modeled to the kids. I think women generally question first, the belief of *is it me? Is there something?* It kind of leads me, though, to a question I have because in my own therapy and work in recognizing that I'm codependent, then I brought that into my marriage; so I'm already kind of scanning and feeling responsible for everyone's emotions and not knowing my own and all of that. So can you help us?

Elisa: [laughing] With you!

Vivian: [laughing] Yeah. So, Natalie, in that, like that part is me. I do need to be responsible for recognizing and growing and doing the work. How would you respond to a woman who is saying, *well, you know, I do, I come in with baggage from my formative childhood years, and that does impact our relationship. Is it me?* How would you respond to that?

Natalie: Yeah, well, the interesting thing is that when you're in a healthy relationship, I've talked to women who have brought a lot of baggage into their marriage, and the marriage has actually been a force of healing and redemption in their lives because their husband has truly been a Christlike person in the relationship and showed them what it is to be in a healthy relationship with others. So it can be very redemptive. I talk about the role of the victim. She's in the relationship. She is the abuser's toy, but that's not who she really is in real life. She actually has a lot of incredible character attributes that make her an easy target for someone who would tend to be abusive. She's very considerate of other people. You know, you just mentioned codependency, but these are some amazing things that someone who would call themselves that have. They're very persevering and committed. They are trustworthy and honest. They take personal responsibility. That's why it's so easy for him to give her all of the responsibility in the relationship. And even in their religious communities, it's easy for... You know, when religious leaders hear about a marriage that's on the rocks, if the wife is showing up, like, *help me, tell me whatever, I'll do whatever I need to do.* Well, of course the leader's going to say, *okay, well, here's what you need to do.*



Whereas the abuser's like, *Yeah, thank you for telling her what she needs to do to make this relationship better.* Right? ...um... Generous, kind and empathic, very forgiving. They forgive and forgive and forgive. The ironic thing about that is that when they finally are done and say, "I can't be in this relationship anymore" — not because they haven't forgiven, but because they've just need to get to a place of safety — they're often accused of being unforgiving, which is also very ironic. Very sensitive to the emotions of others, patient and longsuffering, this is why they stay in these relationships for so long. Courageous, resourceful, and loyal. The is-it-me part comes in because they are coping with the abuse and protecting themselves from it by blaming themselves, by denying their reality, by normalizing his abusive behavior, rationalizing his behavior, spiritualizing her own pain, dissociating, distracting herself with other things, maybe numbing out by eating or shopping or scrolling or whatever. Lowering her expectations, so now she just has no expectations at all in the relationship. And the biggest way of all that she copes is by holding on to hope that something is going to change, even if it's been decades of seeing that this is not changing. And then I get into complex post-traumatic stress disorder, which is a lot... what a lot of Christian women end up with who have been in these relationships for long periods of time. And that is also a very debilitating situation that they need to get help with and heal from.

Vivian: Yeah. Well, can you give us some examples? I think this is so helpful.

Natalie: So one example is that they are dishonest, not necessarily with overt lies, although I think a lot of them do overtly lie. But a lot of times they'll, especially if they're very passive aggressive, they'll just leave out information with the intent to mislead you or hide something from you. So if you've kind of always wondered, *Is he telling the truth? Can I trust him?* and you have that question. Like, I don't ever wonder if I can trust my healthy husband. He's trustworthy. He always says it like it is. Does he say things happened that didn't? Or does he say things didn't happen that did? Are you often confused — this is where that confusion comes in — and unsure about what is true or what isn't true? And then another example would be critical. Is he critical of your interests, or your hobbies, or maybe your choice of clothing, or your personal style, or the way you wear your hair, or your friendships, or your fears and hopes and dreams? Are you safely allowed to just be yourself in the relationship without being afraid that there will be repercussions if you show up? And, number three, disrespectful. Does he disrespect your boundaries? Are you allowed to say "please stop" or "no, I can't do that," without suffering emotional and verbal consequences? And, number four, entitled. Does he say that you are being disrespectful if you disagree with his opinions? Does he claim that because you don't respect him by agreeing with him — so he would equate respect with agreeing — that you are failing as a wife? Does he demand respect regardless of how he behaves toward you or any children that you might have? Number five would be controlling. Does he control the money or other marital assets and not discuss or share that power with you? Now, I'm not talking about a relationship where there's an agreement between the two of you that he



pays the bills, or maybe you pay the bills. I'm talking about someone who doesn't give you information about where the assets are, or partner with you in making some of those big decisions. Does he control the time that you spend with friends, or what you do or say, or your career, or your choices, or even the way that you parent? Number six, withholding. Does he withhold communication and affection in order to control your emotions and decisions? So a lot of times these people will give you the silent treatment or withdraw from you if you do not give them what they want or don't agree with them in some way. And that can be so... I mean, you think, *well, what does the silent treatment do? That's not really...* The silent treatment is, again, it's a personal annihilation of who you are. They're dismissing you and saying *you do not exist in my world right now. I am so done with you.* And it is such a... a horrible feeling to be silenced in that way. And then seven kind of goes along with that, shutting you down. If you stand up to your partner in any way, or if you express a concern or something that's hurting you, would your partner use any of these verbal tactics to shut you down? And here are some tactics: Accuse you of something to get the focus off of himself; block the discussion altogether and just say, *Nope, we're not talking about it.* Correct the things you say, or gaslight you in order to create that confusion and doubt. Discount your credibility, *Well, what do you know? I mean, you're just staying at home with the kids.* Scoff at your concerns, or make fun of you, or crack jokes about things that matter to you. Threaten you, call you names, yell at you, and intimidate you. And calling names can be as simple as just saying, *you're so ridiculous. You're just silly. Really? That is so silly.* It doesn't necessarily have to be that he calls you, you know, swear-word names. And then just one final word about spiritual abuse, because some of these men, if you're in a Christian marriage, which, I mean, I would argue: is this really a Christian marriage? But if you're in a marriage with someone who says that they're a Christian, spiritual abuse is something I address quite heavily in my work, because that's who I'm mentoring is Christian women in environments where their spouse or their religious communities are using the Bible or the concept of God to guilt or shame them. And they may threaten withdrawal of love or affection, or even punishment from God, if you don't obey. Or they might say, *well, you're not submitting enough, so therefore, that is why you're suffering in these ways.* And I think just the egregious nature of spiritual abuse is that it drives a wedge between the survivor and God, her lifeline, so she can actually begin to see her one hope. "I look to the hills, where does my hope come from? My hope comes from God, maker of heaven and earth." She can start to see that lifeline actually in alignment with her abusers, and this can be very traumatizing to her faith.

Elisa: It's like it cuts her off from her health and in such a way. This information — *whew!* — is like a fire hydrant, you know, coming out. You know, just drinking from a fire hydrant, there's so much. And for the woman who is listening and going tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, you know, on every single thing you're saying. It's traumatic to even hear it, so I want to encourage you, as you're listening, to ... to check out the resources. But also I'd love it if we could turn the conversation toward: how did you get out, Natalie? And



what couple of principles or handholds would you give to the confused and depressed and just incredibly burdened woman who's listening right now?

Natalie: Well, I started doing that research in Barnes & Noble, and I started reading books. And shortly after that a book came out, brand new book came out by Leslie Vernick called *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*. And I read that book, and I hired her to coach me. And so she worked with me for six months. Still was not thinking about getting divorced at all, and she wasn't encouraging that at all either. She was working to build my strength in who I was as a person She was working to get me to be able to make decisions that I knew my husband was going to be angry about and learn how to tolerate his disapproval. Now I was not in a physically abusive relationship. I was not afraid for my life. I was not afraid that my husband was going to hit me or anything like that. I was afraid of his criticism. I was afraid of his yelling. I was afraid of his anger. I was afraid of his silent treatment and his just covert abusive wrath. She taught me how to learn how to tolerate that. My religious beliefs are what kept me in that relationship for so long. I was married for 25 years, and my relationship with God is what got me out. God was my Rescuer. Not the church, not my friends, not my family of origin. In fact, when I finally decided, I went to another hotel room. And I brought my 24, 25 journals with me that I ... I kept journals over the years. And for two days, all I did was read through my journals. I listened to my former self, that younger version of myself, and I decided that I was going to be a witness to her pain. And when I was done, I fell on my knees, crying, on that floor of that hotel room. And I said, "*I am going to follow you, God. And I'm going to be the person that you've called on to save this girl.*" I saw myself as... instead of, you know, we're so taught that we're to love everyone else, but I wasn't really loving myself. I wasn't really taking care of myself. And it was very hard for me to get past that idea of laying down your life for everyone, but I had to choose to lay down my life for me and be Christ to myself. And I knew that it was going to mean that I might get excommunicated, and I did. And I knew it might mean that I would lose my family of origin, and I did lose them as well. So, my fears all came true, and really, I think, sometimes as Christian women, we might have those fears, but we don't articulate them. We don't actually pull them out of ourselves and look at them in the face and go, *you know, what the real bottom line is, is I'm afraid to get kicked out of my community. I'm afraid to be out in the wilderness alone with God. What if the wild animals get me? What if other enemies get me? Is God enough to protect me if I'm thrown out of my religious community?* And I was ready at that point to find out, and I did. That does not mean the next few years were easy. They were the most hellish years of my entire life. I went up against religious leaders. I went up against my family of origin, not that I went up against them belligerently. I went up against them and spoke truth, and they did not want to hear it. And so I had to accept that my church had a right to excommunicate me. I signed a paper that said that I would not ever get divorced, and that's their rule; so if I'm going to be a member in their church, I need to play by that rule. But if I don't want to be under that kind of authority or that kind of rule, then I need to extricate myself from that. I did try to get out. I gave them a letter of resignation two years before they excommunicated me. It was an official letter. It was very kind, very

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polite. And they said, “we will not let you leave of your own accord because you are living in sin,” because I was separated from my husband at the time.

Vivian: Wow! Wow!

Natalie: They had a big gathering. It's a very large church in the Twin Cities. They had a big gathering and took a vote with a quorum of people there. It had to be at least 400 people there, people that didn't even know me. Now, I had been at this church for over a decade and had poured my lifeblood into it. I'm a giver, and these people took a vote to excommunicate me because I had filed for divorce from my husband.

Elisa: Oh, Natalie, this is just incredibly painful. Thank you for being so open. Could you speak specifically to the woman right now who needs her first step? What would you say to her to get the help that she needs?

Natalie: What I would recommend, first of all, is I know this is painful. And if you are sitting in your car listening to this and you're crying, or you're sitting in your bathroom crying because you're recognizing that this is your life; I want you to know that I see you, and I've been there before. And you're not alone. I personally believe, based on my work, that one in three Christian women are living in a relationship like this. But they're doing it on their own, and they're all by themselves. So what you need is you need education, and you also need support. Support from other women just like you, who can help you walk through this in a way that helps you keep your faith intact, if you want to, and that's lifegiving for you. Your decisions down the road are not important right now. What's most important is that you get information and support. That's what the first step would be.

Vivian: Well, Natalie, this has been such an important conversation, and it's been helpful and eye opening. And I'm just so grateful for your willingness to share your story and would love for you to kind of like end our time just praying for the exact woman that you've just described, the one who is becoming aware or has been living in such annihilation of self and just working and trying so hard and wondering: is it me? And if you would just be willing to pray for her.

Natalie: *Heavenly Father, You see that woman You know her name, and You love her so much. Nobody else is listening to her. She's not sure what's going on, but You know exactly what's going on. You have watched every tear fall from her eye, and You've collected it in a bottle. You remember every single altercation, the big ones and even the little subtle ones that have stabbed at her heart like a small bee sting. The millions of bee stings over the years that have left her devastated and alone. God, my prayer*



for her right now is that You would enable her in some way to experience a sense of Your presence and a sense that she is not alone right now. A sense that You have so much tremendous love for her, that Your faithfulness to her is unstoppable. That nothing that she has done in this relationship to try to cope or strategize or make it better for herself, even if it's been yelling back or hitting back or doing whatever she's done to try to get out or to get help, that You have so much tenderness towards her and that You love all the parts of her. The parts of her that show up all glowy and nice and have a pink bow on top, and the parts of her that are dark and scared and full of shame and full of questions and just don't know. Just envelop her with Your love and show her and guide her to the next steps that she needs to take to find freedom. She's in a cage right now. And, God, I just pray in the name of Jesus Christ that You would open that cage door and set her free. Amen.

Elisa: Amen. We hope anyone listening who connected to this episode or felt like it was speaking to them can get the help they need. You are worthy of a healthy love.

Vivian: Natalie is a powerhouse of wisdom when it comes to understanding signs of abuse. Be sure to check out our show notes for a link to Natalie's website where you can find more about her and her resources. You can also find a link for the domestic violence website. You can find that and more at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

Elisa: And if you liked this episode, or if you've been listening to the show for a bit, please leave us a rating and review wherever you listen to your podcasts. We'd love to hear from you.

Vivian: Thank you for joining us. And don't forget: God hears you, He sees you, and He loves you, because you are His.

Elisa: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Natalie's children and her second husband, Tom, for all of their help and support. Thanks everyone.

Vivian: Our Daily Bread Ministries is a donor supported, nonprofit ministry dedicated to making the life changing wisdom and stories of the Bible come alive for all people around the world.

[ODBM theme]

Vivian: *God Hears Her* is a production of Our Daily Bread Ministries.