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**Intro:** Hey friends! Welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson and I am so happy that you're here. Each week I have a girlfriend over and we talk through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women.

We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life, and how to live every bit of our lives to the full. Life is so much better and easier and absolutely more fun when we navigate it together as girlfriends. And I cannot wait to get started.

Our guest for today's episode is my new friend, Toni Collier. Toni is a hope coach, the author of *Brave Enough to Be Broken* and the founder of Broken Crayons Still Color, an international women's ministry that helps women process their brokenness and reclaim hope.

After a lifetime of childhood trauma, navigating a toxic marriage and divorce, an unhealthy church, becoming a single parent, feeling betrayed and more, Toni has learned how to find hope and healing in the midst of her pain. And that's what we're talking about today.

Here are just a few of the things that she's going to talk to us about in this episode. We're going to talk about how to rebuild your life after experiencing brokenness and pain, how to release ourselves from the pressure of perfectionism, how God can restore our hope and use our past experiences for good, why therapy has played a vital role in her healing journey, and how the practice of gratitude can change your life.

And if you are in a hard season right now, or if you're looking back at your past and wondering how any good can come from it, this episode is for you. I'm praying that you walk away feeling so encouraged. Your story is not over.

But before we dive in, I have a resource I wanted to share with you. It's called *The Between Places: 100 Days to Trusting God When You Don't Know What's Next*. Here's the thing. We all find ourselves in-between places throughout our lives, especially these days, right?

Maybe you're waiting for something longing for something or working for something, but it just hasn't happened yet. Maybe you know where you want to go, but you have no clue how to get there. Or maybe you know you're not where you want to be in life but you don't know exactly what needs to change or how to change it and you don't know how to figure any of that out.

Maybe you're trying to make a big decision and you have no idea which option to choose. Or maybe you're feeling like the whole world has turned upside down in these last few years, taking your life and your plans and any sense of security right along with it. And in all of it you're trying to trust God with the future but you're just not sure how to practically do that and how to quiet the fear and anxiety all this uncertainty has brought up in your heart. That's what *The Between Places* is here for.

Through 100 guided prayer prompts, *The Between Places* will help you trust God with the trickiest, most uncertain, and most important parts of your life. It'll help you believe more fully than ever that God is good that He loves you and that He's taking care of you. It'll help you live today with more contentment, step into the future with more courage and faith and rest in God's peace knowing that He's with you every step of the way.

To pick up a copy, just head to my website. It's [Stephaniemaywilson.com](http://Stephaniemaywilson.com). Again, that's Stephaniemaywilson.com. That link will also be in our show notes.

Okay, you guys ready? Let's jump into our conversation with Toni.

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**Stephanie:** All right, friends, I am here with my new friend Toni Collier. I am so happy to finally get to meet you and have you on the show. Welcome to Girls Night.

**Toni:** I'm so excited. I'm so excited. Thanks for having me.

**Stephanie:** For women who haven't gotten to meet you, tell us who you are, what you do, and a fun fact about yourself.

**Toni:** Oh, I love that. Okay, my name is Toni Collier. One of the greatest things about me is that I'm from Texas, best state in the world. Okay, come on somebody. We're a little crazy, but I love it so much. I've kind of coined this phrase "hope coach" because that's kind of like my steelo.

I like to help people find hope. And not just like regular regular hope, okay, but like hope out of the midst of brokenness and trauma and pain, and clawing your way out of valleys and onto mountain tops. Like that kind of hope.

And fun fact about myself. Okay, I graduated high school at 16 and I graduated college at 19. So I think that's kind of fun. But I have another one. I'm going to do two. I'm gonna cheat. Okay, great.

**Stephanie:** Yeah, you can do it.

**Toni:** And this is a fun one, too. I'm making it pop. I am obsessed with food. Like, I think that if ministry doesn't work out for some reason, I'm gonna be a food blogger. 100%. I have "good eats" lists. I'm ready. I have an idea, I have a concept and strategy. I want to be a foodie, honestly. If the Lord didn't call me to it, I'd be a foodie. Well, blogger.

**Stephanie:** We are the same person.

**Toni:** Oh, okay.

**Stephanie:** Mm-hmm. I'm not a cook. I'm not a cook.

**Toni:** No, I don't.

**Stephanie:** I don't like cooking. Love eating what other people make.

**Toni:** This is what I'm trying to say. Notice I didn't say I like to cook. I didn't say I'm good at cooking. No, no.

**Stephanie:** I thought that you're gonna say, like, "Yeah, I'd be a chef or something." But when you said food blogger, I'm like, that's like the bucket list. Maybe someone will be like, "Hey, you're good at podcasting about nothing related to food, maybe you should host a show on the Food Channel.

**Toni:** This is what I'm trying to say. If Food Network were to call me is all I'm gonna say. Okay.

**Stephanie:** We could totally tandem this... Like follows around and we'll find good food.

**Toni:** Yeah. Listen to me, we don't have the opportunity and the time right now but one day I will share with you my plan and you can be a part of it. And I just want to put that out there. So there you go.

**Stephanie:** Okay. All right. And if anyone from Travel Network is listening or from Food Network, call us. We're your girls.

**Toni:** Call us.

**Stephanie:** That is so amazing. I love this so much. We're just talking about Atlanta and that we have that as a place in common. What is your favorite restaurant in Atlanta? And I'm going to ask about Nashville too, because you said you're here a lot.

**Toni:** Oh, that's a hard one.

**Stephanie:** I know. I know.

**Toni:** That is a hard one because it goes to categories. But I would say when it comes to sushi, there's this place called Umi in Atlanta. U-M-I, top-notch. Top-notch situation. Best steak: Oak Steakhouse. And I will stop there because I can go for a little while. So that's Atlanta. If you're listening, sushi, steak, go ahead and go.

Nashville. I'm gonna go lunch option. Little lighter. I really do love Hattie B's. I do. Hattie B's chicken. It's probably not the most authentic natural, but darn it it is good. And I have stood in that line in the hot natural sun and sacrificed for some Hattie B's chicken. Okay?

**Stephanie:** Yeah.

**Toni:** Justin Timberlake's restaurant is pretty cool, too. But okay, that's it.

**Stephanie:** What's Justin Timberlake's restaurant?

**Toni:** I forgot what it's called. It's why I just had to say Justin Timberlake's restaurant.

**Stephanie:** Oh, my gosh. Sorry, we're all going to Google.

**Toni:** I'll email it to you afterwards.

**Stephanie:** All right. Big fan of his. Can't believe I didn't know he had restaurants.

**Toni:** Yes, girl.

**Stephanie:** All right. Well, let's talk about some of the things.

**Toni:** Right.

**Stephanie:** You have a new book. And it's called *Brave Enough to Be Broken: How to Embrace Your Pain and Discover Hope and Healing*. Can you tell us more about it?

**Toni:** Man, you know, a lot of books I think are about people's stories. And I think that's a beautiful thing. But one of the things I've always said is that I don't believe that my story is powerful enough to change the lie that our brokenness discounts us.

And so when I wrote this book, I wanted to make sure that it had a little bit of my story in it from abuse from my childhood, childhood traumas, parentified child syndrome, which I mean, it's all in the book, battling with addictions, I mean, all of these different things that are a part of my story. But it also includes a roadmap. And that roadmap talks all around healing in the midst of brokenness.

I think one of the things that hurt the most is when I was 25 years old and I've been through divorce and a toxic and abusive marriage, and spiritual manipulation at my church, and eating disorder, and all the addiction. I didn't have any sort of roadmap to figure out like, how do you actually heal?

Like, what does it look like to transition toxic community out of your life and go after real, authentic, safe community? What does it look like to find counseling? Like, how do you find counseling? Like, what if you're in college? What does counseling look like then? How much does it cost? Is it covered by insurance? What does it look like to have a real, authentic relationship with Christ, not to be like a fan, but an actual follower of Christ?

All those things I just had to stumble into. And thankfully, with good community and mentors and people that came into my life, I found those things out. But then I said, "Man, I really just want to create a seamless roadmap for other women to find healing a little bit easier." And that's what *Brave Enough To Be Broken* is all about. It's a roadmap to healing and wholeness. And it starts with embracing pain, which is not fun.

**Stephanie:** Yes, a boo, but yeah.

**Toni:** Boo.

**Stephanie:** Boo but important. Important. I mean, you kind of give us a really brief overview but I would just love to hear a little bit more about your story. And also Broken Crayons Still Color, for women who don't know what that is... Is it don't color, can't color?

**Toni:** No, you got it right the first time.

**Stephanie:** Okay

**Toni:** Man, so many things. So, born in Houston, Texas. Just want to put that out there one more time. Texas all day. I was born in a blended family with my parents. And one of the things that's pretty unique about my childhood is that my mom got really sick growing up. She had a massive stroke, paralyzed and my dad had to work a whole bunch. We didn't have a lot of finances. So my dad just had to work.

It kind of broke up our family a little bit and I ended up taking care of my mom at 8 years old. Driving her around to appointments at 12 years old, helping her with her medicine. And that's where the parentified child syndrome comes to play.

I mean, naturally, we kind of see our lives progress with our parents for those of us that have them in a way that says, like, you know, in our late 40s, or 50s is when we kind of start taking care of our parents. Well, that happened a little bit early for me. I took care of my mom when I was eight and all throughout middle school and high school.

So I grew up a little fast, and I grew up without nurturing and without the wonder of a beautiful childhood that was protected and steered. And so then I got a little wild. At 13 I lost my virginity, started sneaking out of the house with an older guy, started drinking alcohol to numb the pain, started smoking weed and poppin x and all the things. I was twerking in the club and in people's houses. It was wild.

At 16, I left my parents' house and put myself through college, and just kept numbing with weed and with alcohol. Didn't really know God. Kind of was like a fan. We went to a Catholic church. It was just kind of like, yay, pretty cool, whatever. And then I ended up in Georgia marrying someone after three months of knowing them. mm mm. A little wild, okay. Moved to Georgia three months after knowing this guy and got married. It ended up being real, toxic, and hard.

And in the midst of that at 21, I visited a church and messed around and got saved. And I had a mentor come into my life and was like, "You look crazy. And I don't know if this is a good choice but I think that we would love to have you volunteer with the youth."

And because I was so crazy, the youth fell in love with me. They were like, "Yeah, we liked this girl. She a little wild, she kind of curses a little bit. She needs to get her life together, but we love her." Okay.

And in the process of volunteering with these students, it changed my life. I wanted to live a better life. I wanted to be closer to Jesus. And this mentor gave me reps with speaking, helped me go through ministry school. I got ordained, which was super nuts. And you know, really just started in full-time ministry.

The issue at that point was that I was kind of living this double life where there was toxicity and hurt and abuse at home and I was standing on stages pretending, right? Pretending that everything was fine, that I was all good, and life was good. And I think I just got tired of living in a shame bubble. And I ended up getting a divorce.

I had a daughter at the time.. and we decided that it just wasn't safe anymore for her and for me. So went through the divorce, transitioned out of the church, and thought that my life was completely over. That divorce was too much, that my past was too much and that I shouldn't be administering anymore. And that's kind of when Broken Crayons Still Color came to be.

I preached a message at this middle school about broken crayons still coloring, that God still can use us for beautiful things even in the midst of our brokenness. And people were like, "Oh snap, like we resonate with that." This was before like Brené Brown and people who were like, "No more shame. Trauma can't have my life anymore." And people were like, "Man, this is a good message. People need to hear this."

And so I just kept going and started getting opportunities. And met my now husband, who was already in ministry, super saved. I'm still making fun of him for getting away with a wild girl like me. He's a civilized one in the marriage. But he absolutely changed my life. He ended up paying for counseling for me and helping me, my daughter. He's a huge part of my redemption story. And here I am now man writing a book about it, preaching and teaching and helping other women.

Broken Crayons Still Color, the organization, we help women process through trauma and pain and get to hope and it's beautiful. We have courses and devotionals and all the things.

**Stephanie:** I love everything about that. I love that so much. There are so many things that I think we need to hear when we're in the thick of a really hard season, when we've made really big mistakes or done things that we're not proud of, or we're living in a life that is full of pain or brokenness or trauma. So I have just like 1,000 questions because I know you talk about it a lot-

**Toni:** Okay.

**Stephanie:** ...just for women who are trying to figure a way out of this. So the first one is, one of the things I know you talk about is that there's this false narrative that perfection is the gatekeeper to success. Talk to me more about this. Like women are sitting here thinking, "I can't get to where I want to go because of where I've been."

**Toni:** Yeah, 100%. I think the one of the greatest schemes of the enemy, of the Devil or Satan, however you want to call him, is for us to think that having it all together, being perfect, is the way for us to have success, is the way for us to have everything we want in life.

When you start to kind of dissect the Bible and these teachings, you started looking at people like Paul who was nuts. Okay, the apostle Paul in the Bible, just so crazy, Christian bully, sentencing people to death for believing in Jesus and messed around and have this moment where God was like, "Hey, I want to use you to spread the gospel." And Paul's like, "Wait, bro, do you know who I am? Do you know that is like the antithesis of who I actually am?"

And God's like, "Yeah, I want to use that too. And it's interesting because we forget that... Again, we're talking about this Christian bully in the Bible and God literally saying, "I want to use the very thing that defines you as someone who doesn't believe in me, as someone who's absolutely broken..." Some people would call Paul a Christian bully, right? He was just this guy that was completely broken and God was like, "I still want to use you in that. As a matter of fact, it's where I do my best work."

And in 2 Corinthians 12, Paul really talks about this idea of having a thorn in his side. He says to the church in Corinth, he goes, "Listen, if anyone should be prideful, it should be me. I'm over here doing all the gospel things. I'm starving on boats. I'm not eaten for days and days. I'm like ride or die Christian, but really I have this thorn in my side. And it reminds me of my imperfection.

And here's what God says to me about that. He says that His grace is sufficient for me and His power is made perfect in weakness. Not Instagram followers, not likes, not how we can draw our eyebrows on it look like sisters and not cousins. Not our filters, because I love a good filter, hello, somebody. But in our weakness, that's the very place that God uses and does His best work in. His power is made perfect in our weakness.

And the part of the scripture that we don't love is the second part where Paul says, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power will rest on me." We don't want to be broken. We don't want that. But that is actually where God does His best work. Because it's in our surrender, when come to Him that He says, "Oh, I've got you. I'm the player on the sidelines of your life saying, 'Put me in coach.' I've got some power for you. Let me show you what I have for you."

And that's my prayer. That's my prayer. I was tired of trying to be perfect. It was exhausting. It was exhausting trying to pretend. Now I'm like, "No, I'm freaking nuts, I'm crazy and I'm wild and I'm loud, and I probably shouldn't even be here, but God is using me." And is the best thing. It's the best thing.

**Stephanie:** I love that so much. Because I think if we can look at what's happening through us and go, "Well, I did that. You know, this isn't because I'm good. This is because I



tried really hard. This is because I'm perfect." Well, then it's like the credit goes to us. Whereas if we can say, like, "God is working despite me. I'm here, but I'm just the conduit," then He gets all the credit.

**Toni:** And that's a good thing.

**Stephanie:** I also think that, and we talk about this a lot here, that when we go through something hard we become... it's like our mess becomes our message. You know, the things that we go through, that experience transforms us into really the perfect person to walk someone else through that thing. And so it's like if you don't ever... those places end up being really only because of God's redemption, and that being our strongest places.

**Toni:** It's beautiful because... I mean, first of all, how easy is it to super love the girl that is perfect and always shows up. I feel like we have a person like that in our life that we think is so perfect. It's like the girl that brings the best charcuterie, she's super kind, she's like a Teletubby Carebear type situation. It's so easy to love those types of people.

But when someone looks at you and knows everything you've been through, knows what you struggle with, and says, "Hey, you too are still worthy of love and belonging," gosh, it means so much more. It means so much more when it's like, "Toni, I know that you battle with pride. I know that you have been abused. I know that you've battled with pornography. You've battled with addiction. I know those things about you, but you are still worthy." Oh, man. It's like, Oh, snap. It makes you just want to run through a freaking wall.

You mean to tell me that all the things that I've done, with everything that I've been through, with everything that I've really failed at I can still be used? Oh, freak, let's go. Put me on the bus. I'm ready coach. I'm so in. Those are the best stories, I think.

**Stephanie:** Yeah. Yeah. And that's just such proof. It's really easy to sit in the audience and watch someone on stage who looks perfect and think, "Well, they can do this. But that's because they're perfect. I can't." But every time we get to stand up and go, "Well, I'm such a mess but thank God He's using me," that's a reminder that broken crayons still color.

**Toni:** That was good. That was good.

**Stephanie:** So I know that's like one piece of it, you know, knowing that whatever fits in this category, but the hard things in our life don't disqualify us. But we also still have to work through them. I was gonna ask you this kind of more towards the end but I want to ask you this first.

**Toni:** Let's do it.

**Stephanie:** With idea that our mess can become our message, I think that there's this tendency towards maybe wanting to share too soon, like help in... If we've been through something, you know, to rush immediately back in and go, "Okay, well, let me help other women who are going through this." But sometimes that's not the best way. Can you talk to us about that?

**Toni:** What I want to say is, don't get it twisted. We can find Christ's power and love and rest in our brokenness, but we cannot live from it. We have to live from our healing. That's a very different ballgame out here. We have seen people that just leak all over the internet, you get online, you talk about your boyfriend and broke up, which is just crazy. And you are not giving anyone hope. You are not giving anyone hope.

People are walking away from your presence, from your word, probably really sorrowful. But that's because our brokenness needs to be held in the hands of safe, healing places first. And then we cultivate hope from that place, and we can for ourselves, and then we can give hope all for others. That's one of the things I have to learn early on as a young leader—it's you just don't lead from your brokenness, you lead from hope, you lead from healing. And you got to go heal that thing before you start to talk about it.

And I will say this too. One year of counseling isn't just going to fix everything magically and give you the authority to speak on everything you've been through. For example, I healed a lot of my daddy wounds very early on, a lot of insecurity very early on. But I have some motherhood wounds that I'm still processing through this year. And I made a commitment this year to process through it. And it's why oftentimes people don't hear me talk about my mom a whole bunch from the platform.

The truth is, there are parts of me that have healed and I now have the authority to speak into all my platforms and there's parts of me that I do. And I just need to sit down and be quiet. Me and my husband say all the time. It's like we six years into this marriage game, we ain't ready yet. Don't ask us for no marriage advice. Okay? We still learn it out here. All right.

We just have to be okay with that. We have to be okay with it, not only for our audience but for us too. Because we can end up doing more damage to ourselves if we prematurely try to lead out of our brokenness, and we mess around just be looking crazy out here.

[00:23:29] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! In this episode, we're talking a lot about therapy. And if you've been considering going to therapy but wondering where you'd find a good counselor or how to afford it, there's a resource I wanted to make sure to share with you. It's one of our amazing Girls Night podcast sponsors, [Faithful Counseling](#).

Faithful Counseling is a website where you can get matched up with a Christian counselor for professional online therapy sessions. This is truly the easiest and most affordable way to find a faith-based counselor. And you may have heard me talk about Faithful Counseling before, but just in case you haven't, I wanted to tell you four quick reasons why I love them so much.

Number one, it's easy to get started. All you have to do is go to their website, fill out a form about yourself, what you're going through and what you're looking for in a counselor, and within 24 hours, Faithful Counseling will connect you with a licensed, vetted, faith-based professional counselor.

The second reason is that it's easy to schedule. Once you're connected to a therapist, you can start communicating with them in less than 24 hours. You can also log into your account at any time and send a message to your therapist and you'll get timely and thoughtful responses back. You can also schedule weekly video or phone sessions. And the best part is you can do it all virtually. No commute, no awkward waiting room time, less time away from work. You can even do your sessions in your PJs.

The third reason I love them is that it's easy to find the right counselor for you. In order for counseling to be truly beneficial, you need to find a counselor you really connect with. And oftentimes we don't find the right person on our first try, so then we're stuck going through the whole process of breaking up with our counselor which is awkward, and starting from scratch to find a new one.

But with Faithful Counseling, if you don't love your counselor, or if you find you're looking for something different, you can switch by clicking a button. It's easy and it's free. They really make it so easy to find the best fit possible.

And the last reason is that it's easier to fit into your budget. While I love traditional in-person counseling, it can cost more than \$100 per session, which just makes it a total no go for so many of us, especially in a time when the economy is in flux. But Faithful Counseling is significantly less expensive, and they have financial aid available. And if you sign up through the special link that they gave me, you can get 10% off your first month.

Friends, if therapy is something you've been considering or something that you think might be helpful for you right now, head on over to [stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling](https://stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling). That link will give you 10% off your first month. Again, that's [stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling](https://stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling) for all the info and for 10% off your first month of counseling.

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**Stephanie:** I love that so much. Because you know, I was just talking to someone about this. That there are pleases of the like... I very rarely share things in the moment that I'm going through. Maybe there are some people who from a really healthy place can take something that they're going through and share something powerful that helps other people on social media about that thing in real-time. I don't have that.

In the moment, I'm just trying to survive it. So like I can't live tweet my way through it. And then also I have no idea what to say about this. I haven't learned the lesson yet. And so I can't share it with anyone else. Like I'm still in school.

**Toni:** I'm still in school.

**Stephanie:** The same thing with... I have been married for eight years now and we definitely had some people ask us about marriage very early on. We're like, "There's no way." Both of our parents have almost been married for 40 years and we're like, we can hear them laughing at us, being like, "You can't talk about this." It's only this year that we've started talking about engagement and the transition into marriage. But I'm like, it's just there. I can't talk about anything past that because we're just not there yet. We're just still learning.

**Toni:** It's real out here. It's so, so real. And I'm sure you get this all the time. People probably do reach out because they see this marriage and they're like, "I want that." But what they don't probably see is the work that y'all are putting into making this marriage well, into making it to eight years. Which, I mean, statistically, that's a freaking miracle right now. People are throwing in the towel before three years now, which is crazy. That number is just backing up.

You know, I think people just want quick fixes. And they're like, "Tell me how to do this. I want to know." And it's like, "No, there's some work, there's some pruning, there's some fruit that needs to come from this before I give that to you." But you know, we just don't want to wait. We don't want to wait.

**Stephanie:** I know. Well, you mentioned therapy and I'm so glad you did because... I mean, we talk about therapy so much here on the show because I love it so much. But I know that you said like, you know, the process of how do we even find a person and like,

do I need therapy? And would this be helpful? Talk to me about that as part of the healing journey, as part of doing the work process.

**Toni:** Absolutely. Here's the truth, man. As cliché as it sounds, we hire professionals for almost every other area in our life. We hire professionals to do our nails and toes, to get them nasty, whatever the things are called, off of the edge of our toes or of our feet. We get pedicures.

**Stephanie:** Calluses.

**Toni:** There it is. Calluses. We hire fitness professionals to make sure that we stay fit, or we go to the gym, or we watch a YouTube video. We hire professionals to do our hair and our lashes. I mean, all these different things. We want someone to, shout out to the foodies, to cook for us. We want to go to restaurants.

But for some reason, when it comes to our mental health and our emotions, we want to handle that ourselves when there are professionals out there that have actually studied the brain, studied how they interconnect, through our neurons, with our emotions that lead to our thoughts and our actions. And they're available to us.

And I think that the first thing we have to get through is the stigma because I know my family personally, I mean, when I told them I was going to counseling, they were like, "Are you sick? Is something wrong?" I'm like, "Guys, I mean, yeah, we're all kind of sick, but I want to sit down and talk to someone. I want to process through the stuff."

And we have to get rid of the stigma that counseling is the emergency room. Because really it's not. Counseling is not the emergency room. Counseling is the primary care doctor, going for your checkup. You know, it's a safe space for us to enter into the hard work.

And for some of us who have trauma and pain in our past, sometimes the counseling office ends up being the emergency room, ends up having to process through all the things that we've been through and take some more extreme measures like EMDR, which is trauma treatment and all these different things. But the first initial steps is not that.

I think the second thing I want to say too is that your first choice and counseling may not be the best choice. I've gone through four different counselors. I've dated a few different counselors. Not dated for real, y'all, okay? Happily married, hello somebody. But I've, you know, dated before I "married," quote-unquote, counselors to see if they were a good fit for me.

Just because the first one isn't a good fit... I mean, come on, there's somebody listening to this, you went through about three, four, five, six, seven boyfriends before you met your husband. We have to be open to doing the same thing with our counselors. "Hey, this wasn't a good fit for me. Let me try again."

And obviously the last thing is that counselors do not do your work. They help you find out what work you need to do. Counseling is about getting into the door, processing through the things that you need to process with with a guide, and then going to do your work.

I have not left a counseling session without something to do, without something to think about, praying about, process through, ask my parents about. Counseling is wor just like going to the gym is work. But it's the conditioning of your mind and your emotions. I don't think it ever ends. I'm going to be in counseling until I leave this earth. Period. Not because I'm gonna do a whole bunch, but because life sucks, y'all.

I mean, we just went through a global pandemic, we went through civil unrest in 2020, we went through political divisiveness, we went... I mean, got monkeypox popping up all over the place. Life in general sucks and it weighs on us. And we need professionals in every aspect of our life to help us process through that and do it really well.

**Stephanie:** I love that so much. One of the things that I know you talk about is when we are broken in some way that it just spreads out into the rest of our life. And so I want to hear you talk about that because that's sort of like the opposite of doing the work and getting the help and, you know, being proactive about our healing. Like the opposite is, what does that look like?

**Toni:** The opposite is leaking. Our brokenness when it goes untreated and unhealed leaks. And it doesn't just leak in one area, it leaks in all of them. If you are an unhealthy person, you're going to be unhealthy wife and mother and friend and daughter and co-worker even.

We cannot keep our brokenness and our trauma in our pain isolated. It will inevitably leak. It's the reason why when our boss calls us into the office, for some of us, we get a little anxious because something in our past triggers us and says, "I'm going to lose my job. I'm not doing the best that I can do."

There's a reason why that brand-new boyfriend when they bring up something that you've done wrong, you start to feel betrayed or abandoned. There's a reason why these different areas of your life are being triggered. It's because it's coming from a source, from a place.

I mean, and I know this, and I'm not preaching at you, I'm telling you what I went through. When I was in a really toxic marriage, I wasn't just an unhealthy wife but I became an unhealthy mother. I couldn't mother my daughter well.

And her life and the health that came with her name and her life, it was important to me. And so I had to solve the root. Unfortunately for me, that meant getting divorce. And then I had to go to counseling. Because leaving a situation does not necessarily mean you're healed from a situation. You have to go get your work done. And so I have to go to counseling. And the truth is I am a better mom for it. I am a better wife for it.

I get the opportunity to be married again, remarried. I would have jumped into this marriage and still been the same unhealthy, bitter, scared, anxiety-ridden person that I was before I'd gotten it. Just because I got into a good new thing does not mean that I am healthy within the goodness. So we got to do our work. We got to do our work so we don't leak. And that's that.

**Stephanie:** I love that so much. That's just such a good way of putting it. Like, if you're an unhealthy person, you are an unhealthy (fill in the blank) of all these other things. And it's so true. So I know that your new book is like a roadmap through healing. We've talked about therapy. What are some of the other things that we can be doing and putting into place to be able to walk through this stuff so that we aren't carrying this stuff with us forever?

**Toni:** In the book we talk about gratitude. And you know, it's such a simple thing. But Lisa Harper does this thing every single day. She talks about getting up in the morning and really spitting out, like shooting out into the environment, the atmosphere, the things that she's grateful for.

And the reason why that helps... I mean, first of all, there's so many psychological things. But the reason why it's important to healing in brokenness is because when you begin to heal you begin to realize that healing is painful. And that's why the subtitle of the book is *How to Embrace Your Pain and Discover Hope and Healing*. You have to embrace the pain first.

And so sometimes in those painful moments, when we think about road mapping through our past and life and going back into our childhood and starting to identify the things that broke us, it gets really painful. And it feels crazy because it's not linear. And so if you begin to practice gratitude, it makes that painful healing process that much easier.

I remember there were nights when I was curled up in a ball at the bottom of the stairs pleading for God to take my anxiety away so I could sleep. And I would get maybe three or four hours. And I remember one time my husband ordered me a weighted blanket, those were like when weighted blankets first started coming out. And I was like, "okay, cool, cool, cool." I put that thing on and I probably drooled for the first time in my life. It was amazing. It helps so much with the anxiety.

Well, I remember the next morning, getting up and still feeling—gosh, I get emotional about this—mad that I still woke up with anxiety, with that as shaky, weary feeling. But then what helps in those moments is saying, "But I'm really grateful for whatever freaking human being created the weighted blanket because for the first time in a long time I got more than five hours of sleep last night. It sucks. I want to be like the people that get eight hours of sleep, the people that don't wake up and think the world is falling apart, and battle with anxiety. That's what I desire."

But if I just took a moment to say, "But I'm just really, really grateful that last night for the first time I got rest." Gratitude gives us hope when all else seems like it's dark and broken and sucky. We practice gratitude, man, we just get hope and goodness that much easier. That's one of the things in the book. That's like an example of man, like, "There are things that we can do to make the healing process just that much more easier.

I would say the second one that I really love, and I'm gonna give it all too, is the toxic community chapter. There's a chapter on how to transition toxic community but then also how to cultivate new healthy community.

I remember praying for friends, and that sounds desperate and kind of lame. But I remember saying, "Lord, can you just... I mean, honestly, these other friends just didn't work out too well. They were not healthy for me. I was not in unhealthy environments. Can you just please give me new friends that I can relate to, that could see me, that can be safe places for me. Please help me."

And I remember literally one by one the Lord bringing these friends into my life and showing me where to put them because I'm an extrovert and everybody's my friend. That's the problem. All right. So I bring all these people into my most intimate parts, and then I end up getting hurt by them, not because they're horrible people, but because they were not created to be my most intimate spaces. And they may not be in a season where they can even hold what I'm going through.

In the book, we also talk about circles—where to put people in your life so that you can have really healthy, flourishing, beautiful, safe spaces, because we need community to heal. Absolutely. So those are the two parts.



**Stephanie:** I love that so much. Tell me a little bit more about the toxic community and identifying it, and then also why it's important... Like why... I don't know what verb you'd use there.

**Toni:** Like to why transition them out?

**Stephanie:** ...transitioning them out is essential to the healing process.

**Toni:** Yeah, absolutely. If you guys remember, for some of you that are just familiar with some things from the Bible, when Jesus was getting ready to die, the disciples just did not want Him to. Like, "Oh, my goodness, what are you talking about? No, you're the Messiah. You're the Savior of the world." And he was like, "Hey, chill out. I rebuke you because I have a plan, God has a plan, I have to go and do this."

Oftentimes, it's not even about people that are just extremely toxic. We can use that word and we can really harm people with the label "toxic." But sometimes their actions are toxic for us. The reason why Jesus needed to rebuke that is because He needed the grit and the endurance that He needed to go and fulfill what He had at the cross for us, for all of us. And it was new life and redemption and freedom.

For some of us, there are people in our lives that hinder our dreams by the things they say. "Oh, no, that idea is impossible." "No, I mean, I just don't know." They hinder our relationships by the things they say. "Oh girl, you attract the same type of men. I don't know if that's ever gonna work out for you."

They speak things over you that they're not... They don't mean anything ill by it but what they say can be really toxic for you in this environment. I remember I had friends that was like, "Girl, I know you're battling with anxiety, but just smoke something. Just drink something."

The truth is that was toxic for me. Because if I didn't allow myself to be anxious, I would also not allow myself to sit in a counseling office and get healed or get antidotes and strategies to help with my anxiety. I just would have been stuck with it for my whole life.

We have to do a better job at, I don't know, being a little bit more serious about the people that we allow into our spaces. And it's not to say that you have to push people completely out, say bye to people, be rude to people. But it may mean that you need to move them to a circle that is further from your heart, further from your healing. And that's okay. And maybe they'll come back.

Maybe you saying, "Hey, look, we can't be super close in the season because I'm really trying to heal," will prompt them to go and get the healing that they need so you can invite them back into, you know, a more intimate and close space to your heart." But it's important.

**Stephanie:** Tell me, like, how do you... Because that idea of circles is something that I've thought about so much. Hearing you say it, I'm like, "Oh my gosh, yes, someone else thinks of this this way." How do you name some of the circles? Give us some examples of what different levels we can invite people into just so we can kind of think through it.

**Toni:** I would say the closest, most intimate circle is probably called... it's going to be coined the intimate circle. And honestly that's you and God. Nobody else gets that. It's the most tender, fragile part of you. It's the part of you that you haven't told a lot of people about.

It's the part of you that you haven't even been able to be honest about with yourself. Like, there are just some parts of you that are just fragile. That's your intimate space. And that's you and God. Because if that relationship isn't right, you're not gonna be the best version of yourself for other people. But also, you won't even be able to see how you should be treated by other people if you don't know how to be in deep relationship with God.

He lashes in you. He loves you. He respects you. He gives you goodness. And when you cultivate that type of relationship with God, then you start to expect that from your friends and from your spouse and from everyone around you.

The next circle out from that are you're really close friends. These are the people that know things about you that everyone does not know: the things that you battled through. They can be your accountability people. We talked about that in counseling. We talked about having an accountability partner. Being able to have someone that's like, "Hey, how's it going? I know counseling was probably really hard today. Can I take you out for coffee? What did you talk about? Do you feel comfortable sharing it with me?" Those are the people that are literally in the trenches with you. And the people that are in the trenches have to be strong enough to carry you through.

And there are people that are not. And those are your acquaintances. Okay. And honestly, there may be family too. I've had to transition some family in and out of circles as well that just weren't safe enough or already enough to carry the weight of what I was going through as I was going through my healing journey, that didn't understand it, that frowned upon counseling, all the things, but I still love them dearly.

Those are probably your sandwich friends. You just get to have like a little sandwich with them, out and about, you aren't going deep on things. You're just having a little coffee here and there and you keep it moving. In the book, we say even Jesus had circles. He had his close three to Him, then He had the other disciples, then He had the masses. And if we want to be more like Jesus then we need to get really good at having circles.

**Stephanie:** What are some of the things that hold us back from getting the healing that we need?

**Toni:** Number one, shame. Shame. The difference between shame and guilt really trips people up. But I think that if we begin to realize that there is a difference, it'll help us. Shame says that I am bad while guilt says I've done something bad.

If we can start to admit that we are guilty of things, we're guilty of road rage, we're guilty of being a little wild, of drinking too much, of yelling a little bit too much, being too quick to anger, if we can start to admit, Yeah, I'm guilty of that and not allow it to attack our identity, I think we'd be more open to healing those parts.

Think about how different it is to say, "Man, I'm really guilty of being quick to anger with my spouse and with my daughter. I want to get better at that. What are some books, what are some resources, what counselor can I go to and talk about my anger and where that anger is coming from? How can I be more tender to that part of me that thinks that anger is a good solution?"

That's very different from saying, "Okay, I really hate my anger, but I don't want anyone to know about it. And I don't want people to call me the super angry person. I mean, maybe they're wrong. They must be wrong. I don't want to sit in the coun... I mean, how embarrassing is it to go and sit in a counselor's office and say that I yelled at my kid, that I yelled at my spouse."

That's shame speaking. That's saying, "I need to hide my brokenness." And we got to do a better job at understanding the difference between shame and guilt. Toxic community is another thing. You may have people in your life that just doesn't believe in, you know, the healing journey. It's like, "No, girl, you're fine," when you know that there's something in you that needs to be fixed. Toxic community can really hinder you from that.

And there's a list of things. Fear. Some of us—and this is gonna sound really crazy—some of us are scared to feel pain. I mean, when we go through our women's course with women all around the world, they hate step two, because step

two is story mapping. And that means you got to go back in your past and look at the things that broke you. And it is painful.

It's painful for someone to say, "I was molested when I was little," and I don't want to go back to that. It's painful for someone to remember what their dad or mom said to them in the past or what happens to them in a relationship. We are scared to feel pain. But when we begin to embrace our pain and access the things that broke us, the quicker we get, the easier we get to a life of healing and wholeness. And that only happens when we were unafraid.

**Stephanie:** If you could go back and tell yourself something when you were totally in the thick of it, what would you tell yourself? And then if you could go back and give yourself a gift, what would you give yourself?

**Toni:** I vividly remember the moments in my closet at the bottom of the stairs where I was just curled up in a ball pleading, pleading for God to take the pain away. Like pleading. And I think I was begging God to take the pain away because I thought that there would be an easier way. Like, there just has to be an easier way. Like, "You can heal me God without the pain. It just has to be an easier way."

I think I would go and whisper in that Toni's ear and say, "It's the only way but you are going to make it through. It's the only way. It's the only way but you're going to make it through, it's going to get better. But you have to press into pain. You have to learn how to embrace it."

And then I think if I were to give that Toni something, I would give her the freedom to ask for help. I think maybe like a hall pass or something, like a little get-out-of-jail-free card like to just continue to ask for help. I think that oftentimes the pain becomes unbearable in the healing process when we're alone, when there isn't a person that can say, "I know that it's hard right now but let's go get our toes done. I know that it's hard right now, but I got you some Jenny's ice cream, some Goody Butter cake. And here you go. It's going to be okay."

I think that that younger Toni needed to know that there were people who wanted, like actually wanted to walk with her through the healing journey, that she didn't have to do it alone. That there were people that would keep her safe and protected. And I wish I would have gotten there sooner. And so I would have given her the gift of the freedom to ask for help.

**Stephanie:** That's so good. Toni, to kind of close out, would you take a second to pray for the women who are feeling really broken right now and who really looking for healing and hope?

**Toni:** I absolutely will. God, we just invite you into this space now. For those that are watching and listening in the moment, whether they're in cars or doing nighttime routines for babies, cooking dinner, sitting on the couch, Starbucks, wherever they are right now, God we just invite you in, we invite Jesus into this space and we invite the Holy Spirit into this space. And we just say come and dwell with us. Come and dwell with us.

And God as you are here, Jesus as you are here, Holy Spirit as you are here, I just pray for the woman who's convinced that her brokenness discounts her. I pray that she would know it is not over. I pray that she would remember that you're coming after her, God. And you're not only coming after her, but you are ready to trade your power for her weakness, for her brokenness.

God, I'm praying for the woman who's already started the healing journey and it sucks and it hurts. I pray that she would know that, one, even though it's painful, it will get better. And two, she doesn't have to do it alone.

God, I pray for the woman who have had to have some seriously tough conversations with people on their healing journey. That I've had to sacrifice transitioning people into new spaces and leaving places and leaving relationships. I pray for the woman that had been through so much transition. And I just pray withness over her.

I pray that you would remind her that you are with her, God, hand in hand, step by step. That you are not the God at the end of the tunnel, saying, "Get it all together and then I'll be down here waiting for you." But you are the God of the valleys. That you are lighting up our ways. That you are with us. Healing come in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Stephanie:** Thank you, friend.

**Toni:** Thanks.

[00:51:45] <music>

**Outro:** You guys, isn't Toni amazing? Seriously, she's our new best friend, right? I just love her. I love her story. And there were so many times where I was just bowled over by God's truth and His love as she talked. Game-changing. Right?

Now, don't forget that if you ever want to find the links for anything we talked about in our Girls Night episodes, you can always find those over in our show notes. Just head over to [girlsnightpodcast.com](http://girlsnightpodcast.com) and you'll find links for everything,

including links for Toni, so you can pick up her book and follow along with all the great stuff she's doing.

All right guys, that's it for today's episode, but we have so much good stuff ahead this season. And with that in mind, now is the perfect time to make sure you're subscribed. Subscribing to the show is the best way to make sure you never miss an episode. We won't send you an email or anything. It'll just make sure your phone downloads the latest episode when the new one's released.

And I did want to take a quick second to ask you guys a favor. If you enjoyed this episode, or if you've been a Girls Night fan for a while now, would you take just two quick seconds to leave us a rating and review on iTunes? Those reviews help out our podcasts so much and it really would mean the world to me. So if you take two quick seconds to do that, I'd be so grateful. Guys, thanks so much for joining me for Girls Night. I'll see you next week.