

[Theme music: upbeat electronica plays in the background as Katie speaks.]

Katie Axelson: Welcome to Have Hope; Will Travel. When we travel, we get to know people who are different than we are. We hear different perspectives, and we better understand others' stories. We learn to stand with people instead of having opinions on issues. I'm your host Katie Axelson. This week we're hearing from my friend Florence Mayez. I know Flo in real life, you're going to love him. Everyone does. He's got this kindness and this excitement that just flows out of him. He's also got some hard parts of his story that he's going to share with us today, including drug abuse, overdose, and a car accident. Then of course we're also going to talk about redemption. If you're not in a place where those things are good for you to hear right now, maybe jump back to Episode {89} where Carrie Miller educates us on Catholicism. Or maybe go back to the last time we had one of my real life guy friends on the show, Episode {81} with Keith Menhinick. Alright, lets bring in Florence.

[Katie stops speaking and the theme music: upbeat electronica ends.]

Katie Axelson: Well welcome to Have Hope; Will Travel. I'm your host Katie axelson. I'm here today with my friend Florence Mayes. Flo is here to share a little bit about his story with us. He's got a really powerful story of experiencing addiction, having near-death experiences and now becoming sober. So Flo, the pieces of your story that I have heard are the snapshots because of course we work together, so I've heard little bits and pieces here and there but I'm excited to get to hear it a little bit more comprehensive and not just like, "Here's the snapshot from this particular moment." So let's go ahead and just start out like, how did you end up getting involved in drugs?

Florence Mayez: Okay so initially growing up from K to 8th grade I went to a Christian private school called Hope Academy. And in 8th grade I was introduced to like, there was a senior I believe, yeah she was senior. And you know, I was pretty innocent at that time. Like I knew what drugs were but I hadn't been around drugs, right? I remember one time she stuck her hand in her bag and then she like, "Smell that!" And it was this little pipe and it was weed. And I was like, "Oh that's what weed smells like." I was so innocent right? Anyway she started giving me Adderall and she was like, "You should sell these. You should sell these and bring me back the money, and I'll give you a cut." And so that's didn't last very long. The person who I was selling them with ended up getting caught and I'll say snitched, like told on me and said that I was the one who gave 'em them. And he wasn't lying, but they didn't find anything on me. So we both got expelled and then from there it was like four years of just a slippery slope, right?

KA: Sure.

FM: I had to finish eighth grade at this school called Olson Middle School and that's where, you know, I was introduced to like, really public school and secular mentality. And so I started you know, trying to fit in. We had just moved to a house over in north Minneapolis, so that's why I went there. And then from there it was Armstrong High School and I started dating this girl named Ruby and she knew the drug dealer, she was a stoner, and I just wasn't there yet. But I ended up taking acid in school and I had an amazing time and from there it was smoking weed after school, and then from there it was you know stealing oxy and Vicodin from my grandpa.

And then it was just - it got worse and worse. And then I didn't care what I was taking. You know, it used to be like, "Okay you need to show me the prescription bottle." Like I'm not taking it fake, I can just get it from my grandpa, right? But then it was like, "Well I can't get that anymore, are you sure this is real?" and then, "I thought it was real," and it was like, "I know this isn't real. Please Lord, let me just live one more day. This is my last time." And just saying a prayer before I did it right? And I didn't care.

KA: Sure. And of course it wasn't actually your last time.

FM: Yes. But it almost was, you know?

KA: Sure, yeah. So tell us a little bit more about that, about how it almost was your last time.

FM: Okay. So growing up, I'll say this just as a preface, is: I always had like dreams and visions of death. And honestly it's still something that I struggle with once a while, it's like intuition, like I know something's coming right? But growing up, I used to just tell my mom I never saw a future for myself, I didn't see myself getting married, I couldn't envision myself growing up. And I used to tell all my friends like, "I'm going to die young." Like I just spoke a lot of death. And I know the Bible says the power of life and death lies in the tongue right? And I find that to be true. And it's not so much manifestation but I do believe that like by your words and your belief system is the way you act, and by your actions come repercussions. Right? So in that sense I guess I believe in manifestation but not in the new age way.

KA: Sure.

FM: So from there, I remember we were in Florida me and my mom, and I don't remember this but - oh wait, I'm skipping way ahead. Anyway. Okay so there was one night this is my car crash where I just, I was going to go to bed, it was like two a.m. I remember I was lying there, living in this house in this room. And I just got this thought, it was like "You haven't done Xanax in a long time." And tried to go to bed, I just couldn't shake the thought so I just got on my Snapchat started texting everybody who I thought would have Xanax and everyone was like, "No bro sorry. It's late, maybe tomorrow," And then I was like, "Alright." And then finally I remember I was trying to sleep and I heard my phone ping and it was one of my cousins. I call him my cousin although we're not blood related and he was like, "Yo I know somebody who has Xanax, but I'm in Saint Cloud." And I was like, "Don't care, I'm gonna grab gas and then I'll be there. But can I stay the night at your house?" And he said yeah. Because the thing about Xanax - I knew better than to drive on Xanax, I knew better. I just knew better. And so I got gas, I headed there, got there, we went and picked 'em up. We went into his garage, we took them and then at four a.m., five a.m., and his dad comes out and he's like, "You know he can't stay the night, right?" And I was like, "Oh." So now I'm thinking, "Well what am I going to do? Am I just going to sleep in my car?" Anyway he's like, "No bro you'll be fine. Just go inside, we'll make you something to eat real quick, wash your face, you know sober up. Oh by the way, like can you drop me off at my friend's house in New Hope since you're headed to Golden Valley?" And I was like, "Well at least it'll be keeping me up on the ride," right? So we get there. The thing with Xanax is you don't really recognize you're high it's - you can think you're completely sober but you can be belligerent at the same time. You are pretty much are blackout, right? And it's also a time lapse, there's no perception of time. So from Saint Cloud to New Hope, it's about, I don't know, an hour

drive hour, an hour and twenty minute drive. And I remember just like that, we had gotten there. And he hops out of the car and he's like, "Are you going to drive, are you sure?" And I'm like, "Dude I made it this far. I've got a seven minute drive home." And he's like, "Are you sure you don't want to walk around the block, get some fresh air?" And I was like, "Nah dude, I'm okay." So I drive and the next thing I remember I woke up upside down, I smelled gas, I smelled dirt. I felt this heavy like, pressure on my chest. It's probably from the airbag, but I crawled out and not a single scratch on me. There were these two, two big guys in the yard that were like, "Yo," like cussing at me, like "What happened?" Duh duh duh. I was like, "Dude I fell asleep, I'm sorry, I don't know what happened." And they were like, "What do you mean you don't know what happened?" I was like, "I fell asleep, I don't know." Police, ambulance show up. The cop walks up and he's like, "You know how lucky you are to be alive right now?" And I was like, looking at the car, I was like, "Yeah." And I don't know if you've ever seen pictures but I could show you some for reference. And he was like, "Well I know you're not drunk because I would have smelled it on you already." I just remember that. And I was like, "No I'm not drunk." And he like takes me to the paramedics, they are checking my vitals and all of that, and they're like, "Alright, while he's checking out do you have someone you can call to come pick you up?" And I was like, "Well I'm not calling my mom, so I'll call my dad." And that's who I'm at right now. And no answer. And I'm not going to call again, so I'm like "Well I literally live like, right down the block. Is there any way you guys can bring me?" And so they call dispatch to get permission, they get permission, they drop me off and I made it home. I remember I went to bed, and then I woke up like four p.m. the next day to banging on my door. And it was my dad, holding the phone with my mom on it and she was screaming like, "Did you know he got in a car crash?" Like freaking out. And that was my first miracle. I wouldn't say "first miracle," but like near death experience.

KA: Yeah.

FM: And before that, it was like I was reading CS Lewis's Miracles so going back a little more, I was drawing near to God at this time. This is when I started recognizing like, wow there's really a floating ball of gas in the sky and people don't question this. Like, wow there's really a moon. Like, like just realizing like this didn't come from nothing, so there was a spiritual awakening happening but I still had one foot in and one foot out, right? And I think God saw that and that was my first wake up. "I see you, I'm going to keep you here. You think you're going to die young, I'm going to show you that you don't take your last breath until I say you do," right?

KA: Wow, yeah.

FM: And then about five months later I was in Florida with my mom, and this is what she told me after I woke up out of a comma was that I had told her I thought death was near. And I don't remember saying that. But she told me that. So we get from Florida and I ask if I can go to one of my co-workers' house, and I'll be back later that night. And so I go there, and my only sole purpose for going there was to get Percocet with him. Like I knew it was fake fentanyl, like just bad. But we did it. So we go get it and take it with him we're at his house and apparently I said I was going to go to bed, I was tired. Which doesn't make sense because I said I was going to be home. I don't know why I did that, I just did. And he throws a blanket on me, we have work at seven a.m., it's probably around eleven or twelve. He wakes up to his alarm at about 6:15, and comes to shake me awake and I'm not moving. And he checks my pulse, and there's no pulse.

And so he calls 911 they tell him to start doing chest compressions, so he does. They come back. I don't know anything besides this, but like, I had no pulse and they put me in a medically induced coma for five days I believe. And they froze my body to it's like eight degrees below our normal temperature, something Celsius. But t - they're, what's the word? They're technically freezing your body to preserve your organs and brain function and so that's what they did. So I was frozen and had trach tube, catheter, IV's, all of that. And then I woke up and don't remember the next two days after that, but then the drug started to wear off that they had given me and now we're here. I went to treatment after that and yeah.

KA: So I want to clarify, because I want to make sure I understand.

FM: Yeah.

KA: Were you in a coma in Florida or this was only one coma after Florida?

FM: This is two days after we got - well literally a day and a half, two days after we got back from Florida. So here in Minnesota.

KA: Sure. And it was an overdose right?

FM: It was, yeah. Well what they say, yeah it was an overdose but they have no idea what I overdosed on. When they took my blood they checked for everything and didn't find a single drug in my system.

KA: Wow.

FM: I wasn't smoking weed at the time, there was no alcohol in my system, nothing. The only thing they did not test was for fentanyl because that takes a different test, so my guess was it was probably fentanyl or just some alternative fake substance, I have no idea. And another thing is that when they got to my roommates, or - not my roommates my coworker's house. They asked him what I had taken and he said he did not know. But he knew, he was just too afraid to tell them. So that's one thing that God was Sovereign over, is like - they could have given me Narcan if they knew I was on opioids, or I'd taken opioids, but they had no idea and they just worked their wonders.

KA: Wow. Did you have a drug of choice or did you kind of use a smattering of them?

FM: Yeah it was - I was what you would call a poly-drug, you know, user. It didn't matter. It was Molly one week, it was Percocet, but in all in all I genuinely did like opioids, I would say. It gave me a calming sensation and brought peace of mind, but I wasn't a daily user either. Which is - I was a "functioning addict," what they say. So.

KA: So you are still able to hold a job, go to school, do all the normal things with an addiction as well.

FM: Yep, yep.

KA: So then you came out of the coma. Is that when you went to rehab?

FM: Yep so it was about two weeks after that. I remember, this is kind of random too but while I was in the hospital room I had like a super awful dream, sleep paralysis, it was super sad. And I

actually had a dream about Juice Wrld, and I don't know if you know who that is but he's a recording artist who actually passed away from a percocet overdose. But yeah, he glorified the drugs, right? He glorified the demons he was facing, all of that. Beautiful artist though, just glorified it. And I saw him and I can't really get into the dream, but it was just terrifying right? So I wake up it's like three, four a.m., and I'm crying by myself. And my mom gets there the next morning, we eat some hospital breakfast, it was good. And she asked before she left, she prayed over me and asked that I would have the most beautiful dream I've ever had. And I was like super afraid to go to sleep that night just because dreams really affect, like I - they really do. But I went to sleep and I had this third person dream where I was in the parking lot in a car with three of my best friends, but I had no idea who these friends were. And I remember I was watching, but I was also myself. And we hopped out of the car and one of my songs that I had never made or never heard was playing on the radio and the sun was shining on our skin and I could feel the heat, and all the sudden I was just sucked out of it. But I've always looked at that as a moment in the future that will happen, I have no idea when it is but I believe Cullen who I do the podcast with is one of those people. I had never met him before. But when I met him I got that sensation of like: you're someone I'm supposed to do things with. And I'm waiting on the other two people, I don't know who they are yet. They may be in my life now I have no idea.

KA: You don't know who they are yet.

FM: Yeah.

KA: That's cool. So what made you decide to become sober? Is "sober" the proper term or is it like, "clean?"

FM: Yeah, sober, clean. Whatever you want to say.

KA: Okay.

FM: I would say again my mom was showing me pictures when I was in the hospital of me with tubes and stuff like that and I remember we just bawled in the bed together and cried. And that's when I realized how serious it was, because I had no recollection of anything, right? I just woke up one day and I'm in the hospital. But until she showed me the aftermath I didn't really care or understand. Once she showed me that she said, "You need to go to treatment." I didn't want to go to treatment. She said, "If you want our relationship to be the same, you need to go to treatment." And so I said, "Okay." And I got home, healed super quickly, and she - they were going to send me to Teen Challenge but then they came across a Facebook post from an old friend from Teen Challenge that they had met. Because they both worked there and got sober through Teen Challenge.

KA: Wow.

FM: This is my mom and step-dad. And he had opened his own place with another guy named John called Redemption House, that's why I love the word that you use, "Redemption," because I find that to be very true. And they showed me pictures of it, it's like this awesome middle-of-nowhere kind of like cabin-type-house. But it's just super beautiful and you're pretty much on a sabbatical, but it's completely faith-based. So I go there and you know, I was like, "Okay I'm only going to do the ninety days." I go there for ninety days, they're like, "Hey if you

stay another month you can do what we call a Phase Two program,” and I was like, “Okay I guess I'll do the Phase Two but I'm only going to stay there for the six month requirement.” Well I stayed there for sixteen months and I just moved out like a week and a half/two weeks ago.

KA: Sure.

FM: I mean, really because I saw the aftermath and when I got home from the hospital just seeing my brother's joy and - I have a nine year old and a six year old, seven year old brother. And just everyone who loved me. It was like, “Do I really want to be in that position again?” Like obviously I'm here for a reason. I spoke so much death but God showed me two times that like, I'm not meant to be dead. I mean lightning usually does not strike twice. So I don't know. I don't know.

KA: Do you have visions of yourself as an adult now?

FM: Yeah I would say -

KA: Because you talked about not seeing it.

FM: Yeah there's definitely - again I still struggle with that. I can definitely struggle with assurance of salvation as well, like how could God love me? Why does He love me? And I think a lot of people struggle with this, whether they're vocal about it or not I don't know. But I have daily struggles. And there's sometimes you know, temptation to use. Although it's not necessarily like percocet, it's like, “Well you know I didn't really have a problem with alcohol but like, what if I just drank?” You know? But I know where those things can lead. I would say when I am I would say moving correctly, in my word alongside the community, have a good prayer life, I definitely see a future. But there are times where you know, I may be back sliding or I feel like I'm too sinful and those feelings and emotions can definitely lead to like, “Well I don't think I'm going to be here long.” And there's a verse, I have it right here - one minute!

KA: Okay!

FM: It's it's Romans 8:6. It's: “The mind of a sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.” And I definitely find that to be very true for my own life.

KA: Yeah. Oh for sure, for sure. So tell us a little more about Redemption House because we both live in Minnesota and I don't have a lot of experience in the addiction world, but I know that like Minnesota Teen Challenge is kind of the gold standard.

FM: Top of the line.

KA: For rehabs at least here in the state of Minnesota, Adults and Teen Challenge. But then Redemption House, I've heard beautiful things about a couple people who have gone there. So tell us about what that experience was like.

FM: I would say it was very enlightening, it was very beautiful. As I said, that's how I met Cullin who I do the podcast with, I've met tons of great community through there. I mean, the guys who I was living in Phase Two with are some of my best friends, I love them.

KA: That's cool.

FM: Just to see how God brought me from again, a state of almost, just about death to like filled with people who love the Lord and who want the best for me and like, who are pouring into me. It's just crazy what He can do. And to think like, I don't - it's just crazy to see what He can do. Like, where I could be, where I should be... and, but where I'm not at the same time! So it was located in Minnetrista Minnesota, about thirty minutes away from the cities or the Golden Valley where I am. And then, but you know we had a regimen. We woke up at seven, you know I struggled with waking up early but tried to wake up at seven. And we had a half hour to an hour of devotions and then from there we would have groups. We could have anywhere - when I went there there were a ton of people, they were like twelve. I'll say a ton of people is twelve. I think right now there's about six people but every once in a while they'll be like, "Hey, a new guy is coming in, a new guy -" And they're from all over, you got people from Texas, you got people from whatever, Georgia, you got people from New York, you've got people from Wisconsin, North Dakota. And they're just coming in and then those become your brothers for those times and yeah it was good.

KA: That's awesome. So you did devotions in the morning and then you had groups throughout the day?

FM: Yep.

KA: And then I'm assuming dinner and whatnot?

FM: So we - Justin Lakemacher, that's who my parents knew. He's also a what do you call that? Not the head pastor but he is a pastor at Cornerstone Church and so he would lead like pastoral groups of like, he would preach - well not preach but he would teach I would say in those classes. And we would do anything from you know, this is like - so what Redemption House focuses on is not so much "Oh you're an addict, you'll always be an addict," but "Hey, you have an idolatry issue. This is why you look to these things. You have a heart issue." So that's where the faith comes in, it's like okay well if your heart is right you won't desire these things. And this is where Christ comes into play, right? So groups based on that: how are we changing your heart, how is God going to change your heart? And what needs to be changed? Where do these heart issues come from? Well first we're just sinful beings, but second like there is trauma that comes into play too. What was your childhood like? So we had, there was therapy as well, talking about those things. Yeah.

KA: So you started with a ninety day program and that's what I'm assuming you just described to me. What was Phase Two like?

FM: Phase Two is you're out on your own but you still go to what we call "2-2-2 Meetings" every Monday night and then we have what's called Grace Abounds on Tuesday nights. But other than that, you're in a house. We were living in a regular house in Saint Louis Park, we were renting it out, there's no like - I would say, I mean there's one of the people who live there would be considered House Manager, making sure like "Okay we're going to set these chores up for this person," but besides that like, the only thing - the rules there were like obviously don't use and then curfew, be home on weekdays at ten p.m., be home on weekends at twelve. But besides that, you're working a job, you're living life. So.

KA: Yeah. So then, when did you finish Phase Two?

FM: I just moved out like a week and a half ago.

KA: Okay so you've been doing Phase Two the last several months. That's super helpful. Do you find, like how do you feel being on your own, having finished Phase Two?

FM: In all honesty it doesn't feel too much different, because I mean I was living regular life before. The only difference here is like, well I don't have a curfew but I'm not going to lie, half the time I'm still home by that curfew because it's like it's a part of what I do now. And I'm still going to the Monday and Tuesday nights because I love seeing those guys. You know? So I would say like, the life is the same but it's just I have to walk it out. I wouldn't say necessarily on my own, but I just have to walk it out now.

KA: Right, right. Is everyone at Redemption House male or or are there females, transgenders, there as well?

FM: Just males, yep. Yeah.

KA: Just males okay. So I was listening to your podcast where you were talking you and Cullin were sharing your stories and I was really intrigued when the topic of conversation moved over to the topic of like, "Do you have regrets being sober?" and I would love to hear some more of your thoughts on that.

FM: Yeah I would say I don't even remember what I said in that podcast which might be helpful because then I'm not regurgitating!

KA: That's okay, you can tell me fresh stuff now!

FM: I'd say there's times where I may feel like I'm - I'd say the regrets come from like, self-inflicted pain of you know. I mean, oh wait was it regrets of being sober that you'd asked?

KA: That's what I asked but if you have something else to tell me, I'd be willing to hear it.

FM: I was just going to just say, regrets of like the life that I did live but at the same time like I wouldn't be who I am now without it. As far as regrets of being sober, I don't walk around with my head down because I'm sober. I'd say it's just like, the fact that I ever tasted that fruit is where the regret comes from. Because you've tasted that life and you know it, but now you have to live a different life and I don't know, I just feel like it makes it a little harder than someone who's never done it.

KA: Right.

FM: You know, if you've never gone to a party you won't miss a party.

KA: Right.

FM: Because you don't know what that feels like.

KA: Because you don't know what you're missing, yeah.

FM: Yeah.

KA: How has your perspective shifted after having these experiences, both of using and of treatment and of course the near death experience?

FM: Yeah, that's a good question. I would say that life is fragile most definitely. God is sovereign, because since I've experienced a ton of people who have not made it out. We had a guy at Redemption House who I only knew for about two weeks but we had really good talks, deep talks, and one night he just wasn't there. He left, he ran away, left all the stuff there and then two weeks later we found out that him and a friend were found OD'd in the parking lot and his friend survived but he died. You know? And we went to the funeral and I was just like, "Dang. That coulda/shoulda been me." So yeah life is very fragile. These drugs aren't anything you want to play with and it doesn't matter who you are. You want to be a 4.0 star basketball player, you take one of those - you can die too. It's not just someone itching under a bridge right? And I think there's a stigma around addicts that like they're messy. And like yeah that may be the case for some people, but there's also like, CEOs who are, you know, very functioning, high functioning, but yet living a life of Darkness right?

KA: Yeah.

FM: So I think that's kind of what I feel my calling is, is to like remove that stigma and also just be a light you know?

KA: Yeah.

FM: Other perspectives, I would say I don't know. Struggle is - I mean this is really cliché, but struggle is useful for building up if you allow it to you know? You can either allow the struggle to cause you to walk and wallow in like sadness and pain, or you can allow it to make you stronger and because you've struggled in a certain area, you can relate to people who are still struggling in a certain area. So it also gives you, I don't know if I would say "license" but it gives you the ability to be empathetic in a way that maybe some people can't.

KA: Yeah.

FM: Yeah.

KA: I think about how like, you shifted my perspective because I remember there was a point, I don't know sometime last fall, September, October, early November. I was leaving work and you're like, "Hey, get home safe!" and like, my experience - we only say that at work when the roads are bad! And honestly you triggered me and I was like, "Oh my gosh, is it snowing and I didn't even realize it?!" But then of course knowing you and knowing your story, that whole ride home I was like, "Oh my gosh, I wonder - I'm sure at some point like, somebody told Flo to get home safe and something happened and it didn't work," and just like, that thought of like "get home safe," is more than just a "Hey drive safely, 'cause it's icy or snowy or blizzardy," or whatever, but just the reality of like: you know what it's like to not get home safe.

FM: Yep and in general some people just die. Like really, and it doesn't have to be your fault!

KA: Right!

FM: You know, like one thing I've learned is that I always say, "Lord willing," too! It's like, "Yeah I'll see you tomorrow Lord willing," because tomorrow is not promised. Like, and that's one thing I think that's perspective that's changed with me too is like: tomorrow's not promised. Like, yeah I may be sober right now but maybe but like, maybe I maybe an icicle falls on me. What a way! That would be so corny -

KA: For real!

FM: But it could happen! Like, it like kills a couple hundred people a year.

KA: I'm sure it does.

FM: It just happens and like, no one really walks with that perspective unless they know just the fragileness of life. And not to sit here and preach and be like, "I know everything," because there's days I forget that. I can get cocky, I get confident and think I'm on top of the world but it is the reality.

KA: Yeah.

FM: And I don't think a whole lot of people recognize it.

KA: For sure not. So if somebody has been listening and they're like, "Okay I have a loved one who has an addiction," how can they be supportive to that loved one? [Katie pauses for a moment.] I didn't prep you for that question, sorry!

FM: No no, that's a beautiful question. Well I would say first are they a believer or they not a believer? Because if they're a believer, I would say speak to the church, seek wise counsel. What is the length of their addiction? What kind of addiction is it? You know? Is it, is it pornography addiction, is it a drug addiction? I mean, addictions kind of are one in the same in a sense for there's a root issue and there's a cause. But you know, one can literally kill you and one kills you slowly you know?

KA: Right.

FM: Or maybe kills or skews your view of things. Another thing I would say is try to be empathetic and understand why. Again, that goes back to the root cause but all in all, I would say be supportive and do not cause them to feel like they are less-than. And also recognize if you have your own addictions in your life too.

KA: Sure.

FM: Because a lot of people walk around all tall and mighty but they're addicted to caffeine. Or they sit on their TV or phone for eight hours and again, there's that stigma of like "addicts are just the ones under the bridges," but like I don't know. It's not that.

KA: Not at all, it's not that. What like, has been supportive to you?

FM: Community, for sure. And that's why I still continue to go to the groups, is like - because I know there's something to gain. And I've been in states of isolation and it can be lonely, very lonely. And I think that's one thing this generation struggles with and probably every generation before us because nothing's new under the sun but I feel like a lot of people feel like they're

alone and no one can relate, that no one struggles the same as them or no one's been through this. And I know that mindset and again, there's times where I'm tempted to get into that mindset but it's not true because as you meet more people, if you – especially as you're actively searching out! – you can look up “AA meetings near me” and you'd find about ten thousand results. And you go there and you either listen to someone share their story, or you share your own. And I guarantee you'll learn something and you'll learn that like there are a lot of people like you. It's just, they're not maybe in our face. They're not the ones making the music, they're not the ones on national TV you know? And again, I think that's my job, is to be a sort - like, I don't necessarily want to say like “a sacrifice,” but like almost like - I put it in my song Catch A Breath. Like I'm just trying to tell you about my life so you don't have to sacrifice your own. I remember many times, many times that I felt alone and it's like because I went through these things again I'll be able to speak to a broad amount of people about these things and sure, someone who's never been through it can go up there and you know read off or list off scientific facts about addiction but they've never felt the itch. Or they've never really been through it. And I think people are more willing to listen. So maybe that's God's whole plan with me. And I would say with everyone, and that's why we have the word of God right? Is like to show, okay God sent Jesus to be flesh, just as we were. And it says that He was faced with every temptation known to man right? So we do not serve a high master who is not able to sympathize with all of our weaknesses. But yet He was without sin. So yeah, I think if you've been through something traumatic or you've got a struggle, or whatever, be it depression or anxiety, be vocal because you could really affect people.

KA: Yeah, that's a good word. That's a really good word.

FM: Yes.

KA: So you've talked a little bit about your music, and we've alluded to your podcast and stuff like that. Tell us a little bit more about what kind of creative work you're doing and where we can find it!

FM: Okay, yeah. So again my name is Florence Mayez and you can find that on all platforms, whether it be YouTube, Spotify, Apple. I will say that my SoundCloud has a lot more songs on it because I just don't - there's a lot of leases to beats that I don't purchase and so I don't have the rights to put them on Spotify. But some of my favorites are on there. But as far as my bigger songs, they're on Spotify and whatnot. My creative process, I recorded in my room. I've invested a lot of my money into a good studio and my music when I was you know, sixteen, seventeen was a lot different than it is now. It was glorifying the life I was living and whatnot. And at some point I even before my OD's and all that, as I said it was a spiritual awakening and I stopped speaking about those things in a positive light. I stopped cussing in my music, started speaking about things that are helpful and fruitful. I'm in the process of making it more fruitful, because I want Christ to be glorified in my music. Just one thing I don't want it to always come across, because I know one thing I struggled with and probably a lot of people struggle with is with Christian music is it maybe - it seems too happy or too joyful for people who maybe don't feel a lot of joy. And so I like to speak to both. It's like, I like to speak to you know the sad part of things as well but also offer “Hey this is what it could be,” You know? “Here's what it was for me at one point and here's where I am now.” Besides that I make all sorts of genres, alternative, rap, R&B,

spoken word, it doesn't matter. As long as they're instrumental or beats inspire me, then I hop on. Yeah.

KA: Sure. I think sometimes in the Christian life we think everything is always sunshine and roses and it's not. There's like a whole book of that in scripture called Lamentations, that's all that it's sadness.

FM: Or psalms!

KA: The Psalms, yeah. David was not in a good set in the Psalms. Jeremiah? No he was naked and suicidal. There's just so much in scripture that I think we gloss over, because we think "Oh God is love and everything's always hunky-dory," and it's just not.

FM: It's not, yep. And that's that stigma again I'm trying to remove. It's like, we Christians go through hard things too. And like, you don't have to be perfect. And I'm really good at preaching this but not so good at remembering it myself, of like: man, God loves me not because of me but because He wants to love me, you know? It's nothing that I've done. And I think there's a lot of times where Satan creeps in there and he's like, "Well you went this far. Is He still going to love you now?" And that pattern is very dangerous and destructive and I hate it. Yeah.

KA: For sure, for sure. No that's so good. What is the name of your podcast?

FM: The Epiphany show.

KA: The Epiphany show.

FM: Yes.

KA: We will link to the show notes as well as your music.

FM: Thank you.

KA: Yeah. So two final questions for you unless we continue to talk and come up with more questions, but the first one: would you be willing to pray for us?

FM: Of course! Dear God, I thank You for another day that's not promised. I thank you for Katie Lord, and just her heart and the platform that You've given her. I pray that You continue to grow her platform and reach new ears and that she would just trust in You with that Lord. I just thank You for this opportunity to be able to share the goodness of Your love in my story and not make it about me but what You've done and how good You are, God. So I pray that listeners would just be encouraged by this and that You would bless them and keep them safe Lord, and allow them to know there are people out there who struggle. And that You are able to empathize with them and that You do draw near to the brokenhearted. I pray for anyone struggling with any kind of addiction, Lord, that You would break those chains and that You would be with them Lord, and protect them. Be with Katie the rest of this day Lord and keep her safe Lord. And may she be encouraged and may she have been able to learn something from this Lord. I pray that she would just continue to do this work God. It's a good thing. And may she - may it be built on solid ground, on a nothing shaky God, and may it last. And just, do with it as You please. May we have a blessed rest of the day Lord. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

KA: Amen. Thank you so much!

FM: Yeah!

KA: I love getting to hear people pray 'cause I feel like it shows a lot about what their relationship with God is, and yours shows definite intimacy and enjoyment in being in His presence. So thank you for sharing that with us.

FM: Thank you! [Florence laughs.]

KA: So our final question, with the show the way it is, we're always looking to learn something new. So I would love to know: what is something you've learned recently?

FM: Oh... curveball! [Katie and Florence laugh.] Something new I learned... the word entelechy [Florence spells the word for clarity.] means the realization of potential.

KA: Wow!

FM: And I think it's a beautiful word, I would say my favorite word and not that I - obviously things have potential. You can have potential, but what do you do with it? But anyway, just the realization that you can do something is a pretty cool thing.

KA: That's a good word - literally and figuratively! I've never heard that word before either, that's fun.

FM: Yes! I'm sorry I couldn't think of more but there's that.

KA: Oh that's great! It's not supposed to be a deep question, it's supposed to be a fun one. [Florence laughs.] Flo, thank you so much for your time this afternoon, thank you for sharing your story with us, for trusting us with your story, and for being willing to share what God has done in and through you and what He's going to continue to do in and through you. We're excited to see that.

FM: Awesome.

KA: Thank you.

FM: Thank you!

[Theme music: upbeat electronica plays in the background as Katie speaks.]

KA: As always, big thanks for listening. Have Hope; Will Travel would not exist without the team of people helping me bring each episode to reality. If you're interested in joining the volunteer team, you see a way that your skill set could help improve this show, or if you want to talk more about what openings we've got, send me an email at Katie@KatieAxleson.com. I'd love to connect with you on Instagram as well, I'm at [@KatieAxelson](https://www.instagram.com/KatieAxelson). It's where we share real life stories and where my grandparents are getting a lot of Internet time right now. Be sure to connect with Flo at [@FlorenceMayez](https://www.instagram.com/FlorenceMayez) on Instagram or on The Epiphany podcast. His music is also available on Apple Music, Spotify and all the places. If you're looking for another encouraging story of God's redemption, check out Episode {85} Lori Ann Wood. I'll see you again in two weeks with a fresh perspective and a new individual to learn from. Until then, know

that you are valued, know that you are loved, know that your story matters, and we'll see you soon. Bye!

[Katie stops speaking and the theme music: upbeat electronica ends.]