

IF THERE IS A LOVING AND POWERFUL GOD, WHY DOES HE ALLOW ABUSE? PART ONE

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of FlyingFreeNow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 105 of the Flying Free Podcast. It's just going to be me today, and we're going to talk about why God allows injustice and oppression. I woke up this morning and was scrolling through my Facebook feed. I saw a thread of comments from some women, survivors, who were in a lot of pain. Some of these survivors had been through some of the most horrific types of abuse. In even trying to get away from their abusers, they had suffered in excruciating ways with the aftermath of getting out.

They were asking some questions about things they had been wrestling with, things I have wrestled with myself, and I think you will relate to this. I'm going to read some comments, because I read comments like this regularly in social media. I think these comments are representative of the questions that are being asked. If they aren't being asked in your conscious mind where you've actually pulled them out and looked at them, I think they are being asked by a lot of us on a subconscious level. Here are some of these comments. Tell me if you can relate:

- "Why does God continue to let so much injustice and oppression happen by the same people, even by the same 'righteous' people, without executing justice? To be silent in the face of oppression and injustice is still an action against those being oppressed. God is being complicit, and that doesn't go along with who He says He is. His inaction seems so far from the God I know. God just being with us is not enough."
- "God cannot be all powerful and all love, so I choose to believe He is all love and no longer expect Him to change anything in my life but to always be there with me through it."
- "Abuse is abuse regardless of who does it. Position never, ever justifies abuse. I'm with you on the whole 'If He's there, why the hell isn't He doing anything?' What good father would sit by his daughter while she is being assaulted and say, 'It's okay baby, I'm right here,' and not save her? It's gaslighting and coercion. Where is the God of the Bible Who rescues and miraculous works are shown? The suffering seems endless and so very preventable and so very stoppable."

Now, the Bible is chock-full of stories of God's inaction, where God just doesn't do

anything. Did you know that? If He does do something, it's kind of half-assed and it doesn't really last very long as far as the great effects. You don't really see paradise coming about in the Bible, right? Look at the very beginning, how it starts, with the story of Adam and Eve. Satan tempts Adam and Eve, and God just stands by and lets it happen. He lets the whole world go to hell-in-a-handbasket right there in that one moment. He didn't jump in and control everybody.

In another story, Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers. Then he gets betrayed by his employer's wife. Later, he gets betrayed in prison by a man who he helps by interpreting his dream. What does God do this whole time? He just stands by and lets all these unjust things happen. He doesn't jump in to control Potiphar or control his wife or control his brothers or control his dad and all the people. Why not? It's totally preventable. He can totally stop all that stuff. Why doesn't He do that?

The Israelites spent hundreds of years in slavery, and God just stood by and let that happen. He never jumped in and controlled everybody. The Jewish people were waiting, and waiting, and endlessly waiting for the promised Messiah Who they believed would finally do what all the gods are supposed to do and step in and control everybody. He was going to step in and vanquish the Roman empire and reign forever, in control over everyone in the universe. But then, what happens?

Along comes this simple carpenter from Nazareth who says He is the Messiah. He fulfills all the prophecies, but they don't recognize Him because again, this God, this Jesus, doesn't step in and control one single person. He doesn't control the Pharisees. He doesn't control Judas. He doesn't control Peter. He doesn't control the rich young ruler. He doesn't control the prostitutes or the drunkards. He doesn't control anybody. Well, He does. He controls one person. He controls Himself. He does what I believe God has always done. He maintains His personal power while teaching and modeling for others how to take their personal power and use it to change the world.

The god that we are actually looking for is the devil. We want this god who is going to control everyone and everything, and we'd like him to control things according to our manual. We only know that kind of power. We don't know any other kind of power. To us, that is what power is. That's what we've been born into, that's what we've grown up experiencing. We've been brainwashed to believe that's what power is. But God knows that is the kind of power that destroys. That kind of power doesn't set anybody free. The power of God is superior in that it changes the world one person at a time.

I want to talk about this in terms of the model that I teach in my coaching practice and in the two programs that I run for Christian women. One of the programs is called

Flying Free, and it's for Christian women who are in emotionally or spiritually abusive relationships or are trying to get out of them. My other program, which just started a few weeks ago, is called Flying Higher. (That didn't start a few weeks ago, but it opened to the public a couple weeks ago.) That is for Christian women who are divorced. In those two programs, I teach this model. You can take any circumstance in life and you can run it through this model. The model does not solve problems. What it does is reveal our brain's programming so we can see how we think, how we've been programmed since we were children, and that how we think has a direct correlation to the results we experience in our lives. It creates our results.

Here's the thing. We all think it's the things that happen outside of us that create the results in our life. This really puts us in a place of having no power, because if the people around us and the circumstances that happen to us are what create results in our life, then we are without hope. We're just at the whims and the power of everyone around us. If we're around great people, we've got great circumstances, we've got the money we need to do the things we want to do, then we're going to have all sorts of great thoughts about that. We're going to have great feelings. Then we will do great things and have great results, right?

But what about all the people who don't have great things going on around them? What about people who've been kicked out of their churches, rejected by their parents, or rejected by their children? What about the people who don't have enough money or are in debt? What about those people? What about minorities? What about women who are in abusive relationships? What about them? If their circumstances are the only thing that brings them hope, what is happening around them, do you know what they are going to have to do? They are going to have to take power over their circumstances somehow. That means they will have to control people.

That is what the enemy wants. That is the enemy's style of control. That's the god of darkness – that's his style of control. It is putting us victims in the place of needing to go that direction. People do go that direction. Victims can go that direction if they think that's how they can get their power back.

But I want to introduce you to the model and show you that there are several options, different routes, that you can go. Hopefully, by the end of this podcast episode, you'll be able to think through these things on your own and decide which model you want to adopt for your life. That's what we get to do as adults. As kids, we get programmed with certain things and we don't have a choice about what our brains are going to buy into and believe. But now that we're adults, we can look at the thoughts and beliefs that we have and we can decide if we want to keep those thoughts and beliefs or if we want to

change them, rewire them, and pick different thoughts that might serve us better and create better results for us.

I highly recommend, as I'm going through this, that you take some notes if you are able. If you're in your car or walking or doing something where you can't take notes, just listen carefully and you can always listen to the replay. We'll put the transcript on the show notes page. This is Episode 105, so you can find the show notes if you go to flyingfreenow.com/105.

The model starts with the "C" line. That's your circumstance. (I'm going to run you through five different models. For all these models, we are going to have as the "C" line, "God." We will put God on the "C" line).

The next line underneath is the "T" line, and that stands for our thought – our thought about the "C" line, our thought about that circumstance. There are five different thoughts we can have. That's why we are going through five different models. We're going to see what the results will be with each of these five thoughts. "God," the circumstance, is going to stay the same in all these models. It is not the circumstance that is going to create the result in our lives. The only thing that is going to change is the thought that we have about the circumstance.

We're going to start with the thought, "There is a God. He is loving, but He is not powerful." That's what I heard in one comment that I read earlier. Someone said, "I choose to believe that there is a God and He loves us, but He really can't do much about what's going on in the world. Therefore, all He promises is that He's going to be with us."

Underneath the thought is a feeling. Thoughts create our feelings. Feelings are vibrations in our bodies; they are emotions that happen as a direct... When we have a thought in our brain, it creates a chemical reaction in our body that causes physical vibrations. That's why when you trip up the stairs when you're going to give a speech, your body might feel shaky. You might blush. There are physiological reactions in your body, and those are your emotions. The feeling that you get when you have the thought, "There is a God. He is loving, but He is not powerful," is (for most people who think that) fear.

When you feel fear, you ask yourself, "What do I do when I feel fear?" That takes you to the next line, which is "action." Our feelings are why we do the things we do. We tend to do things that make us feel good and we tend to avoid doing things that make us feel bad. That's why, when we feel good about ourselves, we'll probably take better care of

ourselves in our actions: we're going to show up for ourselves, we're going to set healthy boundaries for ourselves. That's what we do when we're feeling good about ourselves and feeling confident.

When we're feeling fear, our actions will be quite different. Usually when we're feeling the fear response we either freeze, run away, fight, or fawn. Basically, we let other people take power away from us when we're afraid. What is the result when we do things that allow other people to take power away from us? The result is that we are powerless. We care, but we're powerless. The result is victimhood. We are a victim.

Notice that our original thought, our belief, is, "There is a God. He is loving, but He is not powerful." The result in our life will ultimately be that we are also powerless, but we are loving and caring. We are empathic. We care about other people a lot. Think about it. As abuse survivors, we really care about the people who are abusing us and we really care about other people, but we give them all the power. We are powerless. It is because at our core we are believing in a God who is not powerful and doesn't have the power to change anything. That is one of the models.

Circumstance – God

Thought – There is a God. He is loving, but He is not powerful.

Feeling – Fear

Action – Give away our power.

Result – Victimhood. We are powerless.

The next model we'll go through has the same circumstance. The circumstance is still "God," but the thought is different. The thought this time is, "There is a God. He is powerful, but He's not loving." This would be a God like the one mentioned in the comments I talked about from the Facebook thread. Some women believed there was a God and He could do something about all the bad things that are happening in the world, but He's not doing anything about it, and that actually makes Him an abuser.

In the first model, God is a victim, and then we become victims. In the second model, God is an abuser. This thought also creates the feeling of fear. We have this feeling of fear again. This thought and fear combination causes people to take the action of trying to take power away from other people. That is how we respond. In our fear, we try to take power away from other people. Some people do this. This is their response to the idea.

Think about it. In the churches I was a part of, especially the one that excommunicated me, they definitely believed in a powerful God. They believed that God was sovereign

over everything, that God controlled every minute detail of everyone's lives, our decisions, and that everything was under God's control. But they really didn't believe He was loving. They actually believed what one of the Facebook commenters said, that God really is abusive. He could totally step in and do something, but He just chooses not to. He just watches and says, "You know, honey, too bad. I'm very powerful, but I really don't care all that much about you. You're such a little dirty, rotten sinner. If you do what I tell you to do and go through all these hoops, then maybe I'll deign to look upon you if I've chosen you. But if I haven't chosen you, then you can be a Christian wanna-be, but too bad for you." That is an abusive God.

What we want to do, and we see people in churches trying to do this, is to take power away from other people. Rather than empowering other people and giving people freedom, they take that power away and tell them, "You have to obey this, you have to do this, this, this, and this. If you do all these things, then we will love you and take care of you and we can be in fellowship with you." The result with this kind of belief system is that those people are powerful, but they are unloving. This is the abuser model.

Circumstance – God

Thought – There is a God. He is powerful, but He is not loving.

Feeling – Fear

Action – Take power away from others.

Result – Abuser. We become abusive to others.

Now we have the victim model and the abuser model. Here is the third model. The circumstance is still "God." The thought is, "There is a God, but He is not powerful and He is not loving." This would be a God who would set the world in motion and then just walk away and let it go because He doesn't really care enough to do anything about it.

This also creates a feeling of fear. What I want to point out is that these first three models are all fear-based models. The Bible talks about the fact that fear is the opposite of love, fear is the antithesis of love. Perfect love is going to cast out fear, so wherever you see perfect love you will not see these three models or belief systems. You can say, "I really love everybody." You can be in that first model and think, "I am so loving, but I have no power." No! That's not perfect love. It might be a small kind of love, but it's not a perfect, all-encompassing, powerful kind of love.

Back to the third model: "There is a God. He is not powerful or loving." We've got fear. What do we do when we have this kind of fear? We do both. We try to take power away from others as well as giving up our power. I think I fell into this role several times. What I was trying to do was to manipulate my circumstances and change the people

who were hurting me. I thought if I could just get them to change then we can all be one happy family.

In that respect, I was trying to take their power away from them. I was trying to control them, not let them have their own choices to be whoever they wanted to be. They could be assholes if they wanted to. Well, I said, "No. You can't be an asshole. You have to be an amazing person and I'm going to show you how. Once you do what I tell you to do, then you'll be nice and then we can all be a happy family." Do you see this? I'm still trying to take power away from them. I was also giving up my power because I was saying that whatever they did, their behavior, was going to dictate how I felt about myself. If they looked down on me and were abusive to me, then I turned around and abused myself by saying, "Yeah, come on, Natalie. Why can't you get your life together? Why can't you be a better person for them? Why can't you make them happy? Why can't you be successful? Why do you always fail everybody around you?"

So there you have it. The result is that I was powerless and unloving. I'm using myself as an example here. I think I've had all these beliefs at different times. I hope we can all be self-aware enough and honest enough to say, "This is human nature." The result then is that you are both victim and abuser at the same time.

Circumstance – God

Thought – There is a God, but He is not powerful and He is not loving.

Feeling – Fear

Action – Take power away from others and give up our power.

Result – Victim and abuser. We are powerless and become abusive to others.

The fourth model has the same circumstance, "God." The thought in the fourth model is, "There is no God." There are many people, I've talked to a lot of them, former Christians, who have said, "I don't even believe that there is a God anymore. He doesn't exist. I'm going to erase Him from my belief system." That is totally fine. You can do that. Whether or not people believe in a God doesn't affect the circumstance at all. We must understand that what we believe is in our brain only. You can believe whatever you want to. Your circumstance, however, remains the same. That remains something outside of you.

Your belief that there is no God is in your brain, just as your belief that there is a God and He's not powerful or loving, your belief that there is a God and He's powerful but not loving, or your belief that there is a God and He's loving but not powerful – all those thoughts are stories that you've decided to believe in your head because of your programming or for whatever reason you have chosen to believe that. But the outside

circumstance remains unchanged, and it is outside of you.

The feeling, if you were to really go there... Here's the thing. Some people have said, "I believe there is no God. I have so much peace, I feel amazing, and I just love it. I've never had so much peace before in my life. There is no God." My challenge to them would be to say, "Then you really don't believe there is no God because..." We can talk on a conscious level about what we believe, and we can say... People do this all the time. They will say things all the time (we all do it because this is human nature) that we don't truly, fundamentally believe because we don't really live our lives like that.

For example, if we really believed... All the people who believe in hell and that all the people who don't pray a specific prayer are going to burn in hell forever and ever and ever, they don't really believe that. They say they believe that, but they don't really believe that because if you really, really believed that you would be in sheer terror for your neighbors, your relatives, and your loved ones every minute of every single day. So on some level you don't believe that. Your brain doesn't really buy into that. You believe it at an intellectual level, maybe a conscious level, but you don't actually believe that on a core, fundamental level.

Let's say that you actually believed that there was no God. I've talked to people who really have gone there. I myself dove into that pit just this last summer. I went into a very dark pit and I took this thought to the nth degree to where it really brings us. Where this thought brings us in our body is to despair, utter and total despair. Here is why. If there is no God, there is no love, there is no justice. So all the people who think, "I just believe in justice and love. I believe in good things. But I don't believe in God," if you really don't believe in God, then you don't believe in any of that stuff because those things don't exist. If God doesn't exist, none of those things exist.

I don't know how you want to define God. You can define him as "the great Consciousness." You can define Him as whatever you want. But how I would define God at this point is that He is the Creator of everything that we see. He is the Creator. If there is no intelligent design, then there is no meaning. What I liken it to is... Think about ants that are born. They are born. They go through their life cycle. All insects and animals go through their life cycle. They labor and then they die. They are either prey for other animals or they get stomped on by someone's foot or squished between a toddler's fingers. That's the end of them. What was their point? We can go there. That is very despairing.

But when I am tucking my little boys in bed at night (I think any mother can relate to this), there is no way that I can survive with any kind of sanity at all and believe that my

children's lives are meaningless, that they are no more than an ant; that if a meteor came and struck us dead and that was the end of our existence that their lives meant nothing, that they were nothing, that all of it was for nothing. I don't believe that.

The reason I don't believe that is because I know that love exists. I know it exists because I have love for my children. I have love for people. I have compassion. It exists, and it exists because there is a greater Intelligence that has brought that into existence.

Let's take the model with this thought down the rows. You've got the thought which is, "There is no God." You've got the feeling which is despair. What does that bring us to as far as the action in our lives? The action should be suicide, because if there is no point, then why are we here? Because there is so much suffering on this earth, why would we want to stick around for that? I don't want to stick around for that. Why would we not just do what some people do and shoot their families and shoot themselves? Do you see how this is also abusive? People who go from saying, "There is a God," to "There is no God," are now going further down the road of abuse.

Here's the result. The result isn't abuser or victim. Do you know what the result of this model is, the model that begins with the thought that "There is no God"? The result is that there is no me. If God doesn't exist, I don't exist. If there is no meaning, there is no meaning in me. That is the result of that. You can totally have that model. Everyone gets to believe whatever they want to believe. Do you know why? Because there is a God who gives you that choice. Is that not amazing?

Circumstance – God

Thought – There is no God.

Feeling – Despair

Action – Annihilation.

Result – There is no me. There is no meaning in me.

This leads us into our fifth model, which is also an option for all of us if we want it. That is the thought, "There is a God. He is loving and He's also powerful." If we have that thought and that belief, that is going to create a feeling of security and freedom. Security because we know that we are secure in God's love and His power to ultimately bring all things into oneness with Himself, and freedom because we know that we are free because His love can hold any of our choices. Rather than constraining it to God being limited by our choices, what we are actually doing is making God so much bigger when we recognize that He gives us freedom and He works within and around our choices.

I don't know if you've seen "The Queen's Gambit," but it's like "The Queen's Gambit" on steroids. Think of the gal in that movie (I can't remember her name). Think of God as being able to play an infinite number of chess games and being all the steps ahead of everybody and all the choices they make in all their chess moves. That would be Who God is. That is a God we can't really comprehend. It's definitely not a God who is loving but not powerful, powerful but not loving, not loving or powerful, or non-existent. That is a God who blows our minds.

Let's take this model down through the process. We've got this feeling of security and freedom. If we really have that feeling of security and freedom, what are we going to do? We are going to take risks. We are going to love unconditionally. We are going to be vulnerable. We are going to have our own personal power that is always intact, always available to us. We are going to live and embody that personal power. Then, out of the overflow of our own power and love, which we get from a very powerful and loving God, we're going to love and empower other people. What is the result? We are loving and powerful and we change our world. This is the power of God. This is the love of God.

Circumstance – God

Thought – There is a God. He is powerful and He is loving.

Feeling – Security and freedom.

Action – Take risks, love unconditionally, be vulnerable, empower other people.

Result – We are loving and powerful and we change our world.

When Jesus came into this world, He came as a man to show us how God embodies mankind. God wanted to show us who He actually is. He is not the devil-god who takes power over other people, who lies, cheats, steals, destroys, with power-over. He is the God who gives everyone free choice, and He is redeeming this world in that crazy, mind-blowing way. It defies all human logic because God's power is so not like man's power. God's love is so not like man's love.

If we want to think about it in terms of changing the world and all the suffering in the world, we'd have to look at it from a much bigger perspective than just where we're at with our small... We're given one life to live. During this life on earth, we can believe any of these five thoughts about God. These are our five choices. (Maybe there are other choices too. I don't know. You'll have to send me an email to let me know if there's another choice.) These are five thoughts that we have available to us, and you can decide.

What I would do if I were you, I would sit down and decide which one... The

circumstance is the same, "God." That's the circumstance. That's not going to change. But the thought in your brain? You've got power over that thought, and you can decide what result you want in your life. Do you want the first result? Do you want to be powerless but loving? Do you want to be a victim? Do you want the second result? Do you want to be powerful but unloving? Do you want to be an abuser? The third result: do you want to be powerless and unloving, interchanging between victim and abuser? The fourth result: do you want to be annihilated? Or the fifth result: do you want to be loving and powerful and change your world? Those are your options.

We can talk more another time. This is the kind of thing we dive very deep into in the Flying Higher program. We also dive into it quite a bit in the Flying Free program. This is the kind of coaching I do every week in both of those programs and in the kinds of classes I teach. If this intrigues you and you are interested, we go with the fifth model. That's the model that I am working on in my own life, that I'm trying to live out in my own life, and that I'm trying to empower other women to live out in their lives.

If you're interested in working that out in your own life and you want to join us, you can apply to join either program at any time. If you're a woman and you think you're in an emotionally or spiritually abusive relationship or are trying to get out of one, you can apply to join Flying Free at joinflyingfree.com. Go over there and you can learn about it and apply today.

If you're a divorced woman of faith and you want to take your life back, I am all about helping women do that. You can apply to join that group. It's called Flying Higher, and you can apply today by going to joinflyinghigher.com. Over on that page you can find out more about that group and apply.

That is all I have for you today. I hope this was helpful. My hope and prayer for all of us is not that our faith actually flounders and ends up flat on the ground, a useless appendage that basically leaves us completely powerless and in a place of not being able to love others (including ourselves, by the way. That's a whole other topic: taking care of yourself, which is our number one responsibility), but have a faith that deepens and grows and builds you into a person who makes tremendous progress in your own personal life and in the lives of every single person who you touch. That is available to you. Your brain might not believe it right now. I'll believe it for you. I promise if you want to jump into either of my groups that I will help you get to the place where you can believe it for yourself as well. All right, my friends. Fly free!