

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

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: So a couple of weeks ago I addressed a very common and serious problem among survivors who have been through so much injustice for so many years. Some of that injustice includes emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual, and financial abuse. It includes things like being kicked out of their churches, losing their children, losing their careers, losing their health, and more.

The question they are grappling with in their minds — and certainly I have done the same — is where in the world is God in all of this. If he is so loving, how can he just stand by and watch all this happen and do nothing about it? Why do wicked people get away with abuse while victims suffer for years into the future?

What I did two weeks ago is break down this thought five ways by using a model I teach in my coaching programs for women of faith. If you haven't had a chance to listen to that episode, I really want you to stop listening to this one and go listen to that one first. It's Episode 105.

So if you've listened to that, you're all caught up, and we are going to expand more on some of those thoughts because, as we learned a couple of weeks ago, what we believe about God will create different results in our lives. And I want every single one of you to have beautiful results. I want you to experience peace and love in your bodies. That's what you were created for. And it feels good. And it's available to us regardless of our circumstances. I know this because I've experienced it myself — and I've read about and talked to hundreds of women who have also experienced this.

This is where we get to take our power back. We get to take our inner worlds back. Maybe you've never had power and maybe you've never felt in control of your mind and your body and your life. And I want you to experience that in your lifetime because that's what you were made for.

Now if you remember, we talked about how there are five different thoughts or beliefs we get to choose from for ourselves when it comes to God.

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

2. There is a God and He is loving, but not powerful
3. There is a God but He is not loving or powerful
4. There is no God
5. There is a God and He is powerful and loving.

Now it doesn't really matter what we think as far as the circumstance of God. What is true is true regardless of what anyone thinks about it. If you're listening to this podcast, you've probably run into this a lot in your life — where people believe things with all their hearts, but they aren't actually true. Maybe your abuser believed you were having an affair – and you weren't. But nothing you could do would convince him you weren't. He believed it in his own mind, so he was having all the emotions and taking all the actions as if it were true even though it wasn't.

A couple of years ago one of my kids was doing things I didn't know about. It was happening, but I had no thoughts about it and therefore no feelings about it because I didn't know it was true. I didn't know it was real. Once I found out, I had a LOT of thoughts and feelings about it. But notice those feelings had nothing to do with reality. They only had to do with the fact that I was now THINKING or having thoughts about what was real and that was creating all the emotions and the actions and the results in my life.

So regardless of whether or not God is real, that's not the point. The point is what you choose to believe when it comes to the subject of God.

So if you decided to believe there was a God — and he was powerful but unloving, an abuser god as we talked about in Episode 105 — you would have a lot of thoughts and emotions about that — probably a lot of fear — and that fear would cause you to show up in your life in certain ways that would create negative results for you.

It wouldn't matter that perhaps there wasn't even a God to begin with. Or that there was a God who was totally loving and powerful. The point is that WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS CREATING YOUR RESULTS not what is actually true.

The men who flew planes into the World Trade Center totally believed that's what god wanted them to do. They believed in the abuser god and the result is that they, themselves, became abusers. It didn't matter that God may not be an abuser god at all.

My point is that we all have to believe something when it comes to the circumstance of God. Everyone has faith. Everyone. Even the atheist is believing in something. They are believing there isn't a god. That is faith as well. Faith is just what we choose to believe

about God.

Now in Episode 105, I talked about how what we believe has a direct connection with how we feel and how we show up in this world – and the results that creates for us and the people around us. And you'll have to go back and listen to learn more about that.

But today I want to dive more into the nitty gritty of how, if we believe that God is loving and powerful, how do we reconcile the fact that there is so much abuse in this world? Not only abuse, but horrible accidents. Suffering. Racism. Starvation. Earthquakes and tsunamis and pandemics that kill thousands of people.

If God is powerful, He could stop it all and He doesn't. And if He is loving, He WOULD stop it all. Right? So He can't be both — that's how the argument goes.

We think if he doesn't do anything, then he is complicit to the abuse. He's actually evil.

But let's think about that for a minute because there are more ways to think about this than that.

Take the story of Adam and Eve. God stood by while the devil abused them by lying to them about God and manipulating them to do what God told them not to do.

And God didn't stop them. Why not?

If God had stopped them – what would that have meant? I mean – we stop our toddlers from playing with guns or eating rat poison because we are loving parents. Why would God let his toddlers open Pandora's box if he was a loving parent? And we come to the conclusion that he must not be a loving parent.

But do we stop our adult children from making bad choices? CAN we stop them? Yes, maybe. If we lock them up and take away their freedom. Yes, if we get to decide what is best for them and control their lives.

Do you want your parents to control your life now that you're an adult? Or do want freedom to make your own mistakes and learn and grow from those mistakes?

Some parents DO do this. But we don't call them loving, do we? We call them abusive. And I actually love believing that God isn't like that. That He gives humans agency and freedom to choose to do what is right or what is wrong. And through that agency and exploration, humanity gets to grow and learn and evolve.

Some people look around and think the world is going to hell in a hand basket. But others look around and think the world is actually getting better. It's safer and better today than it was 100 years ago to be a woman. Do we have a long way to go? You better believe it. But it's getting better because we are learning.

See, if God is loving and not abusive, he will give power and personal agency, not take it away. But in doing that, there will be people who abuse that personal agency and use it for evil. And others will use it for good.

We can't control abusers in this world. But we have power to control ourselves. Our own minds. Our own beliefs. Our own actions. Our own lives.

And even if someone were to take us and put us in a hole by ourselves like Alexander Solzhenitsyn, or put us in a concentration camp with other women like Corrie Ten Boom, or put us in prison like Joseph, or kick us out of the temple like Jesus, they can't steal our spirit. We still get to decide how we want to show up in those circumstances. And if you look at those examples, you will see the power of God in the human spirit. But that power cannot reveal itself through us unless we believe it is there and take hold of it.

And that requires faith in that kind of God. It will require us — as it required Alexander, Corrie, Joseph, and Jesus — to believe we are part of something far greater than just our small life on earth.

It will require us to believe we are not like ants who can be crushed and forgotten (and who is to say that that is all ants are either by the way?) but that God is so much more imaginative and powerful and loving than that.

But you see we will need to think and believe bigger than what we are used to — than what our churches and parents taught us to think and believe.

We will need to start thinking like the God we believe in. All of those people, Alexander, Corrie, Joseph, and Jesus changed the world through their experiences and their faith in the midst of those barbaric conditions. Did they like to suffer? No. Corrie got angry. Jesus begged God to do things differently in the garden of Gethsemane. Nobody likes to suffer, nor is suffering, in and of itself, a good thing. It's not God's plan for us. God's plan for humankind will come about IN SPITE OF suffering. Not because of it. Because evil doesn't get to win. Fear doesn't get to win. Abuse doesn't get to win.

Love gets to win.

But the question for you sitting in your particular individual circumstances is what is winning in your life? What are your results?

Are you full of fear? Ask yourself why. This past summer I was riddled with fear, and I was miserable. A lot of bad things happened. I found out things about some of my kids I didn't know about. A lot of past injustice caught up to me, and I was face to face with it again. And I gotta tell you, I wasn't sure there was a God at that point. What if everything I believed was a hoax? I started to think that maybe God was either abusive — like all the religious abusers in my past — or maybe He didn't exist at all. And despair began to set in. Because I love my kids, and I want their lives to mean something to someone Greater than me. I want them to be safe and loved and kept and ultimately set free.

I did a lot of crying and grieving, and it was good. It was painful but I let it come, and I didn't fight it or run away from it. I decided to lean into the pain, and it taught me some profound things.

It taught me that the human experience is sometimes amazing and miraculous and full of joy. And the human experience is sometimes tragic and painful and full of sorrow. And I had to decide if I was going to be all in on this mysterious life my Creator gave to me or if I was going to bail out and give up.

I had to decide who I was and how I wanted to show up in my life regardless of whether it was going well or not.

I had to decide if I wanted to believe in an abuser God, no God, or an amazing God who has a plan for the human race that is ultimately redemptive and healing.

I decided that who I want to be is someone who is free to make mistakes, to speak up, to fall down, to fail, to succeed, to make my own choices, to hurt, to laugh, to feel terrible, to be wrong, to be right and to just plain old be FULLY HUMAN ME.

And in order for me to show up as fully myself with all my good and bad, I would need to believe in a Creator who was all about that as well. A Creator who loved me exactly as I am and who is involved in my life NOT to rescue me or control my life or make everything go terrific — that's abusive — but a God who allows me to live a fully human life with all of the human experience available to me on this planet, and He was going to support me and evolve me and transform ME here on earth and even in the afterlife, whatever that looks like.

I choose to believe I am safe because when I feel safe, I show up from a place of love and freedom. Even in hard things. I don't have to be safe in my family of origin to feel safe in my soul. Someone can disparage me or tell lies about me and I can still totally feel safe because I believe I am safe inside myself. What they think is irrelevant to my beliefs. They get to have their beliefs, and they have my permission to be wrong about me. I get to have my beliefs, and I love my beliefs and my reasons for them.

Now, before we end this episode, I want to take everything I've shared with you and apply it to the original comments I read on Facebook and tell you how I'd respond:

"Why does he 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."

To this I would say that God gives human beings agency. Sometimes humans use their agency to do horrible things to other people. But if God were to control us, nobody would have freedom, and that, in itself, is the definition of abuse. We want freedom to make our own choices, no? Then we need to give that same freedom to others.

There is a story in this comment that God is silent and complicit. But that's just a thought in our minds. Do we want to believe that? Does that help us create amazing results in our lives? And it is even true?

What if God is not silent, but is quite loudly and powerfully moving humanity in a direction of love through individuals and their daily choices to show up for their neighbors? I see God moving in incredible ways through social justice movements on earth — and yes, it's messy because He is moving through messy humans. But He is moving. He is loud. He is never complicit to abuse but uses all things, including abuse, to change the world.

If I hadn't experienced all the things I went through, I would not be working with hundreds of Christian women. I would not be writing books or doing this podcast. I would be sitting on my porch drinking lemonade and holding grandbabies. Nothing wrong with that, and I hope to do that too but what I'm saying is that abuse is a horrible thing and God speaks loudly through it.

"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.”

There is a story in this statement that God can't change anything in our lives. But is that true? Where did that thought come from? I see women's lives changing every single day. How does God change lives? He uses people. WE are his hands and feet in this world. We start by changing our own lives and that starts with our thoughts and beliefs. Then as our own lives change, they inspire change in the lives of others.

I thought I'd be stuck in my former marriage forever. But I eventually got out. Just because change is slow and sometimes imperceptible doesn't mean it's not happening. I've seen women in egregious situations get out eventually. And even if you are still in your abusive relationship, you are changing. Every day you do your personal work, your life is changing. Because our lives are not about where we live, who we are married to, or what is happening outside of us. Our lives are in our minds and bodies and hearts. THIS is where life is truly lived. And your ability to change is within your grasp every moment of every day.

“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's being assaulted and say, “It's ok baby, I'm right here,” AND NOT SAVE HER??! It's gaslighting and coercion.”

I covered this earlier, but again — there is a story here that God is watching all the terrors on this earth and is powerless and loveless in the face of that. But we don't know if that's true unless we know all there is to know about God, the future, the Multiverse, and so on. And as far as I know, there is no human who has answers to all of that.

So this is just a story. Does this story serve us? What if the real story is that God is totally saving all of us and we aren't there yet? What if He has decided to save us by NOT being a control freak god who controls all the people? What if he is saving us in a different way? Does this story serve us in a better way in our lives? Or do we like the abuser god story so much we can't let go of it?

“Where is the God of the Bible who rescues and miraculous works are shown?”

This statement believes a story that God should control everyone and everything and do lots of miracles. But Jesus did lots of miracles and, for the most part, people didn't believe them anyway. So maybe there's a better story to our redemption than that?

“The suffering seems endless. And so very preventable, and so very stop-able.”

It is if we get someone in there to control everyone. We would need our God to be an abusive dictator. But what if God is better than that? More amazing than that? More creative than that?

What if God wants to use us and our experiences with pain and abuse to redeem the world? What if it starts with faith? And what if it starts with us?

What if that’s the real story? I’m not saying dogmatically that it is, because we don’t know. I mean, there is a lot of scholarship out there to prove things one way or the other. But what I want to leave you with is that you get to decide. And I encourage you to choose a faith that brings more love and light and freedom and hope into your own life and the lives of those around you.

That’s all I have for you.

Until next time, fly free.