

HOW PRETENDING AND FEAR KEEP YOU STUCK IN ABUSE CYCLES (AND WHAT SETS YOU FREE)

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 125 of the Flying Free Podcast. If you're new to this podcast, I want to warmly welcome you. Hit the subscribe button so you don't miss our weekly episode. We put these out every Tuesday, and I will continue to do that every week without fail (unless I croak, and in that case, they will stop coming.) Until then, I will keep providing this resource for you. For those of you who've been listening for a long time, welcome back. You know how much I love and appreciate you and how much I enjoy reading your reviews and getting your questions. You are the lifeblood of this ministry, and just by listening, you are changing the world. Did you know that? You might think that if you're a woman stuck in an abusive relationship and can barely help yourself, let alone anyone else, that it's impossible. But that's just the way we see things in the natural world. That's how the natural world makes sense to us. Human beings have collectively agreed that what we can see, prove, taste, touch, and experience are the real substance of things. That's one reason spiritual and emotional abuse is so tricky. You can't see, prove, taste, touch, or experience those types of abuse if you aren't living in an abusive relationship. Even those who are living in abuse cannot see it most of the time due to how they've been programmed to believe it is actually normal or even godly.

I took a break from reading the Bible for a while, and I know I've said this before, but I want you to know that the Bible was everything to me. I started reading through the whole thing every single year—read through the whole Bible in a year—when I was a kid. I never stopped until a few years ago. I grew up in the church. I went to a Bible college where everyone had to minor in Bible. I taught in a Christian school; I taught a Bible class there as well as English. I was in full-time ministry at a university campus for several years. I went to and led Bible studies most of my adult life. I went to church and Sunday school my entire life every Sunday. I've gone through numerous Bibles and left them dog-eared, highlighted, and written in. I have loved the Bible. There are very few people on this Earth that have loved the Bible more than me. It has been life-giving to me, except for the certain parts of it that were used to control and manipulate me. I read the Bible through that lens most of my life. I was all in on that viewpoint. But the older I got, the more clearly I could see the fruit of that way of reading the Bible, that lens, and it was not pretty. It was destructive. The more I saw, the more I realized just

how bent on evil it was—the evil of powering over other human lives, the evil of controlling, deceiving, harming, and neutralizing God’s children. I was excited to see that the new season of *The Handmaid’s Tale* was out. *The Handmaid’s Tale* is kind of an exaggerated version of what is going on, but there are so many parallels to that story. I felt deep inside that it wasn’t the heart of our Creator. There was either something wrong with parts of the Bible, or maybe there was something wrong with the humans who were interpreting it and making it mean all those horrible things about women. After I suffered some egregious abuse at the hands of a prominent Christian church, I had to stop reading the Bible for a while and just tune into the Holy Spirit living inside of me. I had to learn how to trust Him that He loved me even if I didn’t go to church, even if I didn’t read the Bible, even if I didn’t pray the way I used to pray, which was pacing my kitchen floor and speaking out loud over all my children, my marriage, my friends, my family, and my home. Oh, yes! I prayed for decades like that with a strong and mighty faith. I thought that if I prayed that way, I would see great and mighty things. My children were all going to be missionaries, pastors, and world changers. But you know what I’ve learned in my time away from the Bible? (Not my time away from God because nothing can separate us from the love of God. Even if you feel like you took a break from God, God doesn’t take a break from you.) I learned God doesn’t change the world that way. He doesn’t change the world through tsunamis, earthquakes, and hurricanes. He changes the world through caterpillars and butterflies, through tadpoles and frogs, through stones skipping over the surface of waters, through ideas and touches and smiles, and through love. You can’t always see love.

I’m back to reading the Bible again, but I am reading it through a brand-new lens. It’s like a bunch of scales fell off my eyes. I feel like I’m seeing it more clearly. I’m seeing things I didn’t see before. I’m seeing the truth of what love actually is, the truth of what Jesus actually came to show us, and the unseen ways that God changes the world through us. Can I give you some examples? The gospels are full of this kind of teaching. Who did the people believe were the world changers back in the time of Jesus? They believed the Romans were because they had all the power. The religious leaders were the ones who knew the best. So you’d think that God would work through those guys. They were amaze-balls after all. But it turns out God wasn’t really impressed with any of those guys, and He would not change the world through them. He instead walked around and spoke quiet words and gave quiet touches that healed hearts and bodies. Many people demanded that He prove Himself, and He did. They didn’t believe Him anyway, and that was okay with Him because His motive wasn’t to make people believe Him or change. His motive was pure love—no catches—just love. Always love. You don’t see Him excommunicating anybody. You don’t see Him giving lectures or telling people how to dress, what to drink, or where to go to church. You just see Him loving, smiling, listening,

truth-telling (the kind of truth that gives life and not death), and sharing little bits of His wisdom. He didn't try to fit in. He didn't try to do anything. He just was. He lived in the essence of who He was. What if that's what His followers are called to do? Simply that.

Do you know what Jesus was for? He was for love. He was for people. He was for the disenfranchised and forgotten. He was for the small things, the hidden things. The truth was in the mystery and the parables always. But do you know what He spoke out against? I see Him speaking out against two things in the gospels. First, He spoke out a lot against pretense—basically, pretending that things are real that aren't. Second, He spoke out against fear—basically being afraid to live. If you read the gospels, He was always telling people to stop pretending, and He's always telling people to stop being afraid. Pretense prevents us from walking in the truth, and fear prevents us from living a life of love. The opposite of pretense is truth, and the opposite of fear is love. Truth and love—that is what Jesus came to give us. Both these things together set us free from bondage to shame. Shame neutralizes the human race. Shame is a destroyer. Where you feel and experience shame, you are in an environment of abuse or you are believing the lies that abuse taught you, even if you got out. People pretend to protect themselves from the feeling of shame. That's why they pretend. People are afraid because they don't know what the truth is. They don't know they are perfectly loved and accepted just as they are. They don't know that there is no condemnation or criticism, that there is just pure love left. People don't experience that on earth with other people, so they think it doesn't exist in the universe. But that is the good news that Jesus came to bring—that the Creator of the universe isn't like people.

Let's talk a bit more about those two things—pretense and fear—and their opposites, truth and love. First, pretense. In Mark 7, you see the pharisees catching the disciples breaking a rule. Oh my goodness! It was a minor infraction, but they broke a Sabbath law. Jesus tells them they aren't honoring God at all with their little Sabbath law. He also tells them they are pretending to be like God by making up a law that God never gave them by clinging to their own silly law which they felt made them look better than everyone else. Then Jesus quotes Isaiah and says, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commands of men." Have you believed doctrines that were simply commands of men? If so, what were the results in your life? In the lives of others around you? If you've ever tried to point out how the doctrines of men have led to the destruction of human lives, have you been shut down or kicked out? I believe that is darkness. That's satanic—anti-Christ. It's the opposite of light and love.

Later in Chapter 8, the pharisees try to pick an argument with Jesus and they demand evidence. Do you know what Jesus does? (Has a narc tried to pick an argument with you and demand evidence? "Give me proof that you have been abused.") Jesus does this; He sighs deeply and walks away. He doesn't engage with their foolishness. He didn't come to help them understand. They already believed they were whole, complete, and amazing gifts to humanity. They were the spiritual leaders. They were the ones with God on their side. Jesus came to help the ones who knew the truth—the truth that they were humans who made mistakes and got messy, humans who needed their Creator, humans who wanted their Creator. That was okay. That was good and beautiful. Late, in verse 38, Jesus calls the religious establishment an "adulterous and sinful generation." He tells them they had gained their pretend world in their own minds, but they had lost true life in knowing, living, and breathing in the truth of their Creator.

This idea of pretense and pretending drives abusers. Abusers pretend that their reality is reality. If they believe in their own minds that you are a little woman with nothing more to offer than your body and your babysitting skills and some cooked meals at the church potluck, then that's how they are going to treat you. They pretend those things are good for you and that you should like them if you are a godly woman. But they also pretend that sharing their own bodies in love, teaching the next generation alongside of you, and creating delicious meals for the hungry is beneath them, as if it is not a godly use of their time. Do you know what the reality is? All those things are good for the whole human race to participate in. It doesn't matter what your gender or color is. If they pretend they are the big man whose big job is to preach, lead big corporations, and run big governments, then they will believe that they are better than everyone else and will treat others with contempt and judgment. They will control other people. They will pretend that being the big guy is good for the world and the world should thank them. They are delusional. The reality is all those things are good things for the whole human race to participate in. It's good for everyone to preach, to lead companies, and to run governments to our varying degrees of gifting and desire. Nobody is bigger or better than anyone else. There is no judgment, hierarchy, or power over. In the kingdom of man there is, but not in the kingdom of God. That is the message Jesus came to bring. When churches buy into all that stuff, whose kingdom are they buying into? Are they buying into God's unseen hidden kingdom of wisdom and love or a proven, evident human kingdom that you can see, touch, and experience in all its ugly, competitive force and power? The churches I've seen and experienced are no different from the world's corrupt governments, which is so sad because they are supposedly built on the teachings of Jesus Christ, who taught the exact opposite. It is interesting how everything deteriorates to the lowest common denominator. In Mark 10, you can see examples of people who wanted to talk about what they did, their actions. Jesus had to

keep bringing them back to what they could see, what they believed in their minds and hearts. That is what would change their lives. That is what would change the world.

Let me bring this back to what I teach in my programs. I teach that if you want to change your life, you will need to change how you think. You will need to change your brain's programming. This is NOT an overnight transformation. This is hard, emotional work, and this is the work of God in your life. This is transforming your mind—renewing your mind—I should say. This is the work that will change the world, the work of what you think in the universe of your brain, because what you think in your brain will create all the emotions in your body. Those emotions are going to drive everything that you do, and what you do will create your results. What you believe is what you see with your mind's eye. We're going to bring this idea of our thoughts and our beliefs and join it to this idea of seeing—vision, understanding, wisdom. If you believe what your abusers have drilled into your head, then you are believing in their pretend universe. You are buying into their pretend universe. Your universe is hooked into theirs and nothing good will come of that for you or anyone around you. Your brain is always going to be on the lookout for evidence of what it already believes is true. You've been programmed to believe in the laws of the pharisees, to believe that those tangible, felt, evidential laws that can be measured and written on tablets are how we will change the world. That is a lie from the devil. Jesus came to show a different way. Love trumps the law always. Love casts out fear. Love is rooted in truth, and truth sets people free. Love cares about human lives always and period.

In Mark 11: 17–18, Jesus calls out the chief priests and the scribes. These were the pastors and writers of the day. What was their response? Narcissists always respond the same way. They want to destroy whatever threatens to tear down their pretend universe. Sure enough, Mark says they started looking for a way to destroy Him. Later, they pretended Jesus was the abuser. Does this sound familiar? They came to arrest Him with clubs and swords, as if He would rise up against them. (Typical narcs.) They lied about Him in court. They made fun of Him. They stirred up the people against Him. They treated Him as if He were the law breaker. Who were the lawbreakers in that story in reality? The Bible says that Jesus felt forsaken, even by God. If Jesus can feel forsaken by God, then don't be alarmed if you do when the narcs come after you in all the same ways. They came after me that way and utterly undid me. At the same time, I felt I was in alignment with my Savior in those moments. Those were precious, bittersweet times.

So if pretense is what abusers do, then what do the children of God do? They throw off pretending and they live in reality. Jesus didn't walk around pretending everything was hunky dory. He wept. He felt things. He drank all of life's sorrows down to the bottom of

that cup. He lived and breathed reality. But it wasn't just the reality of life on planet Earth, it was also the unseen reality that kept Him going. It was the knowledge, awareness, and understanding of an energy that existed outside created time and space—an unseen kingdom of love. A kingdom that was going to grow with tiny seeds of mustard and tiny grains of yeast. A kingdom that would exist and develop in the gazillions of synapses of brain cells in the billions upon billions of created beings on this planet. The only ones who would see it were the ones who could set aside the seen and embrace the unseen by faith. The people who understood that the unseen was actually reality, and that all was not lost. In fact, the opposite. All was being found.

Once you know that and live into that, you have solved the fear problem because what are we all afraid of? Humanity is afraid of death. That is the current that flows under everything we do and think. We are going to die one day. We don't know what happens when that happens. That deep-seated fear is the leverage of the devil who wields it in the hands of religious and government leaders alike. Even if we don't think we are going to die, we are afraid someone else will. Or we're afraid something we do will lead to emotional death or death of a dream or death of our health or death of our purpose or meaning in this life. We are forever running from death in terror. But love solves that problem because love conquers death. Love doesn't allow death to have the final say. If you're going to have faith in anything (and everyone has faith in something) why not have faith in something that allows you to live your life, however long or short, healthy or unhealthy, in such a way that you are living it to the fullest with abandon, without fear, with hope and love and joy—because why not?! What do you have to lose? People who live like this change the world. that's how Jesus changed the world, not by coming in and overthrowing governments and religious institutions but by living a life of total, pure, 100% love because He could see what was unseen. He calls us to do the same.

You may live in an abusive marriage, and there may be nothing you can do about that right now in your life. But you can be set free from your abusive religion. I'm telling you, it's a game changer. Join me inside the Flying Free Sisterhood where I will teach you how to live a life of truth and love because changing your world starts with a universe between your ears. Let's start there. Go to joinflyingfree.com for more information. That's all I have for you today. Until next time, fly free!