

## WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN YOUR CHRISTIAN HUSBAND BULLIES YOU PART TWO

*Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of [Flyingfreenow.com](http://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 134 of the Flying Free Podcast. Before we get started on today's episode, I want to let you know we offer free online small groups every four months that go through my book, *Is It Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage*, along with the companion workbook. Do you know who hears about how to register and join these groups? Everyone on my mailing list. It pays to be on my mailing list. I never spam. Women on my list get one email per week letting them know what that week's podcast episode is, and when we open up the free small groups, those are the ones who get invited. If I get a hankering to write an article, those folks hear about it first.

At some point down the road, when I am making some badass documentaries exposing abuse in religious environments (which is a huge dream of mine that I hope to start make a reality soon), those women will be the first to find out. Those are my peeps, my community, my family. If you're not part of it yet, why not? Go to [flyingfreenow.com](http://flyingfreenow.com) and hop on the mailing list. It's too late to join small groups this time around, but you'll be the first to hear about winter groups in February. Of course, you can always apply to get into the Flying Free program by going to [joinflyingfree.com](http://joinflyingfree.com).

If you are divorced and need a tribe, check out Flying Higher at [joinflyinghigher.com](http://joinflyinghigher.com). That group is small but mighty. They are kicking ass and taking names. Excuse my French, but it captures the energy of this group. We would love to have you join us if you are divorced and are ready to rebuild your life.

A couple of reviews. Thank you, thank you, thank you for everyone who has been doing this—leaving reviews. Momentum is starting to build around—I shouldn't say starting but continuing to build—around this podcast. We love to see it because it means more women are getting free. If we can train and free women, we can train and free the next generation. So I think this work is pretty critical.

One woman wrote in: "Fantastic support for emotional and spiritual abuse sur\*thrive\*ors." I love that!

Another woman writes: "[It's] a lifeline in confusing and painful times. I can't remember who recommended Natalie to me, but I remember sitting in the bathtub the first time I took in an episode." (You never know where you might be.) "I hadn't filed for divorce yet

but was living in this horrific limbo between recognizing and leaving abuse with all of the physical/emotional/spiritual repercussions for my kids and I, and experiencing Christian leaders perpetuate and condone abuse in my home for the sake of an 'image' of an intact marriage. I couldn't find anyone in our Christian leadership circles to prioritize our safety over 'the marriage' and it was terrifying. Then came Natalie. And she helped me make sense of the devastating experience I was living. She shed so much biblical light and truth on my situation. She literally laid out my STORY without ever speaking with me about my situation. She provides a community of women to work toward health and healing together. It's been a lifeline. It's been a safe place. It's been an anchor in the stormiest sea I've ever been in. I LOVE LOVE LOVE that God's Word is the center of helping women understand confusing marriages and experience permission to get safe. No matter what she does, it's impactful. I started here, joined her community, and am now working through her book in a book club. She's a source of light and hope for everyone in my situation."

Thank you so much for leaving that. It's so encouraging. I think I've said here on the podcast that I remember several years ago a church elder looked at me across a circular table, leaned in toward me and said, "You don't know God." So when I read reviews like this, it is really encouraging because in that moment it was very traumatizing for me, but it's encouraging to know that God is using this work in the lives of so many people. If you like this podcast, subscribe, leave a rating and review, and thank you so much for helping us out.

Last week, in Part One of What You Can Do When Your Christian Husband Bullies You (and I use the word Christian loosely here), we talked about how there is sometimes confusion over what is abusive behavior and what isn't. Abuse targets will often react to the abuse in ways that may look similar to the abuser on the outside, but that's because she is trying to take back some personal control and autonomy. She thinks she can't. She typically feels triggered and panicked because she's been programmed to buy into her husband's universe—his movie of how life is supposed to be and how she is supposed to be. She has her own movie of how he is supposed to be as well. She keeps hoping beyond hope that if she just plays her cards right, he will be the man she thought she married. It never works that way, though. Whoever you married is showing up exactly as he is. He's been trying to show you who he is for years, maybe. For some of you, it has been decades. But our brains are amazing, and they don't let go of their programming without some focused effort. This is what I train the women in my programs to do so they can eventually get free in their brain's programming, and then their lives will follow.

Last week, I gave the first five ways that Christian bullies show up in their relationships with their wives and some new ways that those wives can respond from a place of personal power and autonomy. This week I'm going to finish by giving you five more. So we did one through five last week, and this week we are going to start with number six.

6. Abusers hate the truth. The truth sets people free, and an abuser is himself trapped in a cage of his own making. His goal is to keep his targets and everyone around him in the dark so they will be trapped along with him. Abusers lie a lot. They lie to cover up their bad behavior. They omit information so their target can't make good decisions because she doesn't have all the pieces she needs to do so. They lie about money, time, who they are, where they are, what they do, how they got there. They lie about you—who you are, what you're thinking, what you are like, and so forth. They are big pretenders, and they suck their target into their pretend world where the target gets to be a Lego character. Woohoo!

So what can the abuse target do? She can be a truth teller. If she is surrounded by liars in her family of origin or her church, then she's going to have to stand alone. She'll have to break out of the bubble of lies and learn how to be like Jesus, who told the truth even if it caused a lot of folks to gnash their teeth at Him. Jesus said He was God. Do you remember that? Then the people wanted to throw Him off a cliff because they were filled with so much rage. Truth tellers must be strong and brave and do hard things even while their legs are shaking. When you tell the truth, it shatters cages and sets people free, starting with yourself. But yes, it also puts you at odds with liars. The Bible talks a lot about how the enemy poses as an angel of light. When you try to expose that fake light, you're going to get burned by others who have already been pulled in by that fake light.

Do you know how to tell the difference between real light and fake light? Real light from Jesus always loves and never judges, condemns, hates, kicks out, or vilifies. Real light offers freedom and hope. It allows everyone to make their own choices and take their own personal responsibility. It lets people be on their own journey and build their own emotional and spiritual muscles in their own time.

If, when you tell the truth, people get angry and say, "I will not be your friend anymore," you know they are not representing Jesus. You can accept their decision and grieve your loss of that friendship but understand that kind of pain is actually clean pain, and you will survive it. Demanding that they understand you, believe you, defend you, or love you will only cause you dirty pain. It's hard to get rid of dirty pain. Helping women clean up their dirty pain and allow the clean pain is one of the important things we do in Flying

Free.

I can hear what some of you are thinking. You are thinking, "If real light loves, then aren't I part of the problem when I take a stand and say, 'No' to my husband? He is devastated when I threaten to leave him. I want to love him and be a good Christian woman. Aren't I being just as judgmental when I make a boundary for myself?" I think that depends on the energy you create that boundary from. If your boundary is more like manipulation, it might sound like this. "You better change and be the amazing husband I need or else I'm going to leave you." That is just power and control of a different kind because your husband gets to be whoever he wants to be. He's an adult. If he wants to be a bully, he can. It's his choice. Love lets him have his choice.

Guess what? Love also lets you have yours. Do you love yourself? Do you have your own back? When you set a boundary from a place of love and freedom, that might sound more like: "Husband, I accept you just the way you are. You've shown me time and again that you lie. That's what you do. You are a chronic liar and I've decided to accept that. You're an adult. You get to do you. I love you even though you are a liar, just like Jesus loves you even though you are a liar. But I also love me. I've decided that for me, I will not live with lies or liars. That's who I am. So, out of love and acceptance for both you and me, I'm leaving you. I wish you the best, but we are not a want match. I want a man who walks in truth and integrity. You're not that guy. I love you, and goodbye." Do you see the difference?

7. Abusers are highly reactive and have the same predictable reactions over and over. They also tend to be serious. If they are a jokester type, the type of jokes they typically enjoy are ones that are malicious. That's not funny at all. So again, serious. The emotional climate of your abuser depends on things that happen outside of him. He's not able to regulate his emotions on his own. He might come home from work highly triggered by anyone who doesn't do what he wants them to do. He'll be in a good or bad mood depending on what you are doing or not doing, saying or not saying. This is why he needs to control you because he is depending on you to regulate his emotions. He'll do the same things and say the same things over and over again. You'll be able to predict what he will say or do in any situation because his repertoire of responses is so limited. He cannot think creatively or problem solve on his own. He's like a parasite that must get all its needs met through outside sources, particularly his abuse target. He isn't playful because playfulness requires a person to be self-aware and have the ability to accept oneself warts and all—to be able to poke fun at himself. The narcissist abuser cannot do this.

What can you do about that? While he cannot regulate his emotions without your cooperation, you can learn to regulate yours without needing his approval or cooperation. You can learn to be self-differentiated so that whatever he does or says is just an objective fact, and you don't make it mean anything about you personally. You recognize that his pathology and behavior only give you information about who he is and not about who you are. When he says, "You've put me in a rotten mood because you haven't given me the kind of sex I like in three days," instead of thinking, "I'm a bad wife who's letting my poor husband down," and feeling guilty and catering to his whims, you can give him back his own responsibility to manage his moods as an adult and think, "Look at my husband. He's stuck in emotional childhood again. I sure hope he'll be able to find some help for himself." Then you can walk away feeling peaceful. You can have a nice evening doing whatever you were planning to do because you've made a boundary for yourself that you don't have to have sex with someone who whines and manipulates you with guilt. You let him own what is his, and you own what is yours. You don't have to feel guilty about that. (Again, I can help you with this in Flying Free. This is the kind of coaching I do with women every single week.)

8. Abusers interfere with your other relationships. They like to plant seeds of doubt and anxiety in your mind and in the minds of those around you regarding your identity or their identity. They live in their own pretend world, and their perception is totally skewed. But if they have you wired into their universe, you will buy into their skewed perception, which will only add to your confusion, pain, and anxiety. Abusers are amazing triangulators. They love to pit one person against another. They love to switch sides and get everyone all worked up. Entire families can split because of these kinds of tactics. If you've ever been the victim of triangulation or a well-executed smear campaign, this is the dynamic I am talking about.

What can you do? It takes three sides to make a triangle, and you can remove a side—yours. Refuse to talk about anyone else with your abuser. Refuse to talk about yourself with him. Your brain is going to say, "But he's my husband, and I should have an intimate relationship with him and share all my deep dark feelings and thoughts." Well, been there, done that, and have the certificate on my wall. I can tell you that will come back to bite you in the butt a million times over. I'm guessing you already know what I'm talking about. You'll need to do some serious rewiring of your brain if you want to get out of that triangle. Once you are out, your abuser will still be able to campaign against you with others who might be jealous of you, mad at you, or don't like that you are becoming an adult and controlling your own life now. But that's okay. Let them. When you take your side of the triangle out, you will leave all the drama behind you. It feels so good! Now you have energy to rebuild your amazing adult life.

9. Abusers align themselves with others who think and believe as they do. They have a one-track brain and aren't usually open to learning anything new, so they must only be with those who agree with them. They have limited and narrow relationships with just a few others, and those relationships aren't very deep. They can only revolve around a few selected subjects. Their conversations tend to be transactional and shallow. When they do express an opinion, they expect that everyone will agree with them; they expect everyone to agree with them, and they will go into attack mode if someone doesn't agree with them. (We see this on Facebook all the time.)

This is why you will find a lot of abusers in religious environments, which also tend to be rigid, black-and-white, in-and-out, legalistic, and narrow in their focus and perspective. Environments like that will attract people like that, and here's why.

I just saw this commercial on Hulu for a Christian dating app. This pretty, young, clean-looking Christian girl was talking about what she was looking for in a nice Christian guy. My immediate reaction was that if I was a narcissistic abuser and saw this commercial, I would totally download that app knowing that all I had to do was get on there and act like a nice Christian boy to have my pick of ripe, easily manipulatable, young women who are already primed to meet my needs, cater to my emotional whims, and even believe it is their Christian duty to do so. I'd hardly have to do any grooming at all. Gross!

What can a woman who is married to someone like this do? She can't make him learn anything new, talk to others, or get a new perspective. But she can do that. She can develop her own relationships outside of her marriage and religious environment and learn how to relate to others who are not like her. She can read books written by authors from all over the world to understand other cultures and the experiences of other people. There's a big, wide world out there brought to our own living rooms via computers, TV, and smartphones. She can dive in and explore that world and gain a larger perspective on life in general. This will introduce her brain to new ideas and new ways of thinking and feeling that will eventually transform her life. She needs to know that just because her husband is stuck in ruts of his own making, she is free to create movement in her brain and in her life.

10. When you get an infection and take an antibiotic, the doctor says to take the whole prescribed dose until it is gone. He or she will warn you that if you don't do that, the bacterial infection might not be totally killed off. What happens if that bacterial infection is not destroyed completely? It comes back worse than ever. It's the same with an abuser. If you set well-defined boundaries of protection around yourself and then don't



stick to them, your abuser will come back stronger than ever to suck you in and continue to abuse you because now he knows you've tried to arm yourself once, and now he'll be more alert to anything you do that may be like an immune response in your body. He will make sure he keeps you sick, so you aren't strong enough to reestablish your boundaries. This is like malignant cancer cells that will band together to form a tumor if the body's immune system is compromised. So will his power over you increase as you lower your own immune response or boundaries to his pathology.

What can the abuse target do? She needs to turn her focus from him to herself and her own growth. She needs to practice and hone her own skills and take personal responsibility for herself rather than for him. She needs to practice regulating her own emotions in the face of his emotional dysregulation. The only way she can do that is by letting go of what is not hers to control (namely his emotions, life, and viewpoint) and take back what is hers to control, which is her life, emotions, and viewpoint.

To sum all this up, both Episode 133, which was the last one, and this one, episode 134, I want you to understand that abusive people have no true sense of self. Because of this, you will see an abusive person do a couple of things. First, they are going to violate the boundaries of others, expecting others to take responsibility for what is theirs, and taking what belongs to others to satisfy themselves. In other words, they will borrow the selves of others to gain their own sense of self. But it never is their true self because it is the self of someone else.

Second, because they have no sense of self (they are literally blind to their own self), they can never see the truth of who they are or what they are doing. They have no self-awareness. If they have no self-awareness, they cannot be taught anything or learn anything about who they are or what they do that is creating so much destruction for those around them. If you've ever thought, "Why is nothing changing? Why can't I get through to him?" this is why. Your saving grace is to become what God intended for you to become from the day He created you, and that is yourself.

This is the work we do in Flying Free, which is a support and training program for Christian women in emotionally and spiritually abusive relationships and/or environments. We do this through weekly coaching, courses, expert workshops, live gatherings, and a private forum. I am confident this is the most comprehensive and transformative intentional program out there for survivors.

If you are someone who is sick of the same old ruts, are tired of focusing on the abuse,

and are ready to get down and dirty and work on your own amazing life, then this is the program for you. Tuition for an entire year of strategic, intentional retraining of your brain's programming is only \$290. If you can't afford the full amount up front, you can pay \$29 on a month-to-month basis. We now have a screening process in place. You must go through an application process if you want to get in because we really want to help women in particular who are ready for this kind of next level, personal work. If you believe this might be you, you can learn more and apply at [joinflyingfree.com](http://joinflyingfree.com). I want to thank you so much for listening. Until next time, fly free!