

DOES GOD LOVE YOU LESS BECAUSE YOUR MARRIAGE IS BAD?

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 137 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we have some great listener questions. Let's get started.

QUESTION: Hi, Natalie. Thank you for your podcasts. They are amazing. I recently discovered them, and I don't know what I would do without them. I am a listener from South Korea. I am from the States, however, and I have a question that has been burning to have somebody answer. Basically, my sister had posted on social media about how much she has been blessed by her spouse from years of marriage. It was her anniversary, and she just loves her spouse. She has really experienced God's goodness and love through her marriage, whereas she used to be cynical before that. It was really hard to read. It has wrecked me reading that because I've been in an emotionally abusive marriage for almost ten years. I really question God's goodness and love for me and why it is so different. Why does God's goodness and love follow her but not me?

NATALIE: Thank you for asking that question. I think many people can relate to that. I know I can. I've experienced that circumstance and some of those feelings myself. So let's dig into that. One thing I teach and do a lot of coaching on in my programs is that all our emotions are created by the thoughts and beliefs that we have in our brain. They are not created by our external circumstances. This listener thinks she is wrecked emotionally because her sister posted something on social media. But that's not why this listener is emotionally wrecked. She's upset because she is making this mean that God doesn't love her, that God loves her sister because He gave her a good marriage, and He doesn't love her because He didn't give her a good marriage. She's wrecked because of her core programmed beliefs about God, about marriage, about sisters, about social media, and all the nuanced layers of core beliefs that have been programmed in her brain from a very young age.

Let me give you another example. We think that we're triggered because our mom doesn't hug us back and snaps at us when we try to say "hi" to her at our daughter's wedding. We think her behavior just triggered us. But it didn't. Our thoughts about her behavior triggered us. What we made her behavior mean about us is what triggers us. Our beliefs, our understanding, and our thoughts are what create our emotions. We

were triggered because we have core beliefs and thoughts that maybe sound something like this: “My mom doesn’t love me. I’m a bad person. I should be a better daughter. It’s my job to make my mom happy. I have failed. God is disappointed with me. I’ll never be accepted by my family, and I can’t live without that. I’m all alone in the world.” When we have those thoughts, those thoughts are what will make us feel shame, despair, loneliness, and maybe even anger. When we feel those kinds of emotions in our body, we tend to shut down, and we aren’t present to enjoy our daughter’s wedding. We go through the motions and loop in our mind. Our internal focus is on how terrible we are, how terrible our mom is, how terrible life is, and how unfair it all is. Then we fail to live our amazing life that day. Here’s how we know it isn’t the circumstance that triggers us or wrecks us emotionally—because that same circumstance or fact could have happened to someone else who had completely different beliefs and thoughts, and they would feel very different about it as a result.

Let’s say someone else had a sister who posted on social media, but this person had a core belief that she was loved no matter what and that her marriage being abusive had nothing to do with her or God but had everything to do with the choices of one particular abusive man—her husband. Let’s say she had a core belief that everyone in the world deserves to find a healthy partner, including her; that it wasn’t up to God to find her that partner, but God gave that responsibility to us humans and promised to love us no matter what we chose or didn’t choose; and that God is all about giving us freedom to make mistakes and be a hot mess sometimes. How might a person who has those core beliefs baked into the fabric of who she is think when her sister posts about her happy marriage on social media? She might think, “Well, look at that! Look at my sister being all badass and living her amazing life. I’m so glad she found a good guy. I’m going to find a good guy too one day. In the meantime, I’ve got to figure out what to do with the one I’ve got. I’m so glad God is always on my side cheering me on, ‘Let’s go!’” These kinds of thoughts would create feelings of anticipation about the future, warmth and love for her sister, warmth and love for herself, and warmth and love for God. Those kinds of feelings would also create this motivation to do something about her own crappy marriage. Then all those emotions working together would help her take action in her own life that would create the results that she is looking for, which is an amazing life with a good partner one day.

I know all this is true because I’m personally familiar with this circumstance, and at one point in my life, I shared the same core beliefs that this listener has—and I had the same results. I was miserable, stuck, and felt very little love for myself or for the friend (it wasn’t a sister but a friend) who was posting. We see a lot of friends posting about their amazing marriages and families, right? That’s what people do on social media. The work

that I teach in my programs is the work that I personally had to do to change my own life. I had to first change what I believed about God, marriage, friendships, social media, my future, and all the things in order to create the result that I'm living today—which is that I'm now married to a healthy partner who loves me completely. Was this easy? Do we just snap our fingers and it happens? No! It was hell to go from one side to the other, and it took several years. But if I can do it, so can you. Plus, I've helped hundreds of women do this too. Every day I get to hear about the breakthroughs women in my programs are having. It's the most gratifying, enjoyable, miraculous thing I've ever done in my entire life. But it had to start with me, in my own brain. I work with a lot of Christian women who really want to make a difference in the world. These are natural born people helpers, and they love helping others. But they are themselves stuck in their beliefs and their dirty pain. Ladies, you can only help others and take them to the places that you have gone yourself. I used to think that I was worthy if I was helping people. I think as Christian women, we are taught that. I thought I could create this worthiness in myself if I was really successful at helping other people. I think to a certain degree we can do that. But think about how much you could help others if you had personal inner freedom and momentum in your own thoughts and emotions, if you were helping others from this place of personal intrinsic worth rather than self-worth that depends on other people and their response to you or self-worth that depends on whether or not they transform. If our worth depends on anything outside of ourselves, I'm sorry, but we are screwed. This is why we see so many Bible study leaders, church leaders, or women's ministry leaders who feel this desperate need to control everyone and what they believe—because their own worth is riding on the responses of other people.

What if we could lead a Bible study, a church, or a ministry, and we could let everyone have space to make their own choices and to change at their own pace or not change at all? What if our worth stayed totally intact regardless of what others did, thought, or said? What if we could help other women who are asking us for help, but we could be okay if they didn't change or grow and still love them, and it meant nothing about us or the job we were doing? Do you see how this brings more peace, love, and joy to your whole life? What other people do or say says nothing about us! It only gives you information about them. When this sister posts on social media, what she is sharing is about her. It's not about me. I get to make it mean whatever I want to make it mean. When mom scowls and refuses to hug me back at my daughter's wedding, it tells me something about where her head is at. It says nothing about me as a person.

That actually happened last month at my daughter's wedding. Because I've done a lot of this work in advance and because I've spent the last few years rewiring my brain about what I believe about God, my childhood, my parents, my siblings, abuse, myself, love,

and all the things, when my mom did that at my daughter's wedding my knee-jerk thought was simply this, "My mom is who she is. This is how she shows up for herself. I am who I am, and this is how I show up for myself. I love my mom and I love me. My mom looks like she might be hurting and angry, and she insists on hanging onto her core beliefs. That's okay! She gets to do that. I'm going to give her space to be herself. I'm going to have an amazing time focusing on my daughter and my new son-in-law and having a blast at this wedding." All those thoughts created feelings of peace and joy, and I had an incredible time. There was a time not that long ago when that could have happened to me, and I would be spinning out and feeling agony, loneliness, shame, and hopelessness because my thoughts would have been totally different when my mom treated me like that.

Christian women think it is selfish to take care of themselves, so they never do that deeper healing. They never examine their core beliefs or question those beliefs with curiosity and compassion. To the listener who left this question, I would invite you to do this hard emotional work of writing down your thoughts when you get triggered like this. When something happens is the best time to get your thoughts out of your brain and out on paper. Then you can pick just one thought and examine it. Ask yourself some questions to see if you can get your brain to let go a bit. Your brain believes that its programming and its thoughts are just facts. "It is just a fact that good marriages come to those who are loved by God; therefore, if my marriage is bad, I am not loved by God." But what if you are wrong about that? What if your brain is wrong about that? Think about it. If that is true, God doesn't love anybody because everyone actually has hard problems to live through. If we only believe that God loves us when we have evidence that our life is going amazeballs and we are living in La La Land all the time, then nobody will ever have any affirmation that God loves them. If that's true, what about the hundreds of thousands of women who are married to fools? God must dislike a lot of women. He sounds like the men they are married to: picking favorites, being fickle, abandoning women, being abusive. I don't like that kind of God; I reject that kind of God, to be honest. What if God loves your sister in her amazing marriage and He loves you in your terrible one? What if good or bad marriages have nothing to do with our worthiness or God's love for us?

When you ask yourself some of these questions, don't get judgmental or critical. That shuts down the entire process. There is no human being who says, "Judge me. Criticize me. I love it. Bring it on." Nobody does that. Nobody wants that. We all shut down when people judge us or get critical of us, and we shut down when we do that to ourselves. If you want to gain self-awareness and change anything, you'll need to look at your brain's programming with a lot of compassion and love. Sometimes I say in my programs that

we need to look at it with two C's: compassion and curiosity. That is how your brain will feel safe enough to change its mind if you want it to.

This is the work we do in my programs. I have a program called Flying Free that is for women of faith in emotionally abusive relationships. You can learn more about that program. We have an application process to get into the program. You will be invited in if you show you are ready for this kind of work in your application. You can learn all the things about the program and apply by going to joinflyingfree.com. The second program I have is for divorced women of faith. It's the same process. There is an application to get in. You get an invitation if you are ready for it. You can learn all about that program by going to joinflyinghigher.com. Let's listen to the next question.

QUESTION: I just listened to your podcast, and it was great. Even though I already knew most of it, it is good for my brain to hear it again. But I'm 52, and I'm technically challenged. When you said, "Leave a review at Apple Podcasts," I'm scared if I leave a review that my name is going to pop up and that my husband will see it because I just joined Facebook a few years ago, and I realized when I "liked" or "followed" certain things that it showed up. That scared me. I'd love it if you would do a show on how technology plays into all this. I know that's not your thing, but for someone who has been a homeschool mom for twenty-six years and hasn't been in the workforce except for piddly little things, I'm scared half to death of technology. I love your group. I've gotten friends to join. I think you're a badass woman, and I definitely am now as well.

NATALIE: The recording dropped out after that, but thank you for this question. I think we need to look at our brain's programming because I run into this in my own brain all the time. I'll want to solve a problem in my business. For example, last year I wanted to provide a better private forum for the women in my programs. My brain's automatic response to that is, "You don't know how to do that. That's not possible. You'll have to learn something totally complicated. It's going to be too hard to get everyone into a new forum and start all over again. It's going to take a long time to figure it out. It's so confusing. I'm overwhelmed." That is my brain—brain chatter on steroids. Honestly, those kinds of thoughts make me want to shut down. But because I'm familiar with my brain's chatter and my physical brain having a cow all the time, I address it. I say to my brain, "Brain, I've done harder things than this. If someone else can do this, and obviously they do, then so can I. I don't have to know how right now. I'm going to take the first step, and then I'll go from there." That calms down my brain. My brain wants to know all the things. "I want to know exactly how it's going to happen before I let you do anything, Natalie." I'm saying that you don't have to know how. We're just going to take the first step. A couple months later, I had everyone in a new forum, and it was beautiful. We

have more interaction and involvement in our new forum than we've ever had before. But do you see, I would not have gotten that result if I had listened to my brain and just gone with my brain's programming. I had to look at my brain's programming and then override it in order to accomplish what my adult-self wanted to accomplish.

I'll give you another example. If an elderly lady wants to learn how to use a computer, her brain may tell her, "That's too hard. I'm too old. I won't remember. It's complicated. I don't get it. I'm confused. I'm overwhelmed." Those thoughts will cause her body to feel overwhelmed. She will have this feeling of overwhelm in her body, and she'll shut down because that's what we do when we're overwhelmed and confused. The result will be that she never learns how to use the computer, thereby proving to her brain that her belief is true. This just solidifies her programming. Do you see that? However, you could take another elderly woman who wants to learn to use the computer, and she may have the thought, "It seems hard, but I can do hard things. I can learn. It might take me longer because I'm older now, but I think I can do this." Then those thoughts create a feeling of motivation and hope in her body. That feeling inspires her to take a community class where she learns how to use the computer, thereby proving to her brain that what it believes is true. She can do whatever she chooses to do.

Let's get back to this listener's question about technology. She said that she's afraid. Knowing that all our feelings come from our thoughts, we know that her fear is coming from a core belief that she has about herself and about technology, and perhaps about some other things too, because these things are nuanced and layered. We can't just slap simple answers on everything. There are a lot of nuances here. But when we examine things, that's when we get to explore. It's exciting and fascinating to explore the inner workings of our brain. When I'm examining a core belief, I like to ask myself some probing questions. This is like taking a hoe and tilling the ground in order to plant seeds. The ground represents my core beliefs—my brain's programming. Before I can plant the seeds of a new thought, I need to plow through the old thoughts. Then I need to pick those old thoughts up and look at them with curiosity and compassion to see what's going on inside of my brain. In this case, the circumstance is using technology. This person has a thought or belief about technology that is causing her to feel some fear. Maybe her thought is something like, "Everyone could see what I post anywhere online." I had a friend who would not text me because she was afraid that someone out there would read our texts. I wasn't able to convince her that nobody was interested in our conversations. But she had a belief, and this prevented her from texting—which is totally okay! You get to believe whatever you want to believe. If you like the feelings you get when you believe that thought, you like the actions that those beliefs inspire you to take, and you like the results that you are getting in your life, then by all means, hang on

to those beliefs. It's only if you don't like the results, the feelings, or the actions you are taking because of how you feel that it may be time to pick up those beliefs—like picking up the dirt that you just hoed and dug through—and examine it with compassion and curiosity to find out why you believe this.

Here are some questions I like to ask myself. What if there is nothing wrong here? What if it's okay if someone listens to my conversations? I'm not saying I have to like it; I'm just saying what if it is okay? What if technology is easier than I think it is? What if I'm safer than I imagine? Where did I learn others might be tapping into my computer? Maybe Facebook and Apple iTunes are different. How can I find out? I am going to be curious and do some googling and perhaps learn a few things. I'm not saying you have to ask yourself those questions. I'm saying this is what I do when I'm face to face with a belief that I'm not sure I want to hang onto because it's not helping me move forward in my life. I may answer those questions and solidify my belief. I might decide, "I really like this belief, and I'm going to hang onto it because it keeps me safe. I want to be safe online." But if we stick with our original beliefs, we may continue to feel afraid. Nobody will be able to move forward if they are paralyzed with fear.

Now I don't have all the answers about technology. I'm not the greatest with technology. I'm a right-brained creative, so when it comes to technology and numbers, I really feel lost. My brain shuts down. That's also just a belief I have. No one has diagnosed me with the inability to learn technology. It's just a belief that I have. I'm not very good with technology. I could change that belief, and I've had to grow my belief that while I may feel lost with technology, I can learn the things that I need to learn and know in order to do my job. I'm telling you I know the minimum amount I need to accomplish my goals, and that is all I care about. I'm content with that. That's all I can share with you about my personal knowledge about iTunes.

Here's what I know about reviews on iTunes. Most people leave reviews anonymously, especially when it comes to the survivor community. All you have to do is Google "Flying Free Podcast on Apple iTunes." It will come up at the top. Link into there and read some reviews. You'll find all kinds of interesting names like, "African Mom, Enjoyed It, Queen Laughy, Pea Sacker, Gumma Mom, Church Chick," and more. I'm pretty sure that no mom ever looked at her newborn and said, "I know. Let's call her Pea Sacker. That's it." You can pick any fun name you want and leave your review. I hope you will be creative because I like to enjoy these reviews, and the names sometimes make me giggle. Personally, I want Queen Laughy to be my name.

Here's the other thing I know about technology. Google is my very best friend and has been my best friend for over twenty years. Do you know how I know how long Google has been my best friend? I googled it. I googled to find out how long Google has been around. That's how I found out how long Google has been my best friend. I built a lucrative handmade soap business with just me, my friend Google, and my friend YouTube. It didn't cost me anything. That's how I built that soap business. I literally google between ten to twenty things every single day. On days I'm learning something new, I google a lot more. All I do is type whatever my question is into the Google search bar, and answers magically appear. I spent most of my life not knowing what a computer was. I'm almost 55. So for me, a gal who loves to learn, this feels like I died and went to heaven. Let's listen to the next question.

QUESTION: Hi, Natalie. My name is Shelby. I have a couple of male friends who are in a bad situation with a narcissistic wife in a Christian marriage. I wondered where you would send these fellows for help.

NATALIE: I love this question, and I'm glad that you asked it. I know men in abusive relationships as well. I don't work with men, so I haven't created any resources of my own to offer. But when a man reaches out to me for help, which happens a few times each month, I always refer him to a website called shrink4men.com. There are lots of great articles and videos on that website. Women, you can get help over there as well because the principles of dealing with a narcissist are the same, whether the narcissist is a man or a woman.

That's all I have for you today. Thank you so much for listening. Until next time, fly free!