

CHRISTIAN WOMEN, YOU DON'T NEED PERMISSION TO MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS

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 14 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we're going to be talking about our responsibility to make choices for ourselves, and I'm going to be reading an excerpt from my book, "Is it Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage: A Christian Women's Guide to Hidden Emotional and Spiritual Abuse."

But before I do that, there are two little housekeeping things here. First of all, I wanted to read one of the reviews that came in for this podcast. It is from KBelly — I think that's a code name. But this is what she says: "I cannot begin to thank you enough for this podcast and your website as well. I have felt so very alone in this process, and I'm just now beginning to see that there are others out there who just don't know how to give a voice to what has happened. Keep up the amazing work. We are listening."

First of all, thank you so much for sending in that review, and there have been other people that have sent in reviews, and I really appreciate that. When people are looking for a new podcast, they're going to read the reviews to figure out if this is information that is worth their while for listening to. So if this has been an important podcast for you, I encourage you to go over to Apple Podcasts and leave a review over there. If you don't know how to do that, I have specific instructions over on my website. All you have to do is go to flyingfreenow.com. Up on the menu bar, click on the word "Podcast" and it will open up all the podcasts. Just come to this episode, Episode 14, open it up, and scroll down a little bit, and you'll see the instructions for how you can leave a review on Apple Podcasts. If you're used to using your Apple Podcasts app on your phone, it's really easy to do it there. Pretty self-explanatory.

And then the second thing is I would love to have... Oh, oh — here's the thing, though. If I can get ten reviews in the next week or so, I'm going to draw a name from a bowl of those ten people and I will send you a free copy of my book — a free paperback copy of my book, "Is it Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage." You just need to let me know on the back end — send me an email — it's natalie@flyingfreenow.com — and let me know that you left a review, and I will put your name in a hat and maybe you will be a winner of my book. And if you already have a copy of my book, you can always hang onto it and give it to someone else. There's always someone out there who needs to hear this information. [This giveaway is now over.]

And then secondly, I would love to get your questions and start answering them on this podcast. And there's a really cool app that you can click on and actually leave a question with your voice so that rather than me just reading a question, we can actually hear your voice asking the question. You don't have to give your name. You can be totally anonymous. It's just your voice asking a question. And if you want to leave a question, all you have to do is, again, go to my website, flyingfreenow.com, click on the podcast link in the menu bar, open up to Episode 14, and there will be a link in there that you can click on and go to leave a voice question, okay? It's super, super easy. So I would love to start doing that here on the podcast. And you don't have to leave a question. If you just want to leave a comment, you can do that too. And then we'll include that in our future podcasts.

Okay, let's get into our content for today. This is from my book, "Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage," and this is about making choices for ourselves. So I'm going to start with a quote by Lundy Bancroft from his book, "Daily Wisdom for Why Does He Do That?" And this is the quote: "Make a decision inside of yourself—a deep decision—that you are 100% responsible for your actions and he is 100% responsible for his actions. You have zero responsibility for what he does, and he has zero responsibility for what you do....When men blame women for their own behavior, that's one of the benchmarks of abuse." And that's the end of the quote.

Excerpt from "Is it Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage":

How would our lives be different if, instead of being people pleasers (an impossible and stressful task), we made the decision to zero in on aligning ourselves with God's view of us and our lives? What would happen if we saw ourselves as adults with God-given power and responsibility to steward our own lives? I'm talking about asking yourself some important questions like: "Who is responsible for my life?" "How will I share power in my marriage relationship?" "If I begin to act like an autonomous adult in my relationship, what do I risk losing, and am I willing to risk that?"

The fact is, God gave each of us one life to be responsible for: our own. We make decisions for ourselves every single day. We may decide to maintain peace in our marriage by not rocking the boat, going along with whatever our spouse decides for us, and refusing to vulnerably engage on a deeper level out of fear of being attacked. We may decide not to push against emotional and spiritual abuse because we want the marriage to work out no matter what the cost to our spiritual, emotional, and physical health. We may choose to go with the flow out of fear our spouse will hurt us even more deeply than we've already been hurt. Maybe we're afraid if we make an effort to change, our religious community will reject and shame us. But the first step in creating

change in our lives is to acknowledge that we do have choices, we do make choices, and they are our own choices.

There are many reasons we choose to keep things status quo, and sometimes these reasons are good ones. Sometimes we have very little choice, especially when children are involved. But often, we have more choices than we are willing to admit, and we may not be aware of our ability to change in small increments, slowly rewiring our brains, learning new skills in how to relate to abusive people and groups, and awakening to our own value as daughters of God. Change almost never occurs overnight. More often, it takes place quietly in the small, imperceptible things we alter slightly every single day. This is the kind of change I'd like to challenge you to pursue. In this way, over the period of one year, five years, and ten years, you will change the entire course of your life. In order to make these kinds of changes, you may need to think a little differently than you have in the past. Here are some important truths emotional abuse survivors have told me they had to learn in order to start making some pivotal changes in their lives.

1. You don't need the agreement, approval, or permission of other human beings to steward your life before God. God isn't going to hold any of those people accountable for your life. He's going to hold them accountable for their lives, and He's going to hold you accountable for yours. Remember the biblical parable of the talents? A man went away on a trip and entrusted his servants with varying amounts of talents. The faithful ones invested their money and doubled it, but one simply hid his to keep it safe because he was afraid of losing it. When the owner came home, he didn't penalize the ones who chose to invest their money just because one chose to do nothing with his. Nor did he let the one who chose to do nothing off the hook because the others invested well. He rewarded the ones who took the initiative to make choices and exercise their power, and he penalized the one who did nothing out of fear. We need to stop looking sideways at others to see if they are okay with us or not. Their opinions don't matter. We live for an audience of One: Jesus Christ. And with Him, there is no fear. Go out and invest whatever He has entrusted you with in full freedom.

2. It's okay to be human and make mistakes. Survivors are often paralyzed with fear that they will make a wrong move and lose the love and acceptance of their spouse, their church, and even God. But God says love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). When we know we are loved no matter what, we are free to choose a path without letting fear stop us. It's true that you may lose the love and acceptance of your spouse and church community, but could you really call that love in the first place? When people only love you because you do what they dictate, that's not love, and you haven't really lost anything but the fantasy that they actually cared. Hopefully, there will be a few people in your life who love you no matter what. People who will eagerly support you as you

learn to take personal control and come into the fullness of your adult identity as God intended.

3. When you come to a fork in the road, it's not always the path to heaven or the path to hell. Sometimes it's two equally viable options. And guess what: if nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, then you can rest assured He will walk with you on either path. So many Christians stand at the crossroads over and over in their lives, wavering in doubt and fear. This isn't gospel freedom. If an abuse victim has the opportunity to make a choice to stay or get out, she gets to decide which path to take for her own life. Both of those paths will be dark and painful for a while. But it isn't the responsibility or personal business of others to decide what is best for her and her children. As Christians, our role in the lives of others is a supporting role. A loving role. A "let me sit in the messy darkness with you so you're not alone" role. We do not have a "I'm going to take it upon myself to be the boss and judge of you" role. That's not the gospel, and that's not Christian love or community.

4. You cannot know the future; therefore, you cannot make decisions based on predictions of that unknown future. The past is the best predictor of the future anyway. So either way, you can only make choices based on your reality right now. If you've been living in an emotionally abusive relationship for ten years and nothing has changed, your best prediction of how life will be in ten more years is that it will be the same—except for what you choose to do about it today. It's tempting to believe a miracle could happen, and God could change your abuser. Could that happen? It isn't outside the realm of possibility, but it is statistically rare because, first of all, abuse is deeply rooted in ideology and entitled attitudes toward women, and secondly, abusers don't believe they have a problem that needs changing. Of course God can do anything. He can make pink unicorns fly across rainbows. But He doesn't choose to control people. He invites, but He never coerces. And neither should we. Your best bet when choosing what to do regarding your abusive relationship is to make decisions based on reality rather than wishful thinking.

Learning how to make decisions for your life is a messy and meandering journey, especially if you've been steeped in the toxic belief that you are like a child or just a dumb, easily misled female. One of the first steps to getting started on this journey toward confident adulthood is knowing who you really are. Because your abuser has it all wrong.

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