

FOUR BARRIERS THAT KEEP WOMEN FROM LEAVING ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

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 142 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I have a guest we heard from two weeks ago, Lydia Dominguez. She is a technical sergeant in the United States Air Force. I just have to stop there and say—what? I'm seeing a picture of you. We're not seeing each other, but there's a picture of her here. She's this beautiful, feminine-looking woman, and she's a technical sergeant in the United States Air Force. She's a badass! That's what I picture.

LYDIA: Just a little bit, yeah.

NATALIE: What I think is so fascinating about this is that she was in an abusive marriage for how many years?

LYDIA: Ten years.

NATALIE: Okay. For ten years. She tried to get out seven times and went back each time. You can hear more of her story in Episode 140. In that episode, she focused more on how to achieve financial independence after getting out of an abusive marriage. But she wrote a book called *Don't Turn Back* where she shares all the notes she took throughout her entire process of getting out and all the things she learned from her experience and from other people. It's called *Don't Turn Back*, but she had experience with turning back. That's what I think is fascinating. Toward the end of that episode, she was talking about how she had shared on another podcast, not Flying Free, about the reasons why she kept going back. I thought, why not have her share those reasons with us on the Flying Free Podcast. So welcome back, Lydia.

LYDIA: Thank you for having me back.

NATALIE: Yeah. I'm going to let you roll with this. You can just teach us the reasons why you went back. I want the listeners to be able to relate—because they will be able to relate—to these reasons. Many of them might not have attempted to get out even once because of these exact reasons. They have just never tried. They think, "I'd never make it. I'd probably turn back, so I'm not going to even try." So I want you to talk about those reasons and what helped you to get out for good.

LYDIA: Yeah. So this is Chapter 9 in my Don't Turn Back book: "Breaking Down the Barriers." I'd like to start off with a quote by Robert Green if that's okay.

NATALIE: Yeah.

LYDIA: "Every day you face battles, that is the reality for all creatures in their struggle to survive. But the greatest battle of all is within yourself: your weakness, your emotions, your lack of resolution and seeing things through to the end." Robert Green of *The 33 Strategies of War*. I read *The 33 Strategies of War* when I was going through my divorce. There are different tactics. It is very militarized. It talks about different types of military styles, of the logistics of fighting a war. As much as we hate to think of divorce as war, it is. That was one of my favorite quotes from the book. I'd like to talk about all the barriers I had to break down in my mind to get through this.

NATALIE: By the way, in that book, it doesn't have anything to do with divorce. You were just applying the principles you were learning to your divorce process, correct?

LYDIA: Yeah, it has nothing to do with divorce. It's just any type of war strategy. In business and in life, we all go through some type of "battle." Learning different strategies... It talks about the different historical viewpoints of battles in China and battles against the British that they had. It was a really interesting book. It broke down the war styles. Obviously, I'm in the military, so I was very interested in seeing the different tactics. Thinking about tactics and applying them to your life, I am going to use some strategy when I go into divorce. There is going to be some type of logistical planning into what I do between here and here. From point A to point B, there will be some kind of planning. I thought about my divorce as some type of war, battle, or chess game that I had to learn how to play. I kept failing at it.

So when I wrote this book, I started figuring out the barriers that had kept me back. I discovered there were four main barriers: the fear of hurting my kids—of taking away that father figure, the fear of going against my Christian beliefs, the fear of how I would be perceived in society, and (this one is a little more provocative) sexual loneliness. Those four barriers were the ones that were keeping me back. You heal physically. Your bruises will heal. You'll heal mentally through counseling. But spiritually, you're going to feel like a bad mom, like a bad wife, and like a bad Christian if you are going through a divorce. I started tackling these barriers one by one.

NATALIE: So tell us how you did that, one by one.

LYDIA: First, it was fear of hurting my kids. I realized I should keep them first... One

thing my ex would do to me was to say that by leaving him, I would be a terrible mom because they would grow up in a single-mom household. He really dug that into my mentality all the time. "You want these kids raised without a father?" That's not at all what I wanted. Looking into it, I knew that raising kids as a single mom I was putting them at risk for teenage pregnancy, for incarceration, and for them to commit any type of crime. They have more of a statistical chance of not passing high school with a single mom. That made me afraid.

But as I went through divorce, I realized God really had control because He puts people in your life to fill that role. Even though I haven't had a person to fill that role per se, as far as "I designate you as their father," I found a father figure for them in different places—through their soccer coach, through their swim coach, through their math teacher. I found God was putting people in our lives who would fulfill that role to show them that men don't act like this with women, but they act like this. This is how normal men behave. I noticed they were fearful of men, and they are boys. We can't have them afraid of other men. I wanted them to not be afraid of men and to feel like they had some type of role model in their life.

NATALIE: The interesting thing is that this is a barrier for you to get out, yet the more fearful thing was that they would stay and continue to think that all men were like dad—scary and someone to be feared. The opposite was true.

LYDIA: It was. I could see that once he had left that they were going through PTSD and anxiety. I could see that I was going through it, and they were going through it as well. I started realizing they needed counseling too. Even though filling those physical and mental healings, they still needed a person. God is great. I moved to Las Vegas. I had no family, no military family yet. I had just come into a new unit. I didn't have the same structure I had where I had lived in California. I moved to a new place and thought, "They are not going to have that father role." I don't know why I was worried. God fulfilled that role in Himself as God and around people and men who were God-fearing. It was really great to see that in them and to see that they are not as afraid as they were. I can see they are not as timid as they were. It's been fun watching them fill that role.

NATALIE: That's neat. So what was the second barrier?

LYDIA: The second barrier was the fear of going against my Christian beliefs. At some point, I felt like how the heck did I become the woman at the well, a reject among rejects? How did this happen? I was suddenly in church by myself, looking around, and wondering how did this happen? I started feeling jealous and angry. If I could go back a

bit, my ex had discarded me toward the end. He left me, and he left me financially ruined. When he left, I felt like I had tried everything I could, even putting myself in financial strain for him, yet I was still feeling like such a reject at church even though my church, friends, and family at no point made me feel bad. It was my own feelings of jealousy and anger at church.

What I realized was that God didn't place me here to feel this way, to have all this anger and burdens, to feel forsaken and condemned. I really felt like the black sheep. I always use that metaphor that I was the woman at the well somehow. I don't know how that happened. Suddenly, I was just here and feeling so lonely and abandoned. I finally broke down and asked my pastor, "What can I do? I'm feeling so broken and helpless." He told me to go to 1 Corinthians. Right away he was just on it; he knew what verse to give me. He said 1 Corinthians 7: 15-16, "If your husband or wife, who is not a believer, insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases, the believing husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace." Wow, did I feel so at peace! When you finally let go of feeling like you have to cling on to this person and feel you aren't fulfilled until you have this person by your side, I can't tell you the amount of overwhelming peace I felt in my whole body. Just to know that you can go, you can leave. Whether you leave or I leave, whoever leaves, I will be at peace.

I hold that verse with me constantly, and I always try to share it with other women too because you're not called to be just living in anger and shame and regret and reliving many events that happened in your mind. I constantly found myself not being able to sleep, reliving arguments in the shower. Sometimes it seems like you are talking to yourself, but you are really thinking of other ways you could have done that argument or said something. Finally letting go and feeling that overwhelming giant suitcase that you are carrying on your back—like you are carrying a giant backpack. You're running through the airport and are carrying pounds of weight on you, and you're so exhausted. Just put it down! Just let it go and stop carrying that pain with you. I found such a sense of relief that just washed off me. I was able to finally know that just because I was getting a divorce, it didn't make me any less of a Christian believer. It doesn't make me any less of a mother or a wife. My ex, even though he had discarded me towards the end, I really should have left the other six times. Either way, I'm still called to live in peace. I'm still called for the glory of God.

That leads me into my next segment here—feeling how I would be perceived by society. That's where I was feeling like... When you tell people you are getting divorced, they kind of give you this pity look. You feel like a coroner telling them, "Hey, so-and-so died." They are devastated for you. I almost dreaded telling people. "Yeah, we're getting a divorce." I felt like not only am I going through this devastating event, but now I'm

having to tell people and watch their faces change into pity and sadness for me. I avoided places. I didn't want to talk to people. I felt like I couldn't go to my little church. I started going to a bigger church where I could be a ghost, where I could go in, praise God, and leave without talking to anybody. I was so anti-social, and I've always been such a social human my whole life. I love talking to people. I'm a big people person. Suddenly I went to thinking, "Please don't look at me. Don't look in my direction." I felt full of shame. I felt lost. I started questioning, "Why am I the one feeling this weight of society? I'm not perfect. Nobody is."

You get such an image from movies and TV and reality shows that they get a divorce and suddenly they lose all this weight. They get a new life, they get a new boyfriend right away, and they get married all over again. It seemed like such a wrong picture of reality. In reality, people might lose weight, but they might gain weight. It's all about stress. Some people lose ten pounds of stress weight, and some people gain ten pounds in stress weight. It's not a good or bad thing. It means this person needs help. They are stressed out. I'm going to try not to jump too fast but jumping into another relationship isn't necessarily reality. Some women think, "Now I've gotten a divorce, now I need to go find someone else." That's part of the social plan. Don't give into that. That's a bunch of BS. I'm not going to be Kim Kardashian or whichever Kardashian it is that went on vacation with her ex-husband in the south of France. Kourtney Kardashian. She took her ex with her kids and his girlfriend, and they went on a yacht. That's not going to happen. That is not reality. That's TV. People look at that and think, "Wow. Vacationing with the other person. That sounds awesome." I'm sure there are some people that have Christmas and all the holidays together. That would be the best avenue possible, but when you have domestic violence, that's not going to be imaginable.

NATALIE: That's right.

LYDIA: You have to let go of all those societal norms and viewpoints. Society doesn't know what they are doing. They are lost. They have all sorts of issues—especially Hollywood. I wondered why I followed that. Why did I have that in my mind? Why did I think I have to rush home, get the groceries, help everybody with homework, put everybody to bed, and still have time to find a boyfriend? No! That's not reality. Sometimes I came home with Popeyes and food out of a bucket. Everybody gets that. Laundry is piling up, and I need to commit a day to laundry. Things happen and you have to just let go of all that. Don't think you have to be like Kim Kardashian. Don't think, "I've got to lose weight. I've got to look hot. I have to do this and that to make my ex-spouse jealous." No, you need to heal yourself. Just worry about yourself, your kids, and getting yourself to the next step because you don't want to be where you are a

year from now. You want to be somewhere better.

NATALIE: That's right.

LYDIA: That leads me into my fourth barrier, which is intentionally provocative. I know it's a little touchy. Sex is not something people are always willing to talk about, just like domestic violence. This one I called sexual loneliness. Not to go far into the birds and the bees, but I think we can all agree that sex is also physical and spiritual. There is also the biblical version of sex. So you have the physical action of sex, and the spiritual/emotional connection that sex brings through endorphins and chemical reactions in the brain. Then there is what God thinks about sex. He has sex to be in the protection of a marriage. Women are supposed to follow their husbands in a marriage, and men are supposed to be like Christ in a marriage because He died for the church. What I like to say about sexual loneliness is that it doesn't mean you're never going to have a partner. It doesn't mean you're going to die alone. I think we all go into that, "Oh, woe is me. I'm going to die alone." No. What it means is not filling a void with another toxic person. I like to say I go to Christ broken and I like to go to another person whole. I like to go to another human being and say, "I'm a whole person. I would like to complement you as a partner," versus, "I'm a broken human being. Please come help me."

As women, we feel like we have to fill that void for our kids, fill that void for society, and now we have to fill that void for ourselves because I'm hurting. I'm in pain, and I'm lonely. Loneliness can also transfer into sex. You want to have a person in your life and think, "If I give him sex, then he'll be with me and love me." We get it all twisted up. We get the emotional and spiritual part twisted up with the physical part of it when they are all separate. I said this in the other podcast. I chose to be abstinent. I chose to not be sexually active and to not fill that role with somebody with whom it would just be physical. It's a personal choice. I don't condone if you go out and have sex, and I don't say that you should be abstinent. It's a personal choice. But I think that bringing sex into a messy divorce or a place where your kids are is hard. You could put yourself up for the risk of another pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease. Also for the psychological consequences of having sex too soon after trauma. Then you feel regret and shame, and your trust is broken all over again. Now you're not trusting men at all, and you damage and ruin relationships. The solace you seek after a breakup will not come from a random one-night stand. That will lead you to disappointment and despair. I really do... For me, it was abstinence. I didn't fulfill that role. I've seen other women just go straight into another relationship, and it's almost like they missed a step. They didn't look at themselves and fulfill that role within themselves and with God. Then they just put it on the other person—that human man. Now he is put in that

role where he needs to fix you. But how is he supposed to fix you?

NATALIE: Yeah. Often, we end up attracting... Like things attract, so if we're broken and we haven't addressed some of those deeper things, we're going to attract other people that are similarly positioned. Now you have two people who haven't dealt with their trauma, and you have another perfect storm.

LYDIA: Yeah. It seems like a social norm to just jump back in and go into the dating world. You might fulfill a short-term sexual gratification, but it's going to be at a cost. It gets awkward. It's like, "Oh, sex." Because I have my kids, they were like, "We want to read your book." I was like, "Well, there are some parts in there you might want to skip." Sex is something that nobody wants to talk about. I was willing to dive into it. Yes, there is sex. Birds and the bees, right? But we already know that this connects you. Now you're going to connect with somebody physically, and now you're going to connect with them emotionally. If the relationship isn't stable and they leave, now you're feeling like you can't trust yourself. You feel like you can't trust that person. Sex is supposed to be a beautiful gift from God. It's supposed to be reserved for that committed relationship of a marriage. You have to first learn to love yourself and know that you cannot heal in man alone. You must find it in God.

NATALIE: That's right. I love that. I know people kind of poo-poo the idea of loving yourself. They think it's so... But it's true! It's actually really profound. We are always looking for love outside of ourselves. God gave us this beautiful treasure of ourselves. I often say in the private forum of Flying Free, "God gave you the responsibility to love (let's say the person's name is Mary) a woman, and her name is Mary. She is your responsibility." It helps people to see themselves as a separate self. It feels less selfish, which it shouldn't be. It's not selfish. You will actually be able to give so much more to the world if you are a whole person who is well taken care of. Another thing I say a lot is, "No one else is going to rescue you. God put you in charge of a rescue mission, and you're it."

LYDIA: Amen, sister! There is no backup coming. The house is on fire. Get out of the house now. You will save yourself. I say that you will save yourself, but you will have to do the work. You have to crack open the Bible. You have to do the work on yourself—physically and emotionally. Nobody else is going to do it for you. Nobody is going to call you and say, "Hey, Mary. Did you do the work today?" Or text you and say, "Did you go walk around the block? I know you are really stressed out. Did you take a bubble bath?" Nobody is going to tell you to do these things. You have to remember, "I have to do this stuff so I don't get stressed out."

I had a funny routine before I went to court. You know when court is coming up. They have it scheduled a month or two out. Right before court, because I had the gym schedule, I would go to kickboxing right before. I'd always have a massage schedule for a day or two after. I tried to work my schedule like that so I could punch something as hard as I wanted, kick something as hard as I wanted, and be physically exhausted as I went into court. I'd think, "I'm physically exhausted, but now I'm mentally here." Then I'd get out of court so emotionally drained, and then go in for a massage and let it go.

I also do float therapy. I did that a lot. It's where you go into a tank. Different places are different. Some have a tank; some have a pod; some have a room with a giant bathtub. You lay in there and it's like sensory deprivation. There's no light. There's no sound. You go into darkness floating. They have thousands of pounds of salt in there. You are very buoyant in the water.

NATALIE: Cool!

LYDIA: It is cool. Lots of people say they dream. I had a really hard time dreaming there. What I would do is break down what just happened in court in my mind. You are separated from your phone. You don't hear anything. I would go in after court and break down the process of what just happened in court. It would just be me and my own thoughts in a dark room. It was kind of fun. I had these gift certificates that people would give me, so I'd use those. I tried to plan my court hearings and have these little rituals where I'd punch something hard right before and relax afterwards.

NATALIE: I love that! I just love that! I did something similar. I didn't do the kickboxing thing. But when I separated from my ex, I knew I... Mentally, I didn't think I was going to miss any touching because toward the end of our relationship, we weren't doing anything like that anymore. But I knew enough and had learned enough to know that my body... I was responsible for taking care of my body, and it needed physical touch because all of us need that. Babies need that. We all need it. So I started scheduling a monthly massage. I'd never done that before because I always thought that was super indulgent and selfish. So I scheduled a monthly massage with a Christian woman who did it in her home. It was so good for me. It was good for my body, but it was good for me mentally to say, "I'm taking care of myself—all the different parts of myself." This is something people need. I will not go and have sex with someone, but I can go get a massage and have my body get touched in a way that is safe and wholesome and also healthy. It gets your lymph nodes drained and all that. I always felt like a million bucks.

LYDIA: Yeah. I felt a little selfish also, but when you are going through that I thought, "I cannot take care of these kids if I am going crazy." I had already killed my car, like we

talked about in the last episode. "I killed my car. Things are falling apart at the house. I can't handle this if I'm not okay. I need to be relaxed to take care of these kids and to move on in life." Yeah, sometimes you have to be a little selfish. Even if you can't afford a massage, go make sure you take that bubble bath. Even just sitting down and doing meditation. There are many YouTube videos where they walk you through a meditation, so you don't have to go into a meditation center and pay all that money. You can do it yourself through YouTube.

NATALIE: Yep. Those are good for helping you sleep too. I think sleep is super important. It might be hard to do when you are under stress and your brain is going five million miles per hour. You lay down for bed at night, and you can't turn your brain off. There are some great meditations online that you can download. There are some apps too. The Calm app. I don't know if you're familiar with those.

LYDIA: I did the meditation where they would walk you through your whole body. They'd be like, "Okay, tingle your toes. Feel your toes relax. Feel your ankles." It goes through your entire body. Sometimes you have to try whatever works. You may have to try doing yoga, praying, and meditation. Try all the different things and see what works for you because everybody is different. Maybe it takes you playing a dumb game like Crush on your phone until you fall asleep. I'm a big numbers person, but I would fall asleep all the time playing Sudoku. That's a game where it's just numbers.

NATALIE: Yes!

LYDIA: I would get so bored and bore myself to sleep.

NATALIE: That's so funny. I can't stand that game! I cannot do that game.

LYDIA: I know. But sometimes you do the harder ones. I'd really try, but I'd get so bored I'd just go to sleep. Whatever works. There is no formula. You have to make your own formula for yourself. Whatever everybody wants to do.

NATALIE: This has been really good. For those of you listening who didn't hear Lydia when she came a couple of weeks ago in [Episode 140](#), go check that one out. But why don't you tell this audience today a bit about your book and where they can find you online.

LYDIA: My book is called *Don't Turn Back*. It's about giving the women the tools they need to not go back. It is [your survival map to recovering from domestic violence](#). You can find my book on Lydiadominguez.com. That's my website. You can order it from

there and get a free bookmark and a signed copy. You can also follow me on Facebook and Instagram. Lydia Dominguez is the tag. Come reach out to me and we can chit chat. One thing I hope people receive in this message is that divorce does not define you. It is not who you are. You will find the light through this. You will get to the light. I've seen the light. It is real. There is a light. You will recover after this.

NATALIE: So good. Also, I'll mention that if you are in the process of divorce or if you are already divorced, you may want to check out my program. Go to joinflyinghigher.com. That is my program for women of faith who are divorced. We do all the things to help you rebuild your life. You can find out information and apply over there. If you are in your marriage and are wondering, "What is there for me if I get divorced?", there is Flying Higher. There are thousands of divorced Christian women out there. There's a bunch of us, so you are not alone by a longshot. If you are contemplating it and think you will be a pariah, maybe you will be in your circle, but out in the world at large, you are not a pariah. There is a whole family of us out there waiting to give you a big hug and cheer you on through the process.

LYDIA: Yes. And don't feel, like I did, like you are the woman at the well—suddenly a woman rejected out of rejects. It's crazy how we suddenly become that. But you are not alone. You are not the woman at the well. There are others.

NATALIE: Thanks again, Lydia, for coming a second time to share with our listeners. For those of you listening, thank you so much for coming today to listen. Until next time, fly free!