

Changing Your Role (Chapter Eight of *Is It Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage*) Part One

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 146 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today is a special edition dedicated to the book I wrote three years ago, which has sold over 11,000 copies during that time. The book is called, "Is It Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage." Now, I had no idea if 11,000 copies was a success or not, so I googled it, and according to scribemedias.com, the average, traditionally published book sells 3,000 copies over its lifetime and it will typically sell between 250 to 300 copies the first year. By the way, Amazon is selling about 300 copies of "Is It Me?" in all the different formats every month right now. So for a traditional publisher (this is again, according to scribemedias.com) to think of a non-fiction book as a success, it has to sell 10,000 copies over its lifetime. So far, "Is It Me?" has sold over 11,000 copies and it's increasing in its sales every month, not decreasing. I would say that this book has been a success, and it will continue to be a success as long as emotional and spiritual abuse remain a problem in Christian circles, which is kind of unfortunate, actually.

Today, I want to read a chapter to you. I've already offered my first chapter of the book for free if you go on my website flyingfreenow.com. You can sign up, get on my mailing list, and I'll send you the first chapter for free. I'll also send you the first chapter of the companion workbook for free. But I want to give you another chapter for free in audible format here (or you can read the transcript), and it's chapter eight. When I'm done reading this chapter, I'm going to let you know how you can buy the entire book for only 99 cents. Stay until the end and you'll find out how you can do that. Or you maybe already know. It's probably not a secret. All right, let's dig in here.

Chapter eight. This chapter is called "Changing Your Role," and by the way, if you're not familiar with this book, I'm just going to tell you what the chapters are. The first chapter that you can get for free on my website is called "Is This Your Marriage?" and it basically lays out what an emotionally and spiritually abusive marriage looks like, and then you can read all about it and decide, "Hmm, is that my marriage or not?" Chapter two is "What Does a Normal Marriage Look Like?" because if you've been living in a dysfunctional marriage for your entire married life, you maybe don't know. Chapter three is called "The Propaganda Machine," and that's just a chapter about why we believe what we believe that keeps us stuck in these marriages. Chapter four is called,

“His Role.” Chapter five is called “Your Role.” Chapter six is called, “The Roles of Others.” These are all the roles different people play in this dysfunctional scenario that we see in churches all over the place. Chapter seven is called “God’s Role.” Chapter eight is called “Changing Your Role,” and that’s the chapter that I’m going to read to you right now. There are a few more chapters in the book, but I’m just going to read this one. All right.

Another Option

We’ve spent most of this book talking about the problems in your marriage—how they got there and why they persist in spite of your efforts to solve them. You’ve maybe read several marriage books and tried to implement the various tips and strategies you’ve learned, but nothing helped. The problem isn’t their ideas and advice, because it’s probably good advice for a marriage with two involved partners who are both working hard to make the relationship better. The reason those books haven’t worked for you is because you’re the only involved partner in your marriage. For you, I present another option. Instead of spinning your wheels trying to get another person to change, what if you put all that same effort into changing your role?

First, let me make it clear that by changing your role I am not implying your actions were in any way responsible for your husband’s toxic behavior and choices. I am not suggesting that you can improve your relationship with him by changing how you relate to him. You can’t control anything about him or his behavior. That’s his house and yard (more on this in the next section), and he alone is responsible for himself. What I do want to communicate in this chapter is the truth that you can improve your relationship with yourself by changing how you view and respond to what he does. Abuse is never the victim’s fault. Ever. But once you awaken to the reality that you are in an abusive relationship, you need to have strategies for dealing with it so you can find freedom, hope, and healing. That’s what this chapter is about.

Boundaries

One of the books I recommend most in my work with survivors is “Boundaries” by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. Boundaries are THE KEY to an emotionally healthy and satisfying life. People who have healthy boundaries have healthy relationships. They have time to do the things they excel at because they know how to say no to everything that isn’t right for them. They have the best chance at leading fulfilling, well-balanced lives of peace. The word boundaries may not be in the Bible, but the concept is modeled numerous times, especially by our Savior. Jesus was the most well-boundaried person who ever walked planet earth. He loved and served people, but He did not let people manipulate Him from His mission. He didn’t chase after people to try

to convince them of the truth or tell them what they had to do. He respected their right to choose for themselves. He took responsibility for Himself and His work, and He let others decide whether or not they wanted to follow Him. When dysfunctional folks gnashed their teeth at Jesus, He let them gnash. He didn't try to argue with them or change them. And He didn't let their negative opinions stop Him from doing what He needed to do.

Here's an analogy from "Boundaries" that I'd like to expand on. Imagine that every person has a house and yard with a fence around it. Your husband does. Your kids do. Your siblings do. Your parents do. Your friends do. Your co-workers do. And so do you. It doesn't matter what color you are, what gender you are, how much money you have, how smart or popular you are, your marital status, or where you live. You've been assigned to your own home and yard. God gave you your house and yard, and He put a fence around it to show you where it ends and where your neighbor's yard begins. The fence is your boundary. God doesn't expect you to water and mow your husband's lawn; however, He does expect you to water and mow yours. In other words, just because you are married doesn't give either of you free reign to disrespectfully tromp all over the other person's house and yard. Sharing an intimate relationship absolutely requires respect of boundaries.

What happens when someone else leaves their own yard and comes over into yours and starts mowing it for you (and you didn't ask)? If you have poor boundaries, you might be afraid to say, "Excuse me, but this is my lawn, and I'm taking care of it."

Or maybe you would say that, and the response would be, "So what? I think you're doing a lousy job here, so I'm going to do it for you. You should be THANKFUL I'm here instead of bossing me around like a smarty pants. Who do you think you are, anyway?" They've actually committed a double boundary violation. One for invading your space and one for attacking your person when you tried to protect your space. This is double bad, and it's what women who live with abusers deal with on a regular basis. Here are some more real life examples of how this dynamic works:

What if someone else leaves their home and walks into yours, uninvited, and begins to read through your private journals? When you point out this boundary violation in an abusive relationship, you get accused of being selfish, hiding things, not being unified, not trusting the other person, and being mean. Double boundary violation. One for the original invasion of your privacy and one for attacking your character when you tried to protect your space.

What if someone grabs you, carries you over into their yard, forces you to get into their

car, and drives dangerously through town? In an abusive relationship, when you point out this boundary violation, you get accused of not trusting God, being picky, and being a nag. Double boundary violation. One for the original invasion and one for attacking your character when you tried to protect your space.

What if you invite someone over for dinner, but they refuse to leave when you ask them? When you point out this boundary violation in an abusive relationship, you get accused of not sharing, being mean, being selfish, and being rude. Double boundary violation. One for the original invasion and one for attacking your character when you tried to protect your space.

What if someone comes into your house and says your housekeeping skills are crappy, and everything else about you is also crappy? In an abusive relationship, when you point out this boundary violation, you get accused of not taking advice, not being humble, being stuck up, unwilling to learn, and lazy. Double boundary violation. One for the original invasion and one for attacking who you are as a person when you tried to protect your space.

What if someone comes over and steals your personal information in order to open up a credit card in your name and rack up debt? When you point out this boundary violation in an abusive relationship, you get accused of being stingy, not sharing your life and finances, being controlling, and being selfish. Double boundary violation. One for the original invasion and one for attacking you when you tried to protect your space.

What if you close the door of your house and lock it so the Boundary Violator can't get in anymore to hurt you, and your pastor comes marching through your garden gate, bangs on your front door, and informs you that you aren't a Christian, and he never wants to see you in his church again unless you allow the Boundary Violator to do whatever he wants to do to your person, your garden, and your house? Double boundary violation. One for the original invasion and one for spiritually abusing you when you tried to protect your space.

I know what some of you are thinking. "Well, it would be bad if it were a stranger on the block. But if it's my husband, I guess I'm supposed to be okay with it because we are married; and when you are one flesh, it's like your houses and yards are the same because...married people don't have boundaries."

I get it. I used to believe that too. And that juicy little morsel of propaganda has effectively kept countless women trapped in controlling, abusive relationships where

their homes, yards, and persons are repeatedly violated over the course of decades. We'll get back to that ugly lie, but let's look at this from another angle first.

Have you ever gone over into someone else's yard and said, "I don't think you should plant the roses there. They won't get enough sun, and they'll die. I know better than you do, and I'm not going to wait for you to ask for my advice because I need to take care of you and make sure nothing bad ever happens to you so you aren't unhappy."

Or do you ever find yourself feeling like you are required to come over and mow your husband's lawn every week because if you don't, who will? And if it doesn't get mowed, he will be annoyed or upset—so get on it!

Or do you ever feel resentful of all the neighbors who feel free to walk inside your house with muddy feet? Yet you instinctively know that if you asked them to leave, they'd get mad, and you'd feel like a big old meanie?

Or do you ever feel angry that your gate always has to be open to everyone in order to keep them all happy, but when you try to go into someone else's yard, they get upset with you?

Do you see how bad boundaries go both ways? You might think doing good to someone and helping them or saving them when they haven't asked is actually a good crossing of boundaries. But it's not. It might feel good, but it is ultimately not good for you or for the other person. So many of us have done that for years, fully believing we were doing our partners a huge favor and confused about why they didn't appreciate it. If you can get this truth to click inside your heart, you will make a huge leap toward your healing. You are not responsible for your husband's life. For his growth. For his change. For his happiness. For his peace. For his ANYTHING. He is a big boy, and you are a big girl. You get to each be responsible for only one person's house and yard. Your own.

To sum it up, your boundaries need some work if you let others take over your property management, and your boundaries need some work if you think it's okay to take over the property management of someone else's property. Healthy boundaries mean you stick to your house and yard, and you get to decide who comes over and when and why. And healthy boundaries also mean you don't cross over into someone else's house or yard unless you are invited (their initiative), and you only go if you decide that you can. In other words, you don't allow anyone to force you to come over into their territory.

I hope this is beginning to come together for you. The big hang-up for women of faith is that they believe the lie that boundaries are okay in all situations except ones that involve authority. In the case of someone who is in authority over you, the authority is actually in control of your house and yard. They have the final say. So let's talk about this concept of authority and find out who really has authority in your life.

Who is Your Authority?

"The Bible teaches that men and women should be servants of all, and nobody should seek or desire to have moral or spiritual authority over anyone. Evangelical men seem infatuated with obtaining this spiritual authority and preventing women from having it. The problem is their infatuation with spiritual authority. In New Testament Scriptures, Jesus Christ is the Head, the sole authority over every single believer regarding spiritual life and moral well-being. Each believer in Jesus Christ (both male and female) is a priest unto God (i.e. "the priesthood of the believer"), modeling for the world what it means to walk with God. Christians serve one another, encourage one another, and help one another, but the moment somebody tries to take a position of spiritual authority over another person he or she has crossed a line in terms of New Testament Christianity." — Wade Burleson, "Fraudulent Authority"

One of the most destructive pieces of propaganda used to keep women in a power-under position related to men is the idea of authority, and more specifically that men have authority over women. So if you want to paint your walls yellow or get a different haircut or purchase a new rug—better check with your male authority. If you aren't married, that would be your daddy. If you are married, that would be your husband. And if your daddy is dead, and you are unmarried, that would be your male pastor or a male elder. But you are not allowed to make that decision without the permission of your male authority. This takes the responsibility and control of your life (your home and yard) away from you. See how this is a boundaries issue? But is that really God's design for the human race? Or is that the world's power-over way of doing things—all dressed up with a religious veneer that makes it sound reasonable and seem holy?

This issue of the authority of men over women negatively affects so many facets of life. R. Starke writes: "The belief that authority is ontologically attached to personhood, particularly manhood, will shape the way you view any number of issues our country is focused on today— domestic abuse, clerical abuse, police brutality, and civil disobedience. It will shape the way you interpret America's troubling legacy of slavery and segregation, its lingering effects, and the Protestant church's passive complicity and active participation in it." (Source: <https://thethinkingsofthings.com/2018/08/27/our-evangelical-authority-crisis>)

There was no power-over system in the Garden of Eden. Power-over was the result of sin, and the New Testament teaches us that eliminating power-over in Christian relationships was one of the hallmarks of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. But for some reason, a few Christian teachers think the world's power-over system is good. Probably because they are men, and it works for them. (They sure wouldn't like it if women thought power-over was good—but only when women were the authority figures! In fact, I've heard some complain that women just want equality so they can be in power over men, and that's not fair to the men! See how silly this gets?) But God's kingdom is not a power-over system for anyone.

Mark 10:42-45 says: "And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'"

Now, of course there is legal authority in our world. For example, even in a church there are officers listed in every 501C-3 non-profit entity. But is there any situation where human beings are given spiritual authority over other human beings in order to control their lives? No. And keep in mind that legal authority actually exists to serve those under their jurisdiction. Police officers serve their cities. A president serves his/her country. A teacher serves his/her students. That's how it should work when it's functioning in a healthy way. Here's how that might look related to boundaries:

Our job as parents in authority over our children is to help them grow up by learning how to care for and manage their own homes and yards. You've successfully done your job if your children become adults who take responsibility for themselves. If your children are still expecting you or someone else to mow their grass and wash their dishes, then you've got some work to do. And it isn't mowing and washing. It's getting out of their home and yard (out of their business) so they can discover what happens when they don't mow. You might not want them to experience the pain of an ugly yard, but if they don't experience that pain, they'll never be motivated to mow for themselves. So get out of the way.

Likewise, the role of any authority is to help those around him/her take responsibility for their own homes and yards. If someone breaks the law, a police officer gives a fine or makes an arrest. This teaches the law breaker to tend to his/her own house and yard and leave the houses and yards of others alone.

God created Adam and Eve as equals. They are both under the authority of God who teaches us to take care of our own homes and yards. When they sinned against God, God held each one personally responsible for their own sin—not for the sins of the other one. He gave them their own, custom-made consequence as a result. He didn't punish Adam for Eve's sin and vice versa.

In every description of a pastor or elder, and in every example the Bible gives of what a pastor or elder does, the emphasis is on serving and helping where service and help is needed. The emphasis is not on control and power-over. Ever. So whenever a male person claims to be in authority over you, check to see how they are exercising their office. If they are using it to serve you, build you up in Christ, and support you in your efforts to steward your own house and yard, then they may be operating in the spirit of Christ. If they are using their office to condemn, judge, control, and break you down, then they are definitely operating in the spirit of the world's power-over system. Their stolen authority over you is fraudulent, and you are not under any obligation to surrender your home and yard to them.

The idea of church authority is cultural, not biblical. Men and women who follow Jesus Christ have one authority. Jesus Christ. They bow to Him alone and answer to Him alone. So when husbands or spiritual leaders tell you to do something or cover up something that you believe is wrong, you may need to decide who your real authority is.

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" (Matthew 28:18)

"But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'" (Acts 5:29)

God's love for you is not dependent on whether or not you obey those that have placed themselves in authority over you. Never forget that as a redeemed child of God, you are always directly under the authority of Jesus Christ. This frees you up to make choices in your life without paralyzing fear, because the love of Jesus casts out all fear.

Okay, I'm going to actually interrupt my narrator self and just say that when I had originally recorded this episode, I recorded the entire chapter and then I realized, "This is an hour long! It's gonna be an hour long episode!" and I don't really like my episodes to get that long, so I decided to break it up into two different episodes. So this was kind of Part One of chapter eight, and next week I'm going to give you Part Two of chapter eight. And if you just can't wait to hear part two of chapter eight, you can go straight

over to Amazon.com and get the Kindle version of this book “Is It Me? Making Sense of My Confusing Marriage” for 99 cents today all the way through Cyber Monday. Actually, we’re going to extend it to December 3rd, because now we’re going to make Part Two for next week. You’ve got several days here now you can go and grab the Kindle version for 99 cents and let other people you know who may be interested in this book know that it’s on sale.

And that’s all I have for you for this week! I look forward to getting together with you next week for Part Two, and until then, fly free.