

## WHAT ARE THE BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE? (AND OTHER QUESTIONS!)

*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 156 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I'm going to be answering listener questions, and if you have a question that you would like answered in an upcoming podcast episode, all you have to do is go to the link that we provide in the show notes. That link will take you to a page where you can click on a recording button and you can record yourself asking a quick question. I think it only lets you talk for about a minute and a half, but that's enough time for you to ask a quick question, just as these ladies did today. And then I try to answer as many of these questions as I can throughout the course of the year in podcast episodes. So I'd love to get some more of your questions. And by the way, answering people's questions is one of the things that we do in the Flying Free Sisterhood program. Once a month we have a two hour Q&A. It's live, and the women in the program can ask whatever questions they want to ask, and then I answer them. It's also provided in a replay for you to listen to in our very own private podcast. Only people in the group can listen to that podcast. So the replay is provided there as well as the video replay on the membership site. And you also have access to several years' worth of Q&A's that I've done over the years. So you can watch how my appearance has morphed. Anyway, that was ridiculous. All right. Let's get to today's question.

LISTENER QUESTION: Okay, my situation is very confusing to me, so I'm going to buy your book, but my husband is not abusive physically. He's not angry or anything like that. But he does have a diagnosed anxiety disorder, which has severely impacted his functioning at work and within the family. As a leader and a partner for me, I feel like I've had to basically take over the role of being his mother and not a partner. We have a son, a very high-functioning son on the autism spectrum. My husband, on many occasions, has not stepped in to discipline or intervene when he's been violent with me, and so I don't feel like he protects me. When we tried to talk about marital issues and my lack of respect or lack of love or not wanting to have sex anymore, he just kind of shuts it down, and he just cannot handle conflict. It has to be happy or he can't talk about it. Sometimes I've told him he's so positive I don't think he can see reality often. So, just curious to know... my plan is to leave, but I'm not sure I have biblical grounds for that. Anyway, would love for you to address those types of interesting situations.

NATALIE: There are several good books on the subject of biblical divorce that you could

read to gain some insight into the various Christian views. One is “Divorce and Remarriage in the Church” by David Instone-Brewer. That’s the one that I read that really helped me understand a different perspective than I had grown up with. And another one is a newer book by Gretchen Baskerville, who we have had on the podcast a couple of times. It’s called “The Life-Saving Divorce.” And in chapter six of her book, she points out that there are three main Christian views on divorce. So let’s just go over those right now.

“The Permanence View” says that there are no acceptable reasons for divorce, and they use Genesis 2:24, Malachi 2:13-16, and Mark 10 to make their case. That’s the view that I grew up with, and that is the view of the church that I was in at the time of my divorce. Fun times, huh? “The New Testament Only View” says there are two reasons for divorce. Number one, adultery or sexual immorality, and number two, abandonment. And by abandonment they mean physical abandonment, not emotional abandonment. So you can emotionally abandon your partner, just don’t have sex with someone else and don’t actually leave the home. Now, they use the same verses that “The Permanence View” folks use, and then they add to that Matthew 5:31-32 and 1 Corinthians 7:15 to make their case. Now, “The Whole Bible View,” which is what I personally now believe is the Biblical view, gives four reasons for divorce. Number one, adultery or immorality, number two, physical neglect or abuse, number three, emotional neglect or abuse, and number four, abandonment. This view offers up all the same verses that the others do to make their case, but it also adds Exodus 21:10-11, Deuteronomy 21:11-14, and Matthew 19:8 to make their case. Now, according to “The Life-Saving Divorce,” this last view was common among the Puritans and English reformers and is held by many Protestant churches today.

I’m not going to get into this whole thing on this episode because Gretchen and David Instone-Brewer do a beautiful job in their books, and I really think that anyone who’s interested in learning more about this would benefit from reading those resources as you contemplate making your decision. Or even if you’re not planning on getting a divorce, or maybe you’re listening and you’re a people-helper and you have a great marriage and you just want to know how to advise other people or you want to know the perspectives, those are two really good books to educate yourself with.

Now, I would put your situation in the third category of emotional neglect. And if your husband refuses to acknowledge how his actions or his inactions have injured you emotionally or physically or spiritually, then that would be considered emotional abuse as well. Adam Young on his podcast “The Place We Find Ourselves” has a five-part series called “Engaging With Someone Who Has Harmed You.” And in that series, he shows how the Bible defined the wicked as one who doesn’t take responsibility for their

behavior or lack thereof. So only you know what living with your husband has meant for you, how it has injured you and caused you harm. So only you get to make that decision for yourself. But I no longer personally believe in a God Who sadistically encourages His daughters to live under the oppressive rule of wicked men, or of His sons to live under the oppressive rule of wicked women, for that matter. Some do believe in this kind of God, which is why it is not surprising that there is so much oppressive rule in Christian environments that promote this view of God. So, what do you believe? That's all that matters. What you believe is going to create results in your life.

As far as your husband having an anxiety disorder, it's my personal opinion that the reasons for someone's abusive or neglectful behavior are not as important as the behavior itself. We live in a world where there are mental health professionals who can help people with anxiety disorders. There is medication. I know people personally with anxiety disorders who are not neglectful or abusive towards their partners, and when they do have episodes where they are fragile and they fall apart, they are cognizant of how that affects their partner and they grieve that fallout.

And again, if you listen to that five-part series on "The Place We Find Ourselves" podcast, you will see how normal people, you know, your garden-variety sinner, sometimes behave badly. Of course we do. But what sets the normal sinner apart from the wicked is their understanding and sorrow over how their behavior has hurt those around them. And they are working to change and grow in those areas. So if your husband just wants to live in some kind of la-la land and ignore your pain, that indicates a lack of love and concern for the beloved. And that isn't okay. And if you've tried over and over again to get him to take responsibility and he won't do that, his pattern of behavior is to not do that, then yes, you may have biblical grounds for divorce. All right, let's listen to the next question.

LISTENER: Hi Natalie, I am divorced from an abuser and now I'm married to a healthy, Christian man. In my quest to help change the conversation in our churches to one of empathy, compassion, and Jesus-like, not Pharisee-like, behavior to victims, I am being met with a response that I was not prepared for. It usually goes something like this: "Well, because of your circumstance, you're probably more sensitive to these issues and you're probably not seeing it through a very healthy lens." My normal answer to this is "Now that I'm healed and on the other side of it, I actually look at my circumstance as knowledge gained by experience. And that's a good thing, because I can use it to help and comfort others." My question for you is this: is there a better response I could give or something you've said to people in church leadership positions when they seem to speak to me as though I have a scarlet letter on my chest? Thank

you!

NATALIE: At the time of this recording, I've just finished listening to that five-part series that I just told you about that Adam Young did on "Engaging with Someone Who Has Harmed You." And I just have to recommend it again here with this question, because one of the things that Adam Young points out is when you give a pearl to the wicked, they trample on it. It's one of the ways that you can know that you're dealing with the wicked and not just with your garden-variety sinner. I have found that many church leaders are, according to the Bible, actually wicked men. They are the Pharisees of our day who cannot see Christ, even when He's standing in front of them. So how does the Bible say we should respond to the wicked? Do we sit down and try to have a heart to heart with them because they're so open to hearing how they have harmed the children of God? No. I mean, the Bible says we don't have to avenge ourselves, the Lord will fight for us, don't give pearls to swine, don't associate with fools or answer fools. Why? Because one, it's a waste of time. And two, if you engage them, they're going to drag you under.

Now, I'm not saying "Don't say anything." I think we all have an opportunity to use our voices in our own corners of the world to the degree God gives each one of us to do so. But after you've said your piece, if they trample on your pearl, that's your signal as to who you're dealing with. And you can walk away in peace knowing that you have reached out in love to bring love and compassion to victims and to educate and to compel your brothers and sisters in Christ to join you in this ministry of love, and they said no. They not only said no, but they vilified and trampled on you.

They are the wicked. And the wicked are often hiding under cloaks of fraudulent light and fraudulent holiness. They are pretenders. If you keep trying to convince the wicked to love, you will not be available to go where Jesus is, because guess what? He isn't there among the wicked. He is in the ditches with the victims that have been kicked out. I believe the enemy wants us to stay engaged and distracted with the wicked, much like victims stay engaged and distracted by their wicked partners. Why? So that they are neutralized and rendered powerless to do anything else with their lives. So my advice is to speak once, and then walk away and brush the dust off your sandals. And then follow Jesus to the next place that needs your pearl.

Now, there are resources for people-helpers, pastors, and spiritual leaders to go and get educated on how to help abuse victims. One of them is the Give Her Wings Academy. And if you just Google it, "Give Her Wings Academy," it'll come right up. You can send an interested person to that website. They can sign up, they can invest some of their money. Their church can pay for them to take those courses and go through

that program. And then after they're done going through that program, they will be better equipped to help abuse survivors. All right, let's listen to the next question.

LISTENER: My question is, after thirty-eight years of marriage and not living with my husband for three years due to a sex addiction, and him still in his addiction, but he is seeing a counselor and he's in men's groups but he doesn't seem to be changing in that, I'm just wondering about... I just have a hard time wanting to divorce, maybe financially, but my main question is the family divisions. My husband's very "victim-y" and the kids communicate more with him and they give him lots of affection and kudos and stuff, and I'm looking like the bad person because I asked him to move out. So how do you handle family divisions, and what to do when you don't feel like you're ready to divorce?

NATALIE: Okay, I would ask myself, "Where do I want to be five years from now?" And then I would ask, "What would I need to do now to get me where I want to be in five years?" See, your husband likes to be the victim. And he relies on externals, he relies on other people and outside circumstances, to solve for his pain. He is powerless because of this, and he's not going to go anywhere. He's always going to be an addict because, in his mind, nothing is his responsibility. He's just hopeless to do anything but be carried along with whatever life offers him, like sex. And because he plays his role so well, and his kids have grown up thinking, "This is what life is. This is who dads are. They play the roles they have also been programmed to play.

Now, you've upset the apple cart by refusing to play your role, by starting to change your role. And Adam Young (I'm just going to bring him up again) in his podcast series says that wherever you see love at work, you're going to see the status quo disrupted. So you, in love, trying to change things, trying to help him, have disrupted the status quo. But there is a price to pay for that. And you need to ask yourself if you are willing to pay that price. Your family has forfeited their personal power. But that doesn't mean that you have to. You can be the catalyst for change if change is to be had. And again, the change is not necessarily good change. As far as good change, what I mean by that is that it doesn't mean that everything is going to have this beautiful, happy ending and he's not going to be an addict anymore and you guys are going to have this great marriage and everyone's going to be happy and go flying off into the sunset. The change could be that you end up getting divorced because he doubles down, he gets worse or stays the same, and all the kids get worse or stay the same. The point is, change will happen as you change your role.

Now I will say this, though. Being separated and living in that limbo land which you've said you've been living in for three years keeps everyone in limbo land. And there is a

time for that. There's a time for separation and trying to figure out "What are my next steps?" And then there is a time to make a choice. Either stay and be all in on the relationship or leave. And that's why I asked you to ask yourself that question about "Where do I want to be five years from now?" and "Who do I want to be? What do I want to be doing?" and so on. It's so important that you ask that, because your future self is depending on you to make her life what it's going to be, so you need to decide where you want to head.

Not only that, but your kids will only be able to move forward themselves when you have moved forward, either back into the relationship, move forward by going back into the relationship with your husband, or move forward by getting out of it completely. I've seen this over and over again: kids, even adult kids, really struggle with the separation thing. They hold out hope that their parents will get back together, and they will use manipulation and guilt-tripping to get their mom to change back to her prior role. Everyone likes the status quo. That's the human brain. That feels safe. That feels normal. When a woman divorces, though, and moves on, that provides the closure that kids need. And then they are able to heal and move on as well.

It's like watching a loved one die of a long, drawn-out illness. It's horrific, but the healing doesn't begin until the person has died. While they are still dying, there is tremendous tension, there is irrational hope, there is bargaining and begging God, there is refusal to accept reality, there is deep dread of the future. But when the loved one has died, there is no more fighting or resisting reality. I mean, you can. That's part of the grief process, but eventually that grief process can begin to do its cleansing work and the healing begins.

Now, I do not tell women what to do. But I think you asked this question because you are weary of living in limbo land, as I would be if I'd been living in that for three years. I did it for almost two years, and eventually I just had to decide, and that's what I did. I went to a hotel, I read through twenty years of journals, I asked myself "Where do I want to be five years from now?" I wrote down what my life would look like five years from now if I stayed and what my life would look like five years from now if I divorced, and I decided I wanted my life to look like what it would look like if I divorced. I know you're in this place where you dread what's going to happen if you leave him for good, but guess what? It's already happening, anyway.

There is hope on the other side, though. But there is only agony as long as you stay in limbo land. If you want to stay there, you totally can, and stay there as long as you need to. But I would definitely list out all of my reasons for living there, and then I would really want to like my reasons, okay? Remember that you were given your life to live.

You were not given your kids' lives, and your kids were not given your life. If your kids end up with divorced parents, they're going to experience something that half the world's population has experienced, maybe more than half. And they, just like all the millions, billions of people, really, will survive it.

Now, what they make it mean for them is going to impact their lives, not the divorce itself. Let me say that again: the divorce is not going to make or break their lives. Only what they choose to make it mean will impact the results for each one of them. This is why you see some adult kids do really well, and some don't. They have the same parents, the same divorce experience, but different results in each child's life. That's because each child is going to make it mean something different, and that is not your responsibility. That is part of their personal life journey. If they want to make it mean that mom is the bad guy, what if we just give them permission to believe that? It's okay. A lot of people thought Jesus was a bad guy too, and He just kept loving them anyway. He knew Who He was, that's what was important. Do you know who you are? That is the most important thing for you to get clear in your mind. The best way that we influence our children, whether they are young or old, is by modeling healthy emotional adulthood for them, and the only way to do that is to do our own work on ourselves and let go of trying to control everyone else and their experience of everything.

If you're not already in the Flying Free Program, I invite you to join us there to do this work. This is the work we do in the program. I'd love to see you learn how to differentiate yourself from your kids so that you can tolerate their disapproval and love them and love yourself from a clean space. Okay, you guys. That's all I have for you today. Thank you so much for listening, and until next time, fly free.