

HOW DO YOU BREAK THE CYCLE OF EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL ABUSE?

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 157 of the Flying Free Podcast. Thank you so much for being a listener. Some of you have been listening to this podcast from the very beginning. That's been over three years now. And some of you started listening recently, but maybe you've been binge listening and catching up, which I think is so awesome. I know it's because this resource has been helping you unhook from not only abusive thinking but also, and more importantly, an abusive God, made in the image of the men and women who are relentlessly abusing you both emotionally and spiritually. I think that's the thing that motivates me the most, is pulling back the curtain on that demigod, because as long as we're worshipping at that altar, we are unable to see and experience the love of the Creator of the universe, who is nothing like that little god.

One of our recent listeners put it this way in her review on Apple Podcasts: "I just listened to the two-part series on changing your role." (This would be episodes 146 and 147.) "It's amazing how well it explained my childhood growing up in a legalistic church. I am thankful, because this has helped me grit it all out in my mind so I don't associate the abuse I experienced as coming from God. It came from a narcissistic, misrepresented christ. Thank you for this wonderful explanation."

How do you feel about this podcast and our mission to set women free from a false god so they can get to know their Creator who views them with love and honor, so they can then worship that Creator with a whole heart from that safe space of freedom? If you have benefited from this podcast and its mission, I encourage you to leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. The link will be provided in the show notes. Your rating and review gives credibility to this podcast so others will take a chance on it and hopefully discover truths that will give them hope and set them free.

Today, I'd like to answer a question I get a lot from women who have woken up to the fact that they are in an abusive relationship, but now they're looking around at the landscape of their life and wondering what to do about it. They will ask, "How do I break this cycle of emotional and spiritual abuse?" Underneath this question is the assumption that to break the cycle of emotional and spiritual abuse is to stop it from happening. I hear another version of this question from women who are no longer in their abusive relationship but want to help others, and specifically, they want to help

other churches understand what emotional and spiritual abuse is so they can help stop it. And wouldn't that be fabulous if we could collectively stop abuse? I mean, just eradicate it from our churches and homes? If only we could educate enough people, then it would stop! Just think of how the Gospel could be so much more effective if churches and Christians were educated and aware and full of compassion and advocacy for the lives of the weak and vulnerable ones amongst us. If only Christians were leading the way and raising the status of women to their rightful place in the eyes of God as equals, that we might bring about the reality in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Am I right? Let's break this cycle, people!

I wish it could be that way. But that's not how the Creator works in this universe. He modeled how He works in the life of Jesus Christ, and how did Jesus break the cycle? Did He overthrow the Roman government? No ma'am, He did not. And that ticked off some of His more skeptical followers. So, what did He do? He was Himself. He said it Himself: "I AM." And that single statement knocked Roman soldiers off their feet when they came to arrest Him. I think there's a powerful truth in this. And then He told His followers before He went to be with God, He told His followers to go and do likewise, to follow His example. To be the hands and feet of God Himself in this world, just as He was. He simply was Himself. And remember, God is love. So, He was the embodiment of love.

Now, who did He love? Everyone! But did He show that love to everyone in the same way? No. He loved the religious elite by telling them the truth. They were, according to His words, a brood of vipers. They were like white-washed tombs, looking all clean and pretty on the outside, but hiding dead man's bones on the inside, which was an affront to them because these were Jewish leaders, and dead men's bones were considered dirty. These leaders were stealing the freedom, autonomy, and voices from the people. Now, that right there is the spirit of the antichrist, meaning, the opposite of Christ. Jesus Christ Himself loved the weak and the vulnerable and the disenfranchised and the sick by healing them and giving them back their freedom, autonomy, and voices. And that is how He broke the cycle.

Now here we are, two-thousand years later, and we see some pretty amazing changes in the world because of His love. He said Himself it would be like yeast in a lump of dough, tiny little yeast crystals that would eventually leaven the whole dough ball. Eventually. He said it would be like a mustard seed, which is the tiniest of all seeds, yet grows a very large tree. So tiny seed, large tree. But it takes time, and time it has taken, right? So should we expect anything less? The seeds we plant today, the truths we tell today, the stand we make today, will continue to cause a ripple effect in the world long

after we're gone. But we most likely will not see all of those results in our lifetime. We need to keep planting these seeds in faith.

What does this look like? Well, it starts with setting one person free. It starts with healing one person. It starts with rescuing one person. Do you know who that person is? It's you. Your first order of business is to set yourself free, to renew your mind in the truth, and to extricate yourself from abuse. For many of you, that has meant getting therapy, joining the Flying Free Sisterhood, leaving an abusive church, divorcing an abusive husband, or perhaps staying with him and detaching emotionally and spiritually from his opinions about you, gaining employment, reading good books, throwing away bad ones, moving from a big house to a small apartment, going back to school, listening to empowering music, exercising, eating better, starting a business, or starting a new job. And then, once you are free and living a free life, it might look like quiet conversations with your hairstylist, sharing your story with a neighbor, inviting a fellow survivor over to celebrate Thanksgiving with you, praying for your survivor friends online, joining a support group where you can share your wisdom and glean from the wisdom of others, donating money to your local domestic violence center, sharing a good article on your Facebook wall, helping those who reach out to you in your corner of the world, or starting a Bible study.

But here's what breaking the cycle does not look like: chasing after abusers and abusive leaders and abusive institutions and begging them to listen and change. That never works, people. We can't have influence on anyone who is in movement away from us, and I promise that abusive people and institutions are not in movement toward you. They are not interested in learning and growing because to do that, they first have to acknowledge that something is fundamentally wrong with their behavior, and they cannot do that. That's like expecting a giraffe to make their neck shorter. That's not possible. It's a giraffe. Long necks are just part of the gig for them. Now, this doesn't mean that there are not rare exceptions. But if I had a nickel for every survivor who banked on their husband or their church being that rare exception and then sadly discovering they were surrounded by giraffes, I'd be a rich woman. Okay, maybe not rich, but I'd have a very large jar full of nickels.

Now, another way we think of breaking the cycle of abuse is by breaking the generational cycle, because abuse runs in families, which makes sense when you think about it. You've got an abusive dad, and some of the kids are going to grow up like dad and be abusive, and some of them are going to grow up like mom and be a future victim. Why? Because it's all they've ever known. It's normal to them. It's in their brain's programming, after all. But in my experience and from what I've observed, when a woman breaks the cycle in her own mind and in her own life, she begins to set a new

precedence. She interrupts that programming not only for herself, but for anyone who is in close proximity to her, whether it's her kids, her friends, her extended family, and so forth. When they see her changing, they are introduced by osmosis to her new ideas. Some will, of course, react poorly to these new ideas and want to take back control of her life in some way. It's very uncomfortable for humans, all of us, to see someone stepping out of our own programming for how they should behave. So humans, we try to get that person to change back to the way they were before. But some people are going to be more open to these new ideas that you have, and they will slowly begin to change themselves. Do you see how the leaven is beginning to leaven the loaf slowly over time?

So again, breaking the generational cycle of abuse begins with you. Now, if you're doing it in order to get others to change, like, that's your main motivation, that's not going to work. That's not authentic growth. That's just more of us trying to control our outward circumstances so that we can feel good. We do that when we think everyone has to think the way we think and do what we're doing in order for us to believe that we're making a difference or having an impact. But honestly, that's no different from what they're doing when they're trying to control and manipulate us to do and think what they do and think. Our power is never going to lie in changing other people. It's always and only going to lie in changing ourselves and being a healthy, self-differentiated human being with good boundaries. We have to want the change for ourselves. And then any influence that we have on other people, kind of by default, is just the natural outcome or ripple effect of our own change. Honestly, if you want to have influence and impact in the world, this is how you do it. This is how Jesus did it. Together, as we all work on our own selves, we will collectively leaven the dough, and that will ultimately change the world.

I hope that helps just a little bit to lighten your emotional and spiritual load. As a Christian, I've always felt pressure to change the lives of everyone around me, as if I wasn't an effective or faithful Christian unless I was doing my part to convert or grow more Christians. Man, that's a heavy load to bear, and that's not the yoke that Jesus gave to us. He gave us one responsibility, and that is to keep our own eyes on Him. Simple. Focused. And when we do that, we are filled up and naturally overflow with love for others. And of course, love never fails. Thank you for listening, and until next time, fly free.