

TEN THOUGHTS CONFIDENT WOMEN THINK WHEN THEIR HUSBANDS ACT LIKE JERKS

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 159 of the Flying Free Podcast. I've decided to call this podcast, "Ten Thoughts That Confident Women Think When Their Husbands Act Like Jerks," and basically, I started with ten thoughts that I remember thinking when I was married to my ex husband, that I remember thinking on a regular basis, and how I've changed my thinking since that time, or how I would think about things now if I was still living with him. Okay? Now, usually when I do a podcast episode and it's just me and I'm not interviewing anybody, I script it out quite a bit, most of the time. This one I decided not to script out, but I wrote some notes. One of the reasons I script things out is because I tend to get on a roll with things... I shouldn't say a roll. I start going down rabbit trails, I guess. And so those of you who know me best know this about me. By the time we're all done with the rabbit trails, we're a long ways away from where we began. And it's kind of fun, but for these podcast episodes, I kind of like to try to keep them to a half an hour or less. So anyway, we're going to see what happens here, but I have ten things I want to share and hopefully we'll get to all of them in the next thirty minutes.

First of all, I also want to say that the reason that I called it "Ten Thoughts Confident Women Think When Their Husbands Act Like Jerks" isn't because I'm trying to minimize abuse. I think that there are a lot of women who are actually in abusive relationships and they don't know it. They would probably frame it like this: "Well, I just have a husband and he's a jerk sometimes." But they don't actually understand that he's actually being abusive. His behavior is abusive. Now, we can all be jerks sometimes, right? Not that there's nothing wrong with that. There's something wrong with that. But it's just part of human nature to be jerky sometimes, right? But here's when it goes into the abusive category: when someone is being a jerk on a regular basis and they don't ever acknowledge it or see it or they basically blame shift it and put all the responsibility for their jerkiness on the person that they're being a jerk to. We're not going to talk about that here. We've talked about that in a million other places. So we're just going to basically reframe some different thoughts.

So here's the first thought that I had: "He can't see the truth about who I am." Let me back up a second. Let's say that your husband just was mean to you, okay? And said and told you things and tried to tell you who you were and it wasn't good, alright? Your

knee-jerk thought might be, “Well, he can’t see the truth about who I am. And if he can’t see it, maybe there really is something wrong with me. So I better defend myself. I better stick up for myself.” And then you start arguing. The feeling that you have in your body is shame. And then you start arguing and defending yourself, which never works, okay?

If we’re going to embody this feeling of confidence and be grounded in who we are and self-differentiated, here’s a different thought we could have in that situation: “Well look at him, being all him. I get to be all me.” Now, a thought like that wouldn’t create that feeling of shame. It would probably create a feeling of being empowered. And when you feel empowered, you’re going to show up differently. First of all, why would you argue with someone? They’re just being themselves. “He’s just being himself. Why do I have to argue with that? Yes, he’s accusing me of this, that, and the other thing, but that’s just what he does. It’s not who I am. And so I don’t have any need to defend myself.”

It would be like if someone said to you (I’ve done this illustration in my programs), “Your blue hair is so ugly. Oh my word!” and you didn’t have blue hair. Would you get all defensive and be like, “Well, I mean, I like it! I don’t know what’s wrong with it. Blue hair is popular right now. Why don’t you like it?” You wouldn’t get defensive, you wouldn’t try to argue. You’d just be like, “Okay, there’s something wrong with him. He thinks I have blue hair and clearly I don’t.” We only get defensive if we think that there’s some kind of level of truth, if our brain thinks, “Ooo, he found me out. He knows the truth about me now,” because we think on some level inside of ourselves that what he’s saying is actually true. This is why it’s so important to do our own healing work so we can get to the place where it’s like, “Well, I don’t have blue hair, so if anyone’s crazy, it’s him.”

Alright, here’s another one. Let’s say that he just got yelled at by his boss and he comes home and he’s in a really bad mood. Our knee-jerk thought might be, “Argh, how can I help him feel better so I can feel like a good wife?” When we have that thought we might actually feel kind of guilty, like we did something wrong, you know, that he’s feeling so bad that he got yelled at by his boss. I don’t know why we feel like this, you guys, but this is what happens. This is what we do, okay?

But what if we had this thought: “My husband is having a human experience. I mean, think about it. A lot of people get yelled at by their bosses or have problems at work. Why should he be any different? It isn’t my job to fix that for him. It’s not my job. That’s his human experience that he’s having. He can go to therapy; he can take a walk; he can listen to music. It’s his job to fix himself, not my job.” And then that’s going to create a feeling of peace in our body. It doesn’t mean it’s not uncomfortable. It’s just that we

don't feel this guilt or feeling like we have to fix it.

Okay, number three. Let's say that he is stomping around and just being all cranky. Our thought might be, "He's in a sour mood. I must have done something wrong. How can I make him happy?" This is kind of like the last one: "How can I make him happy so I can feel like a good wife again?" I don't know about you guys, but I always thought that if my husband wasn't happy that I was failing somehow as a wife. It was my job to make him happy. And then the feeling that would create in my body is guilt.

But what if instead of thinking that thought, what if we had this thought: "I'm just going to give my husband permission to manage his own emotions. I'll just give him permission to manage his own emotions." You guys, these thoughts, they sound so simple. But if your brain will buy into them, they really will get you off the hook in so many ways. Then the feeling that this thought could create for you is just again, peace.

Okay, let's do another one, number four. We all do dumb things, but let's say he does something dumb and he's being belligerent and stubborn and thinking that he knows everything and in that attitude, he actually makes a huge, colossal mistake, and you and your kids have to suffer for it. You might have this thought: "He is so screwed up. He's a toxic piece of shinola." And when you have that thought, you feel angry in your body.

Here's an alternative thought: "My husband has a fascinating human brain that does what human brains do when they are unmanaged and stuck in emotional childhood. And I can't help him with that. My power lies in working on my own fascinating brain and growing into emotional adulthood myself. And from that place, I can decide if I want to be with someone else who refuses to grow." That's a long thought, alright? You might want to chew on that one for a while, because these aren't just thoughts that you just randomly pick out of the sky. We want to actually rewire our brains to go to these places on a regular basis so that this becomes how we think. This becomes who we are. It becomes woven into the fabric of our being. And then, when we think this way, instead of feeling angry, we might feel acceptance.

Now, it might take us a while. I'm not saying that we just all of a sudden, "Oh, I just go from angry to total and pure acceptance. It's just amazing." It doesn't actually work quite that way. But we can move in that direction, and that's what we're trying to do. And it also doesn't mean that you are not going to feel angry about the fall out or the ways that you and your kids have to deal with the consequences of some of his choices. But remember, this is why so many women finally decide that the consequences of his choices are outweighing the consequences of possibly leaving him for good.

When you get to this place of acceptance, oh my gosh you guys, there is so much power in acceptance. When you get to this place of acceptance, then you can look around you, without your amygdala being triggered, you can look around you at the landscape of your situation and your circumstances and your life, and you can make a decision from a place of understanding what your reality is rather than from this place of “Well, I don’t know. What if this could happen and what if that could happen?” and all of this kind of wishful, magical thinking, alright? Which really keeps us very confused and stuck and in total indecision. And also not accepting reality, because what we’re doing is we’re saying, “Well, I don’t know if that’s really true. I don’t know if I should accept that because it might not be true. He might change someday. You know? He might. It’s been thirty-five years, but you never know. We could wake up tomorrow and he could be a brand-new man.” It’s better to go to a place of acceptance. This is who he is. If you’re going to be married to someone like this, this is the gig. And you can be all in on the gig, that’s totally okay. But just know that that’s what it is.

Alright, let’s do another one, number five. Let’s say that he has just told you what a terrible person you are and that you continuously fail him in all these different ways. And your knee-jerk, default thought is, “I must be what he says I am.” And then the feeling in your body is again, shame. We feel a lot of shame as survivors, okay? These are the messages that we’re getting.

But what if we could change that thought to, “This other person’s behavior only gives me information about him and where he is at in his emotional maturity, in his belief system, in all the things. Just information about him. That’s all it gives me. It doesn’t say anything about me, because me and my thoughts and my emotions and my behavior is what’s going to give information about me, not his thoughts and his behavior.” Now when we get to that place, that’s unhooking ourselves from his universe and then we can feel in our bodies, instead of shame, we can feel peace.

Okay, number six. This is a thought I had: “Well, he’s my husband, so he must know best. It’s my job to give him all the credibility, and I can’t give myself the credibility because my heart is deceitful and who can know it, right?” And then you feel shame in your body.

But what if we could reframe that sentence or that thought into something like this: “He is my husband, but he doesn’t know what’s best all the time. He is pretending that I am a Lego character in his universe. He’s moving me around and pretending that he can control me like a little Lego character. But I’m not a Lego character. I am me. I’m an adult woman. So that means that I have the opportunity, privilege, and responsibility to define and choose who I will be and how I will show up in the real universe, not in his

little universe in between his ears.” And then when I’m thinking that way and having those thoughts, I’m feeling empowered in my body.

Now notice how in all of these examples he gets to be the same person. He gets to keep showing up the same ways that he always shows up. You get to change how you feel about it based on what you’re making all of it mean for you. And by the way, next week I’m going to be doing a podcast episode all on the model, which is the tool I teach in my programs. And I’m going to just do a deep dive into the model next week. So stay tuned. Next week we’ll be taking all of this apart, how I do this, and I’ll teach you how you can do it for yourself.

Number seven. Let’s say that your husband focuses on the negative. Actually, human brains usually do focus on the negative because we’re on the lookout for danger and bad things, and that’s how the human brain is wired to protect itself. But let’s say that he always focuses on the negative about you. And your thought is, “He doesn’t appreciate anything I do. I try so hard and he just never sees any of the good, and he should.” Actually, that “he should” part is going to create some anger and indignation, but just the part where “I try so hard and he never sees any of the good” might create a feeling of sadness in your body.

But what if you reframed it like this: “You know, he’s partly right about me. There are some negative things about me. Okay. I’ll own it. I’m fifty-fifty. Fifty percent of the time I’m pretty amazing. And fifty percent of the time, not so much. Now, his brain wants to focus on the not-so-much, but I can focus on the amazing.” And then the feeling that’s going to create inside of you is... it’s going to create a little bit of peace but also some love for yourself, right? Right.

Number eight. Let’s say he calls you names. Some of you guys, you have husbands who are calling you some pretty bad names, and your knee-jerk thought in your brain might be, “He must be right. Maybe I am those names that he calls me.” Or “I’m not worthy.” And the feeling in your body, then, is going to be that feeling of worthlessness.

But here’s a way you can reframe that. You can say to yourself, “He can verbally knock me down. He can throw out words that verbally knock me down. But I will get up again and again and again because I am titanium.” There’s a song, oh my gosh, I’m not going to remember. Who is that by?

Okay, I had to pause it and go look this up. It’s by David... I’m going to massacre his name. Guetta. I don’t know how to say that. I’m so naive when it comes to pop culture. I actually have a Spotify playlist called “Flying Free” if you’re interested and I have this

song on that playlist. The words go, “You shout it out but I can’t hear a word you say. I’m talking loud, not saying much. I’m criticized, but all your bullets ricochet. Shoot me down, but I get up. I’m bulletproof, nothing to lose. Fire away, fire away, ricochet. You take your aim, fire away, fire away. You shoot me down but I won’t fall. I am titanium. Cut me down, but it’s you who’ll have further to fall. Ghost town and haunted love. Raise your voice. Sticks and stones may break my bones. Talking loud, not saying much.” And then the chorus again: “I’m bulletproof, nothing to lose, fire away, fire away, ricochet.” Anyway, so there you go. “Titanium.” And I love songs like that.

There’s some good Christian songs on that playlist and then there’s also some good secular songs on that playlist that are really empowering. I created that playlist while I was going through my whole situation and I built it over several years. So you’ll see at the very beginning of the playlist it’s all these Christian songs because I wouldn’t listen to secular music at the very beginning. So you’ll see all these Christian songs that I was listening to. And then you’ll see I slowly start listening to some other things that helped me to feel more empowered, and the playlist kind of morphs and I bring in some other stuff. So if you’re interested, go over to Spotify. It’s just called “Flying Free.”

Number nine. Let’s say that he’s yelling at you and he’s just screaming at you and you’re just standing there and you think the thought, “I have to stay and listen to him finish yelling, otherwise I’m not being polite.” Have you ever thought that? I mean, you might not even realize that that’s what you’re thinking, but that’s what you’re thinking, like, “I’m a polite person, so I gotta stay and listen to him finish his tirade.” And your feeling might be frustrated. I don’t know. I’m just guessing, okay?

But a different thought we could have is, “I choose not to be with him when he is verbally throwing up on me. I don’t have to be with him when he is verbally throwing up. It’s not impolite to leave the room when someone is doing that.” It’s impolite to you. You’re disrespecting yourself, right, not disrespecting him. And then the feeling that would create in you would be empowerment, you’re more empowered.

And then finally, here’s the tenth one: “He throws me under the bus because I don’t deserve to be treated with respect. Why would anyone love me? I’m not very lovable.” When you have that thought your feeling in your body is again, shame.

And here’s a different thought: “My husband doesn’t have my back, it’s true. But I do. I have my own back.” And then you have this feeling of empowerment. I’ve told this story a million times, but I did this. I looked in the mirror one day and said, “I’m going to have your back.” I won’t go into it. I think I’ve shared that story so many times I feel like everyone’s rolling their eyes when I say it again. But it really was a defining moment in

my life because it really did create this huge shift in my body and in my brain, and it was one of those times that I rewired instantly. It's not going to work for everyone. But for me, I was just at a place where I was ready to hear that. I was ready to say it, and I was ready to hear it, and I was ready to live into that. And I looked in the mirror and said "Natalie, I've got you. I am never going to throw you under the bus again. I am going to have your back. Even if you make a mistake, I'm still going to have your back. And it doesn't matter if the whole world throws you under the bus. I've got you."

And I really did feel empowered, and I do. I have my own back now. Even when I make mistakes (and I certainly have had my share of making mistakes, you guys), and I screw something up in one of my relationships with my kids or my husband or I do something that I look back and, I'm like, "You know, I'm not super proud of that. I didn't handle that very well. I wish I would have handled that better," I still will have my own back. Even while I go and apologize to the other person, I will say to myself "You know, it's okay. It's okay to make mistakes. Apologize, make it right, make restitution that you need to make, and then move on."

Because it's okay to be human. It's okay to make mistakes. It's okay not to be perfect. I don't have to be a perfect mother. I can be a fifty-fifty mom. That's normal. That's good. That's healthy. A fifty-fifty mom. My kids don't have to be perfect kids. They can be fifty-fifty kids. My marriage doesn't have to be perfect. It can be a fifty-fifty marriage. It can not be abusive. If I was in an abusive marriage, I'd be leaving it. My husband right now is not abusive at all, okay? He's normal. But he's not perfect. And I can have a fifty-fifty life. My life doesn't have to be perfect. My home doesn't have to be perfect. I don't strive for that anymore, because if I was striving for all of that perfection, I would have to be throwing myself under the bus every day on a regular basis like I used to because I just couldn't live up to that. We just can't. Most of the pain in our lives is the pressure we put on ourselves. We think it's our husband, and it is painful, trust me, that's he's doing that too, but if you can at least lift off the burden of the pressure that you're putting on yourself, then the pressure that your husband puts on you will be all on him. It's like, he can put lots of pressure on you to be perfect, but if you don't care, then it doesn't really matter.

In our private forum, someone had said that her husband always made this certain meal over the holidays, and he's the one who made it. And this holiday, he was very upset and he was pouting and he decided to watch TV for three days in a row and then she ended up having to be the one to get everything ready for this holiday. And she was just exhausted and wiped out. I told her in the forum, "You're putting all this pressure on yourself. All you have to do is say 'Hey, it's totally okay. You don't want to make the beef? I'm all in on cereal. Let's just have cereal for the holiday.' Right? Because why not?"

Who says it has to be perfect? Who says there has to be beef? Just make cereal. If he's responsible for making the beef and he chooses not to, you don't have to pick up that responsibility. You can just let him off the hook and go, 'It's totally fine. We'll just have cereal. What do you want, Cheerios or Frosted Shredded Wheat?'"

That's what I would do now. But I'm not in that place anymore. But I'm just saying, if we take off this pressure to be perfect and to have all of our i's dotted and our t's crossed, we just take that pressure off, we will be halfway there, you guys. Halfway there. Now, the rest of the way there, that's not necessarily under our control because we can't control another person, but anyway. This is what I do in the programs. I help women at least get half-way there, and then they can decide what to do with the rest of it. And that's all I have for you today. I guess I didn't riff too much. We stayed pretty focused, didn't we? Alright you guys, thanks so much for listening. Until next time, fly free.