

I CAN'T BE PERFECT ENOUGH FOR MY HUSBAND

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 16 of the Flying Free Podcast. Rachel is with me today. Hello, Rachel.

RACHEL: Hi. I'm so glad we could finally get connected and sit down for another episode.

NATALIE: Yes. We were just talking just a couple minutes ago and just catching up on our lives, and what we're going to be talking about today is... We meant to talk about this a long time ago, but a few weeks ago I wrote a blog article responding to an article that desiringgod.org had put out about... The name of it was... Oh my goodness. I have to try to find it.

RACHEL: Well, the name of the Desiring God article is "We Can't Grieve However We Want," and the name of your article is "The Most Effective Spiritual Abuse Involves a Lot of Truth and a Little Lie."

NATALIE: Thank you, Rachel. Okay, so if you want to look up the article that desiringgod.org wrote, you'd look up the name of that — "We Can't Grieve However We Want" by desiringgod.org — and you could read it. Trigger warning. Just be prepared to feel a little bit ill when you read it. And then I wrote an answer article, but Rachel and I want to talk more about this, because this whole idea of making extra rules or feeling like there's a certain way to do things that are extra biblical, it's not in the Bible... Like for example, this one was talking about grieving as if there is a specific way that we should grieve. It's very shaming then if you don't grieve the way person "A" says you're supposed to grieve.

And then the other problem that you run into is that as many different people as there are living on this earth, they're all going to have their own grid for how you should do certain things. So who are you going to follow? And the ones that are Christians are going to say, "Well, I believe the Bible says this." "Well, I believe the Bible says this." And they're going to pull out their verses to back up their own particular view.

And then you're left feeling... How many times, Rachel, have you felt, "Well, which way is

the right way?" Because you have different friends. Some friends are homeschooling, some friends are doing co-ops, some friends have public school kids. And you're just like, "Well, which way is the best way to educate my children?" And they all have biblical reasons for why they're doing what they're doing, and you're trying to figure out based on what other people are doing rather than doing it the way that God's calling you to do it and using your own wisdom.

And I wanted to bring up one more thing and then Rachel, I'm going to have you share your perspective here. But I put this quote in the blog article. It's by C.S. Lewis, and it says, "It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true Word of God." This comes from John chapter one, very first couple of verses in John chapter one. "The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him," to Jesus, okay? Jesus Christ. He's the center of all. "We must not use the Bible as a sort of encyclopedia out of which texts can be taken for use as weapons," and that's what people do. They take texts out of context or they take texts to prove their point, and they use it to beat up other people who have a different perspective or who have a different idea.

And Jesus, His life over and over again showed how he wasn't interested in rules of men. He was interested in living a life of love towards human beings, individuals. He looked at the Samaritan woman as an individual, not as a part of a group, or He didn't put her in a box of, "She belongs to this box of people over here," and He didn't do that. He looked at her as a person. He looked at her specific, individual life and her circumstances and her experiences, and He loved her right where she was at. Or like the man with the withered hand. He loved that man right where he was at, and He healed that man's hand. It didn't matter if it was on the Sabbath or who was looking or what the rules were. He cared about that man, that human being, that life.

That's what Jesus was and that He was and is the Word of God. And if we are followers of Him, we will follow His example and we will live that kind of life rather than a life that's constantly beating other people up with, "Well, I say the Bible says this, and if you don't do it, then you get kicked out or you're not part of our group." So anyway, that's my little rant. So Rachel is a much more gentle and sweet and probably logical person than me. So why don't you give your position on this one thing?

RACHEL: Natalie, I have to admit, I don't feel very gentle right now. Because there are certain things that get me angry, and I will tell you that the biggest thing among those is when people put burdens on other people that keep them from God and keep them from knowing Jesus and living in His love. Because that's what that does in this article. There is a heaping of shame that is given. And everyone has grief in their life because that is the reality of living in this world. And when you feel that shame because you

haven't done it the "right way," as Desiring God says that you should, you feel separated from God. You feel like you can't even begin to approach the throne of grace because you are so mired, and it's these extra chains that are put on you.

And I can tell you that is the way that shame, living in that shame and those chains and that feeling of never being able to measure up, is the experience of living in an abusive marriage or living in an abusive situation. And I felt that. I've come to realize that recently with an encounter I had with my ex-husband where I was brought back to that feeling of shame and just utter separation from God.

And that is exactly where the devil wants us. He wants us not to live in the love of Jesus Christ and the grace that He gave us on the cross, that He provided for us. And the fact that he doesn't want us to live in the reality that we, because of Him, because we wear His sacrifice like a cloak, we can boldly approach the throne. He doesn't want us to do that. He wants us to live in the bondage of our sin and of our shame, and of the fact that we know that we will never measure up to who God is. He wants us there.

NATALIE: Yeah. I think that you brought up a really good point that when you look at these individual homes where you see emotional and spiritual abuse taking place, that is a microcosm of what's happening on a macro level in the church of Jesus Christ at large, but even more macro than that, in the spiritual world that we can't see. There is a spiritual battle going on between Jesus Christ and the enemy for the souls of people and for the souls of women and children. And wherever you see this kind of marginalizing that you see in racism and other kinds of things, you also see it in this whole gender thing with women being put into a status of... There's complete inequality. Women are put into the status of basically being children in their homes. So men who are doing this, or churches that are marginalizing women, they may not be able to articulate what they're doing. I don't think they're aware. Maybe some people are aware, but.

RACHEL: I don't think that they're aware. They're just living in deception and they don't know it.

NATALIE: They are. I think so. I think that they think that they're actually being benevolent and kind towards women and protective of women. It's like a mother protecting her child. "We need to protect these little children of ours, these little women of ours."

RACHEL: And not only the reason for that is because they don't understand the true heart of God, they're doing what it talks about in that C.S. Lewis quote, where they take

the verses and use them as something to... They're seeing the trees but not the forest. They don't see the heart of God and His purpose for humans.

NATALIE: Right, right. I believe that the Bible teaches that the purpose for men and women is to work together side by side to bring the gospel to the nations. And Satan has been able to successfully undermine half of the human race in that mission and also neutralize them so that they are not working together, helping one another, and being effective because they're so busy in-fighting and all of that kind of stuff.

And abuse in the home is just a picture of also what's happening on the bigger level in the church. I believe that if the church, if there was repentance and the men who are controlling and running the churches were able to see what they're doing and bring — instead of coddling women and treating them like children — bring them, raise them up to this, the place that God has them — God views women in a completely different way than how these men are viewing women — raise them up and let them be free to fulfill their God-given gifts and their God-given skill sets and talents, then what we would see, I believe, is we would see the true body of Christ in all of its fullness and wholeness reaching out to the world. And then the world is going to be drawn to the — not everyone — but the world, generally speaking, will be drawn to the love of Jesus Christ.

They don't see that. When they look at the church, they see misogyny, they see abuse, they see spiritual abuse. In America today, the evangelicals... I don't even call myself an evangelical anymore because of what that word is associated with in our country today. It stands for nothing that I stand for, and it is nothing of Jesus Christ. It is the anti-Christ, in my opinion, okay? And it presents as an angel of light, but it's not at all. Because it's not love. It's hatred. It's vile, judgmental hatred towards human beings, and that is not how Jesus Christ lived His life. That's not what He represented.

RACHEL: What's even worse, Natalie, is you're exactly right: It is vile, judgmental hatred towards human beings. And it's worse because it's in the name of Jesus. And they will say that all day long that they're just doing what the Bible says. And they follow the God of the Bible. But what they've done is they've looked at the Bible like a set of rules instead of as a way to find out who Jesus Christ is and God's plan for humanity. They're taking those verses out like they did in the Desiring God article on grief, the one verse in First Thessalonians, and he's made an entire dogma or doctrine out of it about how you're supposed to grieve, missing the entire heart of God's plan and purpose and love towards human beings that He created.

NATALIE: Yeah, it's absolutely insane. It's really insane. And tragic.

RACHEL: It makes me so angry, and it is such a lie. And Lord, Your will be done here and just come quickly Lord, because we need Your justice and we need Your truth. And every day I'm like, you know what? I just want God to come. I just want His kingdom here on earth. Because I just can't wait for the day that it is given and the truth is put before us.

And I want to talk about truth, Natalie, because the really destructive part of that article on Desiring God is this idea — and he doesn't come out and say it — but this idea that you've got to put on these behaviors because this is what God expects of you, even if it may not be the truth of your reality inside. So he expects that you're going to have this certain appearance. If you're grieving, you're going to have the same level of involvement in church. You're not going to have any disruption in the way that you care for other people or serve other people.

And that's the expectation that's established, even if that is far beyond your capacity inside because of the depths of your grief. And you have to pretend like that grief doesn't exist and you're not allowed to take it to God because you've got these things to do, right? And instead of being honest with God about how you've got these questions, you don't understand, things just are so topsy-turvy in your world — instead of being honest with God about how that's affecting you, you have to keep going and be a whitewashed tomb, have an appearance of godliness. And not real godliness, because your heart's not there.

And all the while you're feeling more and more distance from God because you have these chains of expectation on you. And these chains of expectation you think are what God expects of you. But in the meantime, your heart is further and further from Him because you're really living a lie.

NATALIE: Well, right. And when you perpetuate that kind of attitude amongst people... I mean, I went to a church where there was a feeling — not amongst everyone. Not everyone gave you this sense or this feeling — but there were people there where you felt like you had to be a certain way or look a certain way or have your kids look a certain way or else you would be viewed as not very spiritual or like a baby Christian or just as a less-than kind of a person. Your value really wasn't as good as maybe those who had a better appearance on the outside.

And what that does is that sets up an atmosphere of denial and cover-up and shame, and nothing good can thrive when you've got... In fact, I read somewhere that denial is the beginning of all pathology. So you've got a whole system that's pathological because it thrives on... Well, it's not thriving, but it's built on this foundation of denial of

reality.

RACHEL: Yes. We were made to live in truth. That is how God designed us. He did not design us to have to put on airs, to have a nice set of standards that we follow, but have a completely different reality inside. We are made to live in truth from the inside out. And you know what it reminds me of? I was just reading this morning in Galatians. Paul is having this really strong language for the Galatians because they had heard the truth and stepped into the truth and he had brought them into the gospel of the truth of Christ and then he'd left, right? And so he is writing to them because he's heard that they're going back to the old rituals, the old familiar ways that make them feel safe, like observing certain days as holy or whatever and following those rituals, circumcision, et cetera.

And he was rebuking them because they felt like that was going to bring them to God and that was what they needed to do. And he's saying, "No. Stop living like this." And he gets frustrated with them. He's saying, "People who are telling you 'You need to be circumcised,' they should just castrate themselves. Might as well, right, if they're going to do that." So he's saying "Stop. Stop following these false ways of thinking that you can get to God with these rituals and in these practices. Step into the love of Jesus. Wear Him like a cloak. Live in His mercy."

And it's just two separate things, two separate ways of thinking about things. And I think the way to really get into the love of God and to get step into that freedom is to start by being honest with God. So if you're stuck in the depths of grief, if your child died, if your marriage is a nightmare, even to the point where you somehow think that that was God's fault or you feel cut off from Him and you feel like you can't love Him because of this, start by being honest with Him about that. Because He will draw you in. He's going to start from that point and He's going to start revealing His truth to you.

And it is scary because a lot of times we don't even know the truth about ourselves. We don't know what's going on at the core of ourselves. It requires some really scary introspection and getting in touch with painful feelings. But we're not going to heal, we're not going to really live in God's love if we don't start with the truth. As ugly, as much as we don't want it to be the truth, as horrifying and as scary as it could be, we're not going to heal until we start with the truth.

NATALIE: Right. Well, and also, we're not going to be able to connect with other people on a deep, intimate, meaningful level if we aren't willing to go to those deep places inside of ourselves, because everyone is walking around with shame. And the only way to expose that and to deal with it is to face it and to accept who we are as human

beings before God, because He accepts us that way. But if we can't be honest about the fact that we struggle with anger, that we struggle with even feelings or wishes that someone that is hurting us would just die, you know? I talked to so many women who really struggle with that. "I just wish he was dead and I feel so horrible. What do I do with all of these intense feelings?" You know, if they were to share that in some of their churches or with some of their people... Well, some of them have, and they're castrated for that. You know, you're not allowed to have real thoughts.

RACHEL: Yep. "You better get in line. You better get in line, right? You better start putting these rituals on. Better go get circumcised." That's basically what it is, okay?

NATALIE: Right. Here's the secret, though, Rachel: Those of you who are listening, think of someone that you've told something really hard and then you've been judged for it. You've been told, "Well, you could have done this, and here's what I do, and why didn't you do this, and blah, blah, blah, blah." Whoever told you those things, you might look at that person and think, "Oh man," you know? You might feel shame because you think, "Well, I just had this problem but they obviously don't, and they have their life together and they know the answers and I don't." Here's a little secret: They don't know the answers. They are just as full of shame inside. In fact, the fact that they're judging you and heaping shame upon you is a 100% indicator that they have deep shame inside of themselves.

And the only way that they know to... Oh, what is...? I know I'm going to say this word wrong. Assuage? Assuage?

RACHEL: Assuage.

NATALIE: Assuage. Okay. Thank you. See, I'm just a normal person, alright? I didn't know how to say that word. Assuage. Assuage, okay? The only way that they can assuage... That just doesn't sound right.

RACHEL: I know, now it doesn't.

NATALIE: I know.

RACHEL: Now it doesn't, Natalie!

NATALIE: I remember being a little girl and saying my name over and over again and going, "Is that real?"

RACHEL: Real-life people don't say that word. We only read it.

NATALIE: I know. You're right!

RACHEL: We've never really had to say it out loud before. I know exactly the word you're saying.

NATALIE: Oh my word. Okay. We are totally going to leave that in there because this is real stuff, okay?

RACHEL: This is real.

NATALIE: We are not going to hide. I refuse to hide my ignorance. Okay, so anyway, assuage. The only way that they're able to assuage that feeling of shame in themselves is to heap it on somebody else or to feel like, "Well, I'm better than them because at least I've got this area together."

Now, they might have that area together, but they might not, and for sure they've got other areas that they don't have together. So you have to remember that. Anyone who looks at you and says horrible things to you about your Christianity... And a lot of you have had people say things like that because when you stand up to abuse, you will have Christians who will look you in the eye and tell you you're not even a Christian, and they will do it with full conviction.

Because this is a thing: This is a very strong and intense spiritual battle. And Satan absolutely hates your guts, okay? So he is going to do everything he can to accuse you, to shame you. And so Christians are going to say these things to you. When they do, you need to remember that that person saying those horrible things to you is also very broken inside and very full of shame. And hope that someday that person will be able to be honest with themselves and get the help that they need to heal their inner shame. But you need to move on from them, because they're not healed yet and they're not going to help you. Move on from them and try to build relationships with people who are real.

Think of the movie "The Stepford Wives." You know those wives were walking around like robots? I saw that movie years ago. I can't remember anything about it other than, it seems like one person kind of started waking up and was... Was it Bette Midler? Was she in that movie? Did you see that?

RACHEL: I think I did, but my memory's shot too, so I can't remember.

NATALIE: Well, I feel like — I could be totally wrong — but I feel like Bette Midler was one of those people and she was trying to get people to... So she was being real and exposing stuff, and then she got in trouble. I've got to watch that movie again. Because now it'd be interesting to watch it with the perspective that we have now. I'm totally going to watch that movie this weekend with all of my extra time.

RACHEL: Right.

NATALIE: So anyhow, I think of that like you are waking up and you are becoming realer. Oh, there's another — I'm thinking of another... What is that book where they talk about that?

Oh, oh, I know. It's the, you know that bunny. That bunny. "The Velveteen Rabbit!" Do you know what that is?

RACHEL: I didn't read that as a kid, no.

NATALIE: Oh my goodness. Okay, so some of you know what I'm talking about. In that story, there's this stuffed animal who is so loved by his little boy owner, and eventually, though, the little boy gets a fever. I don't know what kind of illness, but it's a contagious illness and then all of his toys have to be burned. But somehow the Velveteen Rabbit gets away and becomes a real rabbit. And the whole idea behind the story is that the more loved you are, the more real you become.

And you are waking up and becoming more real as you realize — you're worn out and you're old — but as you realize how loved you are by God. This isn't part of the story. I'm just drawing an analogy here, but you are so loved by Jesus. And you are becoming more and more real as you get more and more tucked into Him, keep your eyes on Him, and let Him surround you — let Him become the essence of who you are, which is love.

RACHEL: And realize that He's the only one that you serve and He is your only God. And those people around you with the condemning voices, they are broken and they need His love too. And the thing that's keeping them from stepping into that is their shame, and that shame looks like judgment towards you and judgment towards themselves and judgment towards everyone else, okay?

And shame blocks us from really emotionally... We may understand God loves us on an intellectual level. That's never been a problem for me. Like, "Okay, yeah, okay." Just marinating in His love and knowing it on an emotional level, at a heart level, at the

deepest levels of yourself. That is what's going to change you. That's what's going to make love pour out from you to other people around you.

NATALIE: I have one thing I wanted to share with you guys. I have several children. I have nine children. I was having a conversation with one of them and we were talking about religion. And this particular child doesn't go to church anymore. He's got a really good head on his shoulders, and he really believes that we got out of a cult. And he's shared some of his experiences with his secular friends that he works with, and they have just been appalled — just totally shocked, okay? Which just goes to show you the world is not attracted by this kind of hatred and control and vile behavior. They're not attracted to that. They're not impressed by it. And what they do is, unfortunately, they associate that kind of behavior then, like you were saying earlier, Rachel, with Jesus Christ.

So I was having a conversation with this older child and I was saying, “You know, it all boils down to Jesus.” I'm not going to church anymore either right now. I hope that someday I can find a safe place, but I had to focus my eyes on just Jesus and just get into the gospels and learn who Jesus was. And I've said this before in different venues, but if you are a new listener and you've never heard me say this before, I encourage you to put everything else aside. Put all of your religious notions aside. Put all of your theology aside. Put all of the books of the Bible aside, except maybe the Psalms, and just read the gospels. The book of John is the one I focus on because that book talks a lot about Jesus' love, but learn about who Jesus was, because that is... what C.S. Lewis said about Jesus being the Word of God? He is the Word of God. He is God.

So if you want to know who God really is and what God really thinks about the world and what God's mission actually is in the world, and if you want to align yourself, get in straight alignment with God and His mindset and His worldview, know who Jesus is. What did Jesus do when He was on this earth? How did Jesus treat people? What are the kinds of things that He said? What are ways that He blew people out of the water? He did not follow social norms. He did not follow the religious norms of the day. He was a total rebel. That's why they crucified Him. And if we are going to be like Him, we are going to not be crucified — although some Christians are tortured and murdered for their faith — but we will be crucified in other ways.

People will lie about us like they lied about Jesus. People will make up stories about it. People will call us sons of the devil. They will throw the Bible, scriptures, at us and say how we aren't living according to God. They'll say that we don't belong to God, that we aren't Christians. All of those things that they did to Jesus, they will do to us. So don't be surprised when that happens. And if you stand against abuse, if you rise up and if you

take your stand on this particular battlefield, you will be attacked. Just expect it.

But also know that just as Jesus had His Father on His side, you will have God on your side because you're going to be in alignment with Him. It's like the North Star. You will have that in your sights, and even when things get horrible and you feel really beat up and shot and exhausted inside, it's like a rod that runs through your body or like an anchor that just keeps you centered. He is your center.

RACHEL: He's your source. He's your source. Because we're the branches and He's the vine. He's flowing into us and empowering us to live in that love.

NATALIE: Well, I think that wraps up today's episode. Did you want to say anything?

RACHEL: Yes. There is a book I want to share that my counselor recommended to me. I have been really trying to hone in on the truth about God and the truth about myself. And this is a book – it's called “The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery.” It's by David Benner. And when my counselor said the title, I was like, “Oh, that sounds really new agey — ‘The Gift of Being Yourself.’ Well, yourself is a sinner.” We've been there, right? We know people who say stuff like that.

But I will tell you, this book is really grounded in God, and it is such an interesting perspective on getting to know who you are at your core so that you can have a better relationship with God. It allows you to bring God into that at a deeper level than you've been intimate with Him before. So it's David Benner, “The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery.” It's a pretty thin volume. And I'm working my way through it and it's been a huge blessing.

NATALIE: Thank you for that recommendation. I'll put that in the show notes with a link, too. Alright, well, thank you for joining us for this episode, and until next time, fly free.