

THE WORST THINGS PEOPLE SAY TO JUSTIFY, MINIMIZE, AND EXCUSE THE ABUSE YOU'VE EXPERIENCED

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 168 of the Flying Free Podcast! Today is going to be a little bit different. I recently saw this Facebook post that Sarah McDugal, a friend of mine, posted on her page. I highly recommend following her. She's just brilliant, and she usually posts some pretty amazing things, and there are hundreds of comments underneath this post. She basically asked people, "What are the worst one-liners used to justify, belittle, and minimize your abuse?" As of the time of the recording of this podcast, there were 870 comments. I'm sure that there's going to be more. That's just in a few hours, okay? And many of these comments are repeated over and over and over again.

What I decided to do is, I just got on fire reading these comments, because I've heard most of them too, and I thought, "My gosh, I'm going to do a podcast episode where we talk through some of these."

Trigger warning, okay? Number one, the things that these people say are going to be triggering, but number two, I'm going to be using some sarcasm and some parody and some satire to illustrate and to make my points.

Now, sometimes people get offended by that, and they think, "Oh, she's so angry." And I just am like, "Yeah, I'm kind of angry about this." I'm angry because these things that these people say are so destructive, and not only are they destructive to human lives, to other women, but honestly, they are blasphemous to God, because it causes us to think that God is this way. We think that God is saying these things. God is not saying these things. These are the kinds of things that are the opposite of what God would ever say. We know this because of the way Jesus lived His life and the kinds of ways that Jesus interacted with women and victims, alright?

Okay, I'm also going to use some voices, various voices, and I just hope... It might offend people, but honestly, I think the only people it's going to offend are people who maybe buy into some of these stories, and those of you who are really hooked into these stories and you don't want to be anymore, I'm hoping that this episode will set you free. I just think that making fun of some of these ideas and these clichés is one of the ways, an effective way, of unhooking from them. Okay? Alright, so here we go.

“Marriage is not meant to make you happy but rather to make you holy.” Here’s what I would say: Marriage has made many people very happy, but marriage doesn’t make people holy. If that were true, all married people would be holy, and that simply isn’t the case. So, what does make us holy? The Holy Spirit working in us, and He only works in us if we let Him. So it’s an individual thing and has nothing to do with anyone outside of ourselves, including our partner. Nor does it have anything to do with a legal marriage certificate.

“He says everything is fine, and you’re just overreacting.” Well, of course he says that. It serves him to say that. Do you believe everything people say? Or do you use discernment and listen carefully to all the stories surrounding something that has been brought to your attention? Ask yourself, how does it serve my husband to say, “Everything is fine”? How does it serve me to come forward and say, “My life is falling apart”? If he doesn’t want you to understand why my life is falling apart, it serves him to make sure that you believe my reactions to his behavior are overreactions. And it serves you to believe him if you are treating others the way he is treating me. Are you treating others that way as well? If so, I need to find someone else more discerning and Christ-like to talk to.

“I’ve never seen anything inappropriate from him, and I worked with him for many years.” Ah, but have you had sex with him? Have you cleaned his laundry? Made him dinner every night for thirty years? Cleaned his house? Grocery shopped for him? Bore and raised his children? Sacrificed your career so he could have his? Until you’ve checked all the boxes, your insight into his behavior is 100% irrelevant. Jeffery Dahmer was a nice young man according to his neighbor, so... hello.

“Every marriage is 50/50. What is your 50%?” I don’t know why I’m using a British accent every time I imitate these people. I need to apologize to all the British people. Oh my gosh. Okay, sorry. I just... That’s just what comes out of me. I don’t know. Let me try this over again. “Every marriage is 50/50. What is your 50%?” Maybe every marriage is a 50/50, but a 50/50 of what? So far, his 50% has been to work hard at placing all the responsibility for the relationship on me, and he’s really good at that 50%. My 50% is to take all of the responsibility, and I’m really good at that. What I’m aiming for now is for him to take 100% of the responsibility for his behavior, and I will take 100% of the responsibility for mine. So far, he’s shooting a zero. Why do you think that is? How is your tired and somewhat ridiculous cliché, “Every marriage is a 50/50,” helping him grow up to be an adult man? Is there a more helpful and nuanced way to approach this?

“You aren’t perfect either.” I’m not? Ah! Oh, goodness, gracious, me O my — I thought

I was. Thank you for spelling it out for me. Now that I know I'm not perfect, I can see that it's necessary for me to be used and abused. All imperfect people deserve to be used and abused. Only perfect people are allowed to have boundaries. Only perfect people can say "no" to abuse or stand up for their basic human rights and dignity. And since nobody is perfect, why are you in the field of work you are in, helping all of these imperfect people who deserve to be mistreated? And if you've ever stood up for your own rights or ever said "no," why on earth would you do that, unless you are perfect? Ah! Are you perfect?

"Christians are called to suffer well." Or here's another version: **"It is your cross to bear. God is pleased with your suffering for Him."** So David should have stayed and continued to be a target for King Saul's javelin? So Joseph should have tried to stay in jail instead of getting out? Same with Peter and Paul and Silas? So Mary and Joseph should have stayed in Bethlehem instead of escaping to Egypt? Ah, so the Israelites should have stayed in Egypt instead of escaping to the Promised Land. Hmm... So Jesus shouldn't have healed anyone? I mean, He was taking away their cross and their chance to please Him with their suffering! What about all the verses in Proverbs about leaving the presence of a fool and the wicked? Is God confused? If you came across a woman who'd been kidnapped and you had the opportunity to help her get free, would you say, "I'd love to help you, but are you a Christian? Yes? Then I believe you are called to suffer well. Good luck, sister. God is well-pleased with you." If not, then stop saying, "Christians are called to suffer well," because you are making that concept mean something that it most assuredly does not mean. And if that's the case, then all Christians everywhere, if they were good Christians, ought to be beating one another for the glory of Jesus. What a ridiculous cliché. Just stop.

"We can't focus on his sin. All we can change is yours." If you are seeing a counselor who wants to focus on your sin, run. Run for the hills! That counselor is not a trained or experienced therapist, and he or she will spiritually abuse you until you can't see God anymore for the blood clouding your heart's vision. A focus on sin is the work of the devil, not God. Satan is the accuser. Accusations and focus on sin leads to debilitating shame. Any counselor worth their salt knows that. It murders our spirit. It's death.

What sets us free? Truth. No condemnation through Jesus Christ. A focus on Christ. A focus on loving and accepting ourselves the way God does. It is true that the focus of counseling shouldn't be on the other person, because we can't control other people. But that doesn't mean that we focus on our sin. People who want to focus on your sin have their own unresolved psychological issues, and they use their Bible counseling practice to cover up their own shame. They want to put you under the same condemnation they themselves live under every day. Don't allow anyone to do this to

you. Find a real therapist.

“Let him without sin cast the first stone.” Um, excuse-moi? Nobody is looking to throw rocks here. I was just hoping for a little help coping with my husband’s abuse. Does his abuse count as throwing rocks? Because he throws verbal rocks on a regular basis. Does this mean he is sinless, like Jesus? I’m so confused. I think I might need to talk to someone else.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and who can know it?” Okay. So does this mean that your heart is deceitful too? How do you know that what you are saying isn’t deceiving yourself, and me too? What about all the verses in the Bible about wise people? Are they all just deceived that they are wise, or are we deceived that they are wise, or maybe God is deceived that there are wise people in the world, since He’s the one that wrote in the Bible that there are wise people through supposedly wise men? How do we know that their hearts weren’t deceiving them when they wrote the bible? I mean, seriously, who can know?

“Hurt people, hurt people.” True. And sometimes hurt people don’t hurt people. I know a lot of hurt people who aren’t going around abusing their partners and their children, so how do you explain that phenomenon?

“It takes two to tango!” That’s right, because if one of the dance partners kicks the other one in the knee, for example, the tango is over, and that’s why I’m here — because my partner refuses to dance. He just keeps kicking me in the knee, so can we move on from the cute cliché and talk about the issues here?

“Everyone always has a different perspective of what happened, so that doesn’t mean he’s lying.” You’re right. He might be telling the truth, which makes me the liar. Because I really enjoy risking my reputation, my friendships, my family, my financial stability, and my safety in order to come forward and tell lies about my partner. I had a blast filling twenty years worth of journals with my lies. It really benefits my life to lie, and that’s why I’m here doing it.

But my husband on the other hand, who has zero journals, has never asked for help, has refused counseling or gone kicking and screaming and made my life hell for it when he got home — he’s got to be telling the truth when he says I’m making it all up, because it certainly doesn’t serve him to lie. I mean, if he lies, he saves his reputation, wins over the compassion and support of all our religious friends who think that women naturally suck while men are mostly amazeballs by virtue of simply having, well, balls.

Plus, if he lies, he gets to be a member of church in good standing while getting me kicked out, and he would certainly hate for that to happen, so why would he ever lie about any of this? The fact is, everyone does have a different perspective about my marriage. But here's the thing: My perspective is just as valid as anyone else's, and when it comes to my own life and future and well-being, for which I am responsible before God, my perspective is the most important one for me to consider.

"I don't know why you're complaining. So many people have it so much worse."

Well, now, according to that logic, nobody has the right to get help for anything, because it could always be worse. Have you ever gotten help for anything? Have you ever decided to change jobs or move into a different home or get a car that works? Why? I mean, people have it so much worse. Buck up and get in a cellar and eat only bread and water, for crying out loud. And no complaining, because there is someone out there who has it so much worse. Do you see how this cliché is pretty ridiculous?

"I'm the husband, and you need to submit to me." Mmm, you aren't very familiar with the Bible, then. It sounds like you've bought into a misogynist interpretation of the Bible that is promoted by, well, men, because it serves them. Not surprising, since you were born with a penis. It's okay. You can totally believe that. But sadly, you are married to a wife who doesn't. And it's not my job to teach you. In fact, the folks you selectively listen to would tell you themselves that you should not pay any attention to what I would teach you anyway. I don't have a penis. So you're on your own, honey buns. If you want a wife who behaves like a child, you'll have to divorce me and find her elsewhere, because you're married to an adult. And I believe marriage is a partnership. Not a dictatorship or a mommy/daddy relationship or a parent/child relationship or a military hierarchy.

"I would hate to be you on judgment day. Because it's not going to go well for you." Or, this one is the same thing: **"God will never bless you, because you're in rebellion against Him for divorcing me."** What a fascinating story you've concocted in your brain. How does that story make you feel in your body? Sad? Elated? Angry? How do you show up in your life when you feel that way in your body? What are the results for you personally when you show up that way? Do your actions and your behaviors create a life for you that is going well? That you enjoy or like? I promise you don't need to perseverate on what will happen to me on judgment day. Take a load off. I'll worry about that. You've got your own work in your own life to think about, and I'll leave you to it.

"You just want to be a liberated woman." I just want to be a liberated human. Jesus came to set all people free, and I'm here for it. You do follow Jesus, right? So I'm

assuming you want what He wants?

“I would strongly caution you against using the word ‘abuse,’” or “But he’s never hit you.” This is good information to know about you and your education and experience in this area. It tells me that you are uneducated in what abuse is and the various ways it shows up in relationships. It also tells me you have no experience helping abuse victims. Thank you for the heads up. I’ll find someone to help me who is educated and experienced in this area.

“I’m sure he didn’t mean that. He’s probably just had a bad day.” Whether he meant to hurt me or not is irrelevant to my life. His motives or reasons for his behavior are not my concern. My concern is his behavior and its effect on my life and the lives of my children. That’s it.

“He couldn’t be that bad if you chose to marry him.” Right. Because when you’re twenty-two years old and have a ton of life experience and just oodles of wisdom, you’re guaranteed to make a good choice when it comes to a life partner. I mean, who makes a bad decision when they’re twenty-two years old, am I right?

“Your husband isn’t acting like a Christian, so he is now your mission field.” Um, no. Missionaries don’t have sex and bear children for the folks they are sharing Christ with. A marriage is not a mission field. A marriage is a partnership. In fact, these same people who say this would also tell a single woman considering marrying a non-believer, “Just remember, your marriage is not a mission field.” These people are so confused. You’ll often see them using their favorite clichés that contradict their other favorite clichés.

“Don’t you take your vows seriously?” Why do you think I’ve been staying in this abusive relationship for so long? Why do you think I’m here asking for help? Your question would be a good one to ask my husband. Have you asked him this question yet? If so, what was his answer? And what evidence did he provide for you to show you how seriously he takes his vows? And how is he planning to provide me with that evidence moving forward?

“If you leave this marriage, it’s all your fault.” Hmm. My only fault is not leaving sooner. The top three reasons Christian women divorce their partners are 1. infidelity, 2. abuse, and 3. neglect. The number one reason Christian men leave their wives is because they found someone new. Infidelity, abuse, and neglect are not the wife's fault. Let’s all be adults now and own our own behavior.

“Marriage is hard for everyone.” Not true. I actually know a lot of married people who would say that marriage is not hard at all. Is it hard for you? Maybe your partner is abusive, or maybe you’re abusive. The fact that you think marriage is hard for everyone is a huge red flag and something you may want to look into for yourself.

“If you would just forgive, all would be well.” So true. All is fairly well as long as I allow him to hurt me when he’s in the mood, and never speak up or show up or stand up for the woman who has my name. As long as I throw that woman under the bus and betray her, my husband is very happy and all is well. Is that what you think is best? Is that what God teaches in the Bible, to enable sin and abuse and betray the innocent? I am all in on forgiving. I love you so much, and I forgive you for hurting me. And I will no longer allow you to hurt me, because I not only love you, but I also love me. I value you and I value me. I forgive you and I forgive me, and now I’m leaving. Goodbye.

“You made your bed. Now you need to lie in it.” Well, now, let’s think about that. Since I am an autonomous adult, I actually could make my bed and then get up and walk away. I’m not tied down. I can change my mind if necessity requires a change of mind to protect myself, so actually, I don’t need to lie in this bed anymore.

“You vowed to stay for better or worse. You just got the ‘worse.’” Right. When I said those vows, I meant, “I take thee to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, whether you are faithful or have multiple affairs; whether you hit me or help me; whether you support my health or withhold finances and medical help; whether you give me the silent treatment for days on end or work with me to resolve conflict; whether you yell and call me names or treat me with dignity.” Goodness. Did you think my vows meant that? No, no, no. Maybe you think women should be okay with that risk, but I don’t.

You guys, that’s all I have. I hope that helped. I hope you got a few laughs. But I also hope that it unhooked you from some of those things. Now, back when I was getting out of my relationship, or even when I was in it and trying to get help over the years, I heard these same things over and over and over again, and my brain would buy into them. I believed they were true. All of the things that these people were projecting onto me, I bought in. That’s the way my brain was programmed.

It has taken several years of being out of that relationship (and really, out of a lot of abusive relationships that I was involved in), separating myself from these thoughts and this way of thinking, that has enabled me to think more clearly and to look at a lot of these things from a more rational standpoint and a more objective standpoint. And it takes time. So you may need to listen to this episode a few times just to introduce your

brain to these new ways of thinking about all of these different kinds of cliches and things that people say.

And another place where you can get help with this, much more intense help with this, is in the Flying Free program. This is mainly what we do, is we rewire our brain, we learn how to think about things in brand-new ways that our brain isn't used to thinking, and when we start thinking differently, that's when we start showing up differently. First of all, we start feeling very differently in our bodies, and then when we feel differently, we start showing up differently for our lives, and that's what changes everything. Everything that shows up in the result line of our lives starts in our thoughts. So if we're thinking all of these lies in our brains, it's going to show up in the results in our lives. We can actually get free from abusive people but still have their voices in our brains. So it doesn't really help, necessarily, to get... I mean, it does help to get free from them so we can start that rewiring process, but again, if we're not doing that work in our brains, then we're not going to be able to change our lives, and that's the main thing that we do inside of Flying Free.

You can learn more about this program and all that it involves by going to joinflyingfree.com. It's not that expensive. It's \$29 a month, and it is jam-packed with amazing things that will completely change your life. I'd love to see you on the inside. Plus, you get to talk with me on a regular basis. So you can interact with me. It's great that you guys can listen to the podcast and you hear me talk here, but I'd love to talk with you personally. We can do that in the forum, we can do that in coaching, we can do that in the Q&A's, and I would love to be able to meet you and get to know you that way. Alright? So check it out: joinflyingfree.com. That's the program that sponsors this podcast, makes this podcast possible to produce week after week.

That's all I have for you guys today. Thank you so much for listening. Until next time, fly free.