

DIFFERENT WAYS EMOTIONAL ABUSERS DON'T TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR BEHAVIOR

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 169 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I'm going to be answering two really good listener questions. I am excited about this episode, because I think it's going to create some big shifts in your thinking. But before we get into our content today, I want to thank those of you who have left ratings and reviews on Apple Podcasts. Reviews especially are amazing, and they increase our exposure to other Christian women who may need to hear about these things to give them hope for their own lives. This is one way you can help spread the word and change the world. Because when even just one woman's life changes, the world changes. I 100% believe that.

Okay, let's start with our first listener question.

LISTENER: I've just started listening and learning about what Flying Free is all about, and I already feel so much less alone and almost validated that I'm not crazy. And I thank you so much for that already. But my question is that a common theme that I keep seeing in what I'm reading and listening to is that a requirement to emotional abuse is that the person never takes responsibility for their actions and never wants to grow, and that's actually not my case.

My husband does accept responsibility for his actions a lot, and he does appear to want to grow. But when he's in these fits, which have almost gotten to be daily now, I almost see it that he doesn't have a choice. I can almost see an internal struggle that he doesn't want to be this way. That doesn't make it any better. That doesn't make it hurt less. That doesn't make it any less traumatic. But I just wanted to know... I just keep reading that "he never takes responsibility, he never owns it, he never wants to change," and what if that's not true? Because it still feels like this has got to be abuse.

NATALIE: I do teach that the number one sign that someone is abusive is that they chronically do not take responsibility for their behavior. Now, what does this mean, though? It doesn't necessarily mean that they never acknowledge it. Some never acknowledge it. Some are like my ex, who rear-ended a woman at one point and said it was all her fault because she stopped suddenly. He was the kind that wouldn't acknowledge his behavior even if it was filmed and shown back to him. He was somewhat irrational that way. My kids would say, "Dad, you just said such-and-such a

minute ago," and he would deny it as long as it served him. It didn't matter if five kids all said they heard him say it. If he said he didn't, then he didn't. He was a quintessential gaslighter, and the one he gaslit the best was himself. So that is one way of not taking responsibility.

But there's another way. And that's what I think this listener is dealing with. For example, let's say that they throw their fist through a wall. They will acknowledge it: "Yes, I did that." They might swear at you and tell you that you're a you-know-what. "Yes, I did that." They might even be sorry about it later, because when they do these things, they have to repair the wall, and that's going to cost time and money. They have to repair the relationship if they want to have sex later on, and that's going to cost time and possibly money if it involves counseling.

But remember, a true abuser isn't sorry because they can see you or they see your heart and it's breaking their heart that they broke yours. No! If they're sorry or if they say they're sorry, it's because now their behavior has some consequences for them, and they're motivated by their own desires and comfort to do whatever it takes to get what they want, to make things go back to normal in spite of their bad behavior.

Do they want sex, but they see that their screaming fit has you in the corner hiding? Not a problem. They know they can say they are so, so sorry and, "Please forgive me," and that you will come out and give them sex. They are motivated not by love for you and your preciousness, but by their own wants and desires. That's not taking responsibility. That's putting on a show and checking off the boxes so they can get their own way. Kids do that.

Now, this listener said that her husband appears to want to grow, but that when he has his daily fits, he has no choice. She is so traumatized in her relationship that she truly believes her husband has no choice but to be abusive on a daily basis. That his arms and legs and mouth and face and voice are all acting on their own outside of his control. In other words, he's like a victim of some kind of body-snatcher who's using his body to abuse her, but the real him is helpless and wishes so much not to abuse.

The truth is, adults have 100% control over their behavior. Really. We all do. We might not feel like we do, but we do. Every behavior comes from an internal belief system, and we have control over what we believe or don't believe. Now, if we don't know what we believe, then we might not know exactly or have insight into why we do what we do. That's the work that we do in my programs.

But in a male abuser's belief system, he believes deep down inside of himself that his

wife deserves it or that women deserve it, that it's her fault, that she starts it, that if she wouldn't irritate him or she wouldn't do this, that, or the other thing, that he could be a good man. They also tend to have an entitlement mentality that excuses their behavior or justifies their behavior or minimizes their behavior. He knows that she believes him when he says, "I'm sorry." And so, of course he will use that tactic to get what he wants from her. It works!

He has a choice. I promise you. Every single one of us has a choice at every given moment. Knowing and acknowledging that choice is actually taking responsibility. Now, he may or may not be doing all of those things consciously. Some people are psychopaths and they do all of this with full knowledge of what they're doing, and they enjoy it. And your guy might not be like that. I don't think my ex was like that. But he is for sure doing all of these things from his brain's programming. Again, he might not be aware of what his brain's programming is or how it got that way or why he hangs onto it or how it drives his emotions and behavior, but that's the important thing for you to understand: That he is doing all of these things, period.

The important thing for you is that he is behaving toward you and treating you in a way that is abusive on a daily basis, according to this woman and her situation, and that is your problem right there. If you believe that he has no choice, then you are not putting his adult responsibility squarely on his shoulders as you must if you want to see this clearly. You are taking the responsibility for his behavior on yourself. And because you are so busy and overwhelmed taking responsibility for him, you have no mental or emotional energy to take responsibility for yourself. And this is the real issue.

He is 100% responsible for his behavior; he is not possessed; he is a man with choices; and he has shown over and over again on a daily basis, according to this recording, what his choices are. Now, let me be super clear. People who want to grow, like, authentically and truly want to grow and they're not just playing lip-service to that idea, grow. They grow. When a human wants something bad enough, they go out and get it. But they have to want it bad enough. So if this guy seems to want to grow but he's not growing, then he doesn't actually want to grow, alright?

This is what comes as a shock to so many victims. They think that if they separate from their abuser that he is suddenly going to realize what he is losing and want it bad enough to change. The reality is that abusers don't want their wives — they want their puppet. And if you're not going to be their puppet anymore, "Then to hell with you!" Some will initially fight to keep their puppet, and they'll tell you, of course, that they're fighting to keep you, but let's be honest — do they even know who you are?

But as soon as you show that you are not going to be their puppet anymore and that they need to want a relationship with the real you and that it needs to be a partnership with mutual love and respect between two adults, that's when they'll show you their heart — the heart that was there all along, and you just didn't want to believe it or see it. Their heart wants comfort and their desires met in their own way. Their heart is not interested in you unless you are a means to get what they really want.

So my advice: Give him back responsibility for his behavior, and then you take responsibility for your own life. He is who he is. Who do you want to be in that situation? And do you want to spend the rest of your life trying to manage your brain around his abusive behavior? You can, you totally can. I can teach you how to do that in the Flying Free program. But do you want to? That's your call. If you want help with all of this, consider joining Flying Free. You can go to JoinFlyingFree.com for more information.

Alright, let's listen to the second question.

LISTENER: Natalie, I have been fighting with a verbal, mental, emotional abuser for three years now trying to get out of this marriage, and now he is using everything he can with the Word of God, saying He's sending me a prophetic warning from the Holy Spirit that if I get this divorce, I'm going to be damned to hell — I don't know. But he was never spiritual before, even made fun of anything that had to do with me telling him, "God said," or "This is what I feel God wants." Now, all of a sudden, he has "seen the light" when I left him and he is trying everything he can to use the Holy Spirit and scripture for me to come back.

When the fact is, God specifically showed me when I asked God, "Does he even love me?" and God showed me what love is. Love is patient, love is kind, every single one was no, no, no, no, no. Now he's using the same scripture trying to say, "Love is patient — I'm waiting for you. Love is kind — I'm being kind and I'm waiting. You've shown me grace all those years — now I'm showing you grace." And he's throwing everything in my face. And I don't know how to deal with it anymore.

NATALIE: I coach Christian women just like this woman every week in the Flying Free program. We record the sessions and all of the members get to listen to the weekly coaching sessions on a private podcast. Now, on this public podcast, we have to be careful. I can only take the recorded questions, but I don't do any live coaching here. I wish so bad you could hear the coaching, because it's powerful to listen to a back-and-forth conversation in which we can create some huge lightbulb moments and life-changing shifts in our brains. And you know, our brain is actually more receptive to new

ideas if we're not in the hot seat, which is why listening to someone else get coached is so transformational. But obviously I'm not able to talk to this woman here.

If I were, though, I would dive into her emotions, because we can hear them in her voice, can't we? Her body is in full-on flight or fight mode as she talks about her situation. She is desperate for help and for answers, and she feels totally stuck. She only sees the sandbox of the marriage that she's in. In her sandbox marriage is a little boy who can also only see the sandbox. And he believes his number one job is to keep her in the sandbox, while she believes her number one job is to stay there. So they make a perfect team, as far as sandboxes go.

When she talks about leaving the sandbox, he thinks of what she loves most, which is God, and so he tells her that if she leaves, she will lose what she loves the most. Of course he tells her that. That's a tactic as old as time. Every evil person in every story — I don't know if you like to read stories, but I'm a huge story fan — whether the story is "The Lord of the Rings," "Star Wars," "A Series of Unfortunate Events," "Harry Potter," "The Chronicles of Narnia," or even the Bible, every evil person is going to tell the hero or the heroine lies in order to throw them off track and get them to stop fighting evil so that the evil can win the big battle, right?

So he says, "I had a prophetic warning, and God Himself told me that if you divorce me, you'll go to hell." Why don't we see through that? So this is what we would explore in coaching if I were to coach this woman. What is going on inside our brain's programming that we buy into that story and that we stay with someone who would say things like that to us? Is that how God works? Does God tell rapists what is best for their victims, and then the rapist tells the victim, "Yes, I know what God wants for you"? If a mugger stops us in the street and says, "Well, God gave me a prophetic warning that if you don't give me your wallet, you're going to go to hell," do we just go, "Oh my goodness gracious me, oh my" and hand over our wallet?

We can see how ridiculous this is when we put it this way, right? We can see right through the mugger's agenda, and we understand his motivation for telling us this story about God — this false story about God, by the way. But we can't see it when our abuser tells us the same story or when our pastor tells us the same story. Why is that? Our brains are fascinating. This is what we would explore. But we can't do coaching here, so I'm going to offer some of my own thoughts about this.

When someone uses God or the Bible or religious ideas to control and manipulate another human being, this is called "spiritual abuse." Now, she didn't mention spiritual abuse when she listed off the types of abuse she's been living with, but she can

definitely add that to her list. Remember that the devil uses the Word of God, the Bible, to control people. He did it in the Garden of Eden when he said, "Did God really say this?" And he did it when he tried to manipulate Jesus. He used the scriptures to manipulate Jesus and get Jesus to do what he wanted him to do. So we should not be surprised when controlling, abusive people use that same tactic. They're just imitating their father, the devil. This is exactly what Jesus said in John 8:44. This is what they do. We should expect this. Of course he is throwing Bible verses in your face. That's what he does. He's an abuser. This is not a surprise.

Alright, now that we've established that this ridiculousness is actually abusive and it's not actually God's direction for this woman, now we can move to the real issue, which is her brain's programming. Her brain's programming is buying into what her husband says. Why? This is so critical, because she says, "He's throwing everything in my face, and I don't know what to do about it."

So let's go back to the sandbox analogy again. If you're sitting in a sandbox and a little boy throws sand in your face, what are your options? What are they? Well, you could 1. Yell at him, 2. You could cry, 3. You could throw sand back at his face, or 4. You could get out of the sandbox and go play somewhere else, right?

Now, I can hear the desperation in her voice, because she has no idea that the sandbox she's sitting in of her marriage is actually in a huge playground with all these variety of amazing playsets, a ton of amazing friends, there's a lake with boats and paddleboards, you've got a tennis court in one area and a roller skating rink in another area and all these miles and miles of bike trails, and this whole beautiful adventure is calling her name. But her brain fully believes that the sandbox is all there is, and she can't get out or God will curse her.

Why does she believe this? Because abuser people have been telling her that her entire life. Of course they have been! They need her to stay in the sandbox. That's how they can control her. They are blind, and they want her to be blind with them. They are unable to grab hold of God's amazing grace and all of His provision, and so they want to bring down as many people as they can into their own pit of condemnation and despair and fear. And as long as her brain is fully invested in buying into that storyline about all of this, she will stay stuck in the sandbox.

But I don't think that's her destiny, and here's why. I was in her shoes not too many years ago, and my voice was shaking with fear and desperation as well. I was so angry I could hardly see straight. Plus I've seen other women in this same boat, and I watched myself and I've watched so many other women transform and change and get out of

the sandbox and go start living their big lives.

Now, one of the many books that I read at the time that I was in this predicament was "The Dance of Anger" by Harriet Lerner. And I learned in that book that my anger was caused not by what my husband was doing over and over and over again for twenty years at the time, but it was caused by my belief that I was stuck there in that sandbox with him. I was not even open to any ideas of getting out or getting away, because my brain 100% believed that it wasn't possible. And it is this feeling of zero control and having your human rights stripped away that can cause so much panic and anger and fear in a human being.

Now, after reading that book, I opened my mind up to the new thought: that I actually did have options. If I chose to stay in my abusive relationship, it was my choice. I could stay in the sandbox, but it was my choice to stay, which now put me in the driver's seat of the car of my life. Not my husband, not my church, not my parents, me.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking. I know some of you guys are thinking, "Well, isn't God supposed to be in the driver's seat?" I just challenge you to ask yourself, how do you know that God is in the driver's seat, practically speaking? Because that sounds like a nice idea, but I've known and loved Jesus since I was seven, and He has never once written me a direct message. But He does speak to me every single day, just not in a way that anyone else can understand or know about. In other words, He's got me in the driver's seat, and He is speaking to me. You know that verse that says, "I will tell you whether to go to the right or to the left"? He's inside of me, directing me and guiding me and leading me, but I am still driving my life.

Now, some of you will also think, I know, as I did, that the only way that He speaks is through the Bible, but what do you do when you've learned the Bible wrong, or what do you do with the fact that Satan also uses the Bible to speak? What do you do if you've grown up believing that it's okay, not in our day and age, but in past history... There are people who grew up believing that it's okay for Christians to burn other humans at the stake because the Bible says something that they have interpreted to mean that. Or that racism or misogyny are okay, because the Bible says something that someone decided to interpret that way.

God can speak through the Bible — of course He can. But He also speaks through the Holy Spirit, Who lives inside of us. John 16:13 says, "The Spirit shows what is true and will come and guide you into the full truth." And whenever someone interprets the Bible in a way that brings fear or destruction, then that interpretation is not aligned with the heart of God, and it is a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of what God is

communicating in the Bible. God says that love casts out fear, and God is love. He's the essence of love. Where you're going to see the heart of God is where you see fear being cast out, where you see healing and restoration and redemption rather than condemnation and destruction and fear-mongering.

So, back to the idea of being in the driver's seat. The Bible talks a lot about personal responsibility. Why? Because God gave humans freedom of choice and autonomy, and He anticipates and desires that we take those privileges that He gave to us as gifts and put them to good use. Not that we bury those privileges under the guise of, "Well, I had to bury it because I just know that you, O God, are a hard God Who gets upset if things don't go Your way. So I just did nothing with my life and hoped that You would do all the work. I floated through life believing what all my mommies and daddies told me, and I didn't have to think for myself because my heart is deceitful, and who can know it anyway? So out of fear, I just did nothing. I let others drive my car, and I believed the idea that they were driving it on behalf of You. God, I just sat in the back seat and went along for the ride."

No, no, no, no, no my friend — that is not what God intended when He created you. He is your Father. He loves you! Live your life. Make decisions. You can make mistakes — all humans do — without fear of condemnation, but with hope and faith in the sustaining and never-failing love of your Creator. Do you not believe that He is bigger than your ideas of Him previously?

We're all going to live our lives based on what we really believe about God. If your God is an abuser, you are going to live in fear and you will live small and you will avoid living in hopes of not making a mistake. You will also try to be like God — perfect, knowing good and evil for yourself, and also telling everyone else what good and evil is. That is the original sin, people. We think that's humble, but no. That is the epitome of arrogance, and most Christians who live this way with this kind of God are very controlling, very angry, malicious, judgemental humans. They are the reason the world rejects Jesus, and Satan just loves this.

But if your God is love, if your God is safe, then you will be able to drop into that love and safety, and you will be free to live and love and accept and trust 100% that He's got you and that He's got whatever circumstance you're in. And then you are free to decide for yourself with all of God's love behind you, having your back, whether or not you want to stay in an abusive relationship, whether or not that is the safest, best place for you to thrive.

And if you decide for yourself that it isn't, you will do what many women I know have

done. You will get out of the sandbox and go explore all of the other amazing things about the life God gave you. The sandbox is always optional. Don't ever forget that. You can choose to stay in it, but own your power. Own your choice, okay?

Now, I answer questions like these every day in the Flying Free program through our private community forum as well as in weekly coaching calls and a monthly Q&A. What you guys get in this podcast is just a small taste of how I can help you in other, more intensive ways without it costing you an arm and a leg. In fact, one year of Flying Free, a whole year of Flying Free, is about the same cost as two private therapy sessions. And I don't know if you've had therapy, but two hours of therapy, it's good, but I think we need a little more help than that. I did for sure. I've lost count of how many women have told me that their lives have changed just in the first month of Flying Free compared to years of therapy.

Here's a recent review that just came in this week. She said, "I've been in your program for one month, and what I've done has actually begun rewiring my brain just in that one month. I honestly can't believe it. My mom and friends have commented how they can tell I'm changing: Stronger, more confident in a good way, less anxious and scared. A lifetime of trauma beginning to heal and change in just a month? Wow. I can't imagine where I'm going to be in a year. I'm so excited. I prayed hard for this. I didn't know you or your program, but my soul ached for something, and this something is your program. I'm so grateful I found you, and I finally have hope for my future again."

Ladies, I would love to have you join us if you haven't already. You don't have to pay for a whole year all at once. You can register for a month to month membership for \$29 a month, and you can cancel at any time. You can learn more and apply at joinflyingfree.com. And if you are a divorced Christian woman, consider joining Flying Higher. You can find out more about that program at joinflyinghigher.com.

Now, I get that many of you aren't going to be able to afford even the \$29 a month, or maybe you're just not ready to join. And it's totally fine. A lot of the women in this program have told me that when they joined, they had to listen to this podcast and read my blog and get emails from me for up to a year and sometimes more before they finally decided to take that plunge and join the program. So if that's you, it's totally okay.

I still want to answer your questions. If you want to give me a question like these ladies did and leave a recording, you can go to any of the podcast episodes on my public website, which is flyingfreenow.com. For example, for this one, you'd go to flyingfreenow.com/169. So you could pop in any number after that forward slash and

you'd go to a podcast episode with that number. So flyingfreenow.com/169, and then on any of those podcast episode pages, besides there being a transcript that you can read if you don't want to listen, besides that and a few other little things like the show notes, there is also a link to a place where you can click a record button and record a question for a future podcast episode. I would love to answer your questions.

Now, it is true that I record these episodes almost three months in advance of when they actually air and I don't always answer questions, so I may not answer your question for a few months, but, nevertheless, I try to get to as many of them as possible, and I would love to answer yours.

That is all I have for you for today. Thank you so much for listening, and until next time, fly free.