

WE ARE LIKE THE GOD WE WORSHIP

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 171 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we're going to talk about the god we worship and what our god is like. Everyone worships a god. Everyone on this planet, everyone all throughout history worships a god. And our god is what gives our life meaning and purpose.

Now, some people worship a god called money. So if that's our god, then what gives our life meaning is having a lot of money or what we think is enough of it, which, by the way, never happens if money is our god, because you just want more. The more money you have, the more expansive is your lifestyle, and the more money you want in order to maintain that more expansive lifestyle. Now, I do not believe there is anything wrong with money in and of itself. But when it becomes our god, then we're sorely disappointed to eventually realize it doesn't satisfy the way we thought it would.

I'll give you an example. I was able to give myself a raise last year for the first time in many years, and I thought that that raise would make me feel more secure. But I don't. I don't feel more secure. We had to get new windows for our house because they were molding and rotting, and now I'm going to be paying off those windows for the next four years with that increase that I got in my salary. So I'm not ahead at all. But I'm trying to maintain our home. Has this ever happened to you? And when we die, we can't take money with us. It gets left behind to get picked through and squandered by our posterity.

John Jacob Astor the IV was one of the richest people in the world at a net worth of about eighty-seven million dollars when he was alive. But when he was only forty-seven years old, he perished in the Atlantic Ocean after the ship he was on called the Titanic hit an iceberg and sank.

Our god could be power. So what gives our life meaning is having a lot of power. being able to control human beings. Being able to control a family or a church or a business or a city or a state or a country or the world. There are world-leaders we can see today who worship power. And having more and more of it drives them to do some pretty heinous things. But just like money, the more power one has the more one believes they need in order to maintain their purpose and meaning in life as well as their

lifestyle.

There's nothing wrong with power in and of itself. God has given personal power to each individual to take responsibility over and to steward wisely. He's given us power over our minds, over our choices, over our beliefs. But when power becomes our god, we are sorely disappointed to eventually realize it doesn't satisfy the way we thought it would. And when we die, any power we had is gone.

Some of the most powerful people in history like Julius Caesar, Napoleon, and Peter the Great, for all their influence and power, are dead now. And our current powerful people in the world (I won't say their names, but people come to your mind), they are going to be dead one day as well, their empires picked over by others.

Our god could be youth and beauty and health. So what gives us meaning is having a beautiful face or a perfect body, good health. Looking young and dressing nice. Having nice nails and hair and skin. Thirty years ago, I had no money to spend on nice makeup or skin-care. Now I do have a budget for those things, and I even got my nails done twice last year, once for my daughter's wedding and once for a business trip. And after experiencing nice nails, I was tempted to make it a regular part of my budget.

I started using a skin-care line about ten years ago that I'm still in love with. I know people are going to ask this afterwards, so I'm just going to say it now: It's "Dr. Denese." But to maintain my skin, it's an investment. Now, if I had millions of dollars, I'd probably want a tummy-tuck and a face lift. But then when I look at pictures of famous actresses who are my age, I see that in spite of all their beauty-treatments, they're getting old. And in their attempts to look young, some of them have had facial work done that's made them look a little bit odd. And then when we die, our body is not a pretty sight.

There is nothing wrong with looking as nice as we can and taking good care of our bodies and stewarding them well so that they last as long as possible, and there's nothing wrong with pretty things or having pretty nails. And by the way, I got the gel nails, and they destroyed my nail beds. It was easy to just go, "Eh, it's not worth it." But man, I loved having those gel nails. They stayed nice and they never broke and they never chipped. It was amazing.

But here's the thing. When all of these things become our god, we are sorely disappointed to realize that they don't satisfy the way we thought they would. And everybody, every person alive, is going to get old and their body is going to fail them.

Our god could be popularity, so what gives us meaning is having people love us and

approve of us and give us attention. When we're popular, we have to maintain our popularity by catering to the whims of others and giving them what they want. I've struggled with this as a writer and a podcast host. Sure, people love me as long as I tell them what they want to hear. But if I introduce something new or different or something outside of their programming, then I might get interesting emails. What if I rock the boat? They might call me a heretic or spread stories or misrepresent me and what I believe. They might even hate me.

And if we worship popularity, we're going to avoid that vulnerability, and we'll instead embrace status quo and safe topics. We will not say things outside of our programming. But no matter how popular someone is, they too will die. Here are some popular people who died in 2021: Betty White, Sidney Poitier, Ed Asner, and Christopher Plummer. By the way, I went through and I looked at all of the famous people who had died in 2021 and so far in 2022, and it was surreal to go through and see image after image of all these people that we know from politics and TV and realize that they were alive last year at this time. And today, they are gone.

Our god could be ourselves. So what gives us meaning is always being right and never making a mistake and being perfect like a goddess is. We will jump on Facebook and correct anyone who thinks differently than we do. We will judge and condemn anyone who doesn't live according to our manual for them; who doesn't do what they are supposed to do; who doesn't treat us the way we deserve to be treated; who doesn't cater to our needs; protect us; give us what we want; say what we want them to say and do what we want them to do. We will get indignant when they have a different opinion and aren't convinced by our incredible arguments that we are, after all, correct.

But at the end of the day, we do make mistakes. We do mess up. We aren't able to maintain perfection, and indeed, in trying to do so, we end up throwing out love for both ourselves and for others. Because if we expect ourselves to be perfect, we're going to lay that burden on other people as well. We might be subtle and passive-aggressive about it, but this is a fact of human nature: How we treat ourselves is the energy that we bring to the table in our relationships with others. And in the end, worshipping our self leaves us empty and disillusioned.

These are the gods that we Christians like to think that only the secular people worship: Money, power, beauty, popularity, the self. But we Christians, well, obviously we worship the real God. But I think a lot of Christians worship a petty, abusive god with a small "g." Why do I think that? Because they're showing up in petty, abusive ways, trying to control the lives of others, and using the words of God to do it. Now, they think that this is who God is. So it's not surprising that they imitate their skewed version of him.

Let me give you an example. Someone posted this in the private forum for the Flying Free Sisterhood. I've changed this a little bit because I want to keep it anonymous and keep it private, but this is basically what she said: "I'm so horribly disappointed by the behavior of a certain woman at church. She is a spiritual leader, and I've confided in her about my husband. She's been passive-aggressive and spiritually abusive in her texts to me this past week. It's hard because I trusted her, but now she's telling me I need to read my Bible, and she's saying that I'm foolish and that I'm like the evil woman in Proverbs 2 because I'm considering divorce. I'm so hurt."

Now, this church woman's god is not interested in the life of the victim. This god (and when I say "this god," I'm talking about god with a small "g," like Zeus) is interested in one thing only: Blind obedience to rigid religious rules, and to hell with how those rules are enabling abusers to abuse without sanctions and giving over victims to be entrapped by a choice they made when they were young to unwittingly marry someone who would abuse them. This is their god (small "g"). This is their Zeus. So they're going to stick up for the values of that Zeus, of course. This is the god of the Pharisees.

Now, this church woman believes in this god and stands up for him because of religious brainwashing. And many of us can relate to believing these things at one point in our lives. I know I can! I had a friend many years ago whose husband was chronically cheating on her, and I encouraged her to stay in the marriage. I did. I did it because that was what my petty god wanted, and I was his representative. His proud representative. Now, I've come a long way. Hopefully people can see that. But I hope that I will also always remember who I was when I didn't wrap the grace of the living God around me and rest in His love.

If our Zeus-god is ready to hate on anyone who deviates from his rules and regulations, we're going to be just like that as well, because we are always like the god we worship. It's hard to let go of our small god-in-a-box who makes sense to our human brain. Like, Zeus makes sense, right? If someone does something they're not supposed to do, we're just going to zap them. But it's okay to let go if you want to. In fact, if you want to worship a really big God who is all powerful, pure love, and who always wins in the end, then you'll have to change your view of your current god. And when your view of God changes, everything in your life changes.

So how do we think about people like this church woman? My life is mostly free of these kinds of people, but once in a while, I will get an email from someone who has taken the responsibility upon themselves to correct me. Maybe to give some lists of books that I've already read, or tell me that I don't know God, or inform me that I'm dangerous to the human race, or tell me that they are praying for my soul. Do you think

I'm on their prayer list for real? I mean, I hope so. I could use all the prayer I can get. If everyone who told me that they're praying for my soul is telling the truth and not a bald lie, then I am for sure getting into those pearly gates if their god is a good listener and in a good mood. Keeping my fingers crossed.

So how do we want to think about people like that? I've had to ask myself that question, and here's what I've come up with. So the circumstance is that someone says that I'm a foolish woman... And by the way, I'm running this through the grid for this other woman too, who wrote in the forum, alright, who was told by this church woman that she was foolish because she was considering divorce. And I'm also mixing in a little bit of what people have told me.

So the circumstance is someone says that I'm a foolish woman who is dangerous to the human race and I'm going to hell. Let's just say that's the circumstance, alright? So I could think... That could happen. That's a fact that's outside of my control, outside of our control if that's ever happened to you, and we could think this, we could think, "Well, you're just a religious asshole, so take that!" That's a thought that I have had. Now, when I think that thought, I feel smug. And when I feel smug, I crack jokes about them with my family and friends, maybe even on the Flying Free Podcast.

And when I do those things, you know what the result is? The thought always shows up in the result line, so if I'm thinking, "They're just religious assholes," guess what the result is? I'm a religious asshole.

Alright, let's run a different model. The circumstance is the same: Someone says I'm a foolish woman who's dangerous to the human race and I'm going to hell. So here's another thought we could have. We could think, "Well, those people don't know any better, and they're just doing the best they know how to do with where they're at in their own personal faith journey." Now, when we have that thought, we might feel curious, maybe. And when we feel curious, at least when I feel curious, I can remember, "Mmm, I remember when I was in that same place and how I used to tell other Christians what was what."

You guys, I was one of those women who used to write comments on blog posts and Facebook posts that I disagreed with. And I would get into arguments with Christians and think that I was better than they were because I obeyed all the rules and they didn't. I read the good books. They were reading the heretical books. When I remember all of those things, the result is that I hold space for who I was, I hold space for who I am right now and how I'm changing, growing, evolving, and I also hold space for who they are and who they will be some day. Because hopefully they're changing and

growing and evolving too, and maybe they will end up being someone who is more generous to themselves and to others one day. Who knows? I hope so.

But what if I want to feel even better than just curious? I mean, curious is definitely a step up from smug, right? But what if I want the result in my life to be just love? How can I get there? So let's go back to the circumstance, which is out of our control. Someone says I'm a foolish woman who's dangerous to the human race and I'm going to hell.

What if I had this thought? This is a long thought now, so hang on to your little horsies: "My God is so big and powerful and loving. And He sees all the reasons why this person is saying these things to me. He loves this person with an eternal, never-stopping, never-failing love. And He loves me with that same love. So I am always safe to be me and to make mistakes. And this person is safe to be them and to make mistakes. My God is so big that He knows how this story ends. And since He is the "winner winner, chicken dinner," the ending is going to be fabulous, and will probably involve something even better than a chicken dinner. It will involve reconciliation and healing and connection and love and truth. It will involve all things wrong being made right again..."

You guys, I heard somewhere that true justice, if you think about justice, it's not just about punishment, okay? If someone steals the life of someone else... Let's say that someone kills your child, alright? And then they go on death row. They have to be executed. Let's say that you live in a state where they believe in execution. And then let's say that they are executed. I bet you money that if you talked to any family whose child has been murdered and then their murderer was executed and then you say, "Well, do you feel like justice was done?" they will not feel like justice was done.

They didn't get back the life of their child. They lost all of the future memories that they had with that child, they lost being able to watch that child grow up and have a life of their own. Just because the murderer got executed doesn't mean that justice was done. So this idea about punishment being, like, the greatest end-all as far as justice goes, is ridiculous.

Do you know what real justice is going to look like? Real justice is getting back what you lost. Think about it. Let's say that real justice is you get your child back, and the one who murdered the child sees what they did and is absolutely and utterly decimated by the thought of what they did and repents, and you get back all of the years that you lost, and you get restored one-hundred fold all of the emotions of love and hope and rejoicing and all of the beautiful things about that connection with your child. And you also get to have this relationship with this murderer who is now filled with love and

filled with wanting restoration and connection. That is justice. Okay?

The other kind of justice is a man-made justice, and it really doesn't satisfy, because it comes out of the mind of man. This kind of justice is something that only a really, really, really, really big God could accomplish. So, that's the God I choose to believe in. I believe in a really, really, really, really, really big God. I don't know how He's going to pull it off, because I live in a very fallen world, but this also solves the issue of evil, because if God's going to give us back everything that we've lost, then that's our hope. That's the hope that we have when we believe that God is all-powerful and 100% love and that He gets to win in the end.

So when we think about it that way, then we realize that we're not at the end of the story yet. The story is still unfolding. And because I believe that the ending of this story is going to be amazing, then I can believe that this person, the other person who has said these things about me, and myself, that we will both truly see the truth about one another one day. So I can, then, let their offense toward me go and leave it to God to bring about truth and justice in the end.

I can also, though, create some space between me and this person, since at this stage in the story, they are not ready to be around a foolish and dangerous person such as myself who is on her way to hell, and I don't currently have the desire to spend my limited emotional energy on recovering from their negativity and hate. I have to steward my resources, so while we're still in the middle of the story, I may need to make some space between myself and people like this. We're going to want to make some space between ourselves and murderers, also. We're going to want to make some space between ourselves and toxic people who are still stuck in their toxicity.

Now, when I have thoughts like this and I believe things like this, I feel love. I feel love for myself, I feel a lot of love for God, gratefulness, and I also feel love for the person who said those things. And when I feel love, that's when I feel this freedom to give them the space they need and give myself the space that I need. Because I know that eventually, God is going to heal everything in the end.

Okay, so where are you at right now? Are you someone who struggles so much in accepting your own humanity that you have an impossibly high standard for yourself, and do you live in self-judgment so much that you have to control and correct others who are not living up to that same impossible standard that you hold yourself to? Are you someone who is utterly exhausted trying to keep up with being like your god?

Jesus has some words for you. He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and

burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, my life, for I am gentle and humble of heart. And you will find rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Doesn't that sound lovely? You can let go of controlling all the things and all the people, and you can actually trust that God is big enough to do an amazing job all by Himself. Love feels so much better than hate, and it is more powerful, too. Ask me how I know. I'm a recovering asshole who is always on the razor edge between love and hate. But love is winning more and more.

Or maybe you're someone who struggles with Christians condemning you, correcting you, defining you, maligning you, controlling you, and stabbing you in the back when you're already flat on your face in the mud. Jesus has some words for you, too. He says in Luke, "And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly."

The story isn't over. Justice, true justice, will be so much better than just punishing the one who has hurt you. Yes, they will be required to pay back what they stole. They will know the truth. They will see their actions in the light of truth. But also, yes, you will get everything back. You will get your children back. You will get your personality back. You will get your life back.

It will be like a huge meteor hits the earth and destroys all of it. This is representative of death. Just like Jesus. Death. He died on the cross. And then God brings everything back to life and restores it completely, you guys. Not a half-assed job like a lot of twenty-first century Christians have been taught, but the whole thing, 100%. Evil does not win with this God.

And if this is our God, if this is the God that we are worshiping, what does that mean for us, then? That means that we are finally and truly safe enough to drop into love and peace, even now while we wait for that justice and restoration of all things. This is how we show who we really worship. If we call ourselves "Christians," then let's be like Christ and not act like His enemy, the devil, who is a controlling, pretending, accusing, lying piece of shinola.

Maybe God is calling you to walk alone with Him for a while. That's what He did with me. I just had to get away from people and all of their opinions and all of their ideas and all of their weird interpretations of God's Word, and I just had to take His hand alone and walk with Him and let Him instruct me, let His Holy Spirit instruct me. Maybe He wants to do that with you, too. Maybe He wants to teach you things about Him that you're not going to ever learn from human beings and their various interpretations of

God's Word depending on their culture and their upbringing. Are you ready to take His hand and let Him be your sole companion?

Maybe by the time you circle back to this church woman one day down the road, you will be healed and ready to see her again. Mmm, might not be until eternity, but I believe it will happen, because the God that I believe in wins in the end. He gets everything and He gives everything.

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