

I'M AFRAID OF MY CHRISTIAN HUSBAND'S CRITICISM AND DISAPPROVAL

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 189 of the Flying Free Podcast. I love doing this! I seriously just love doing this so, so much. I'm so glad to be back with you. Okay, this past summer, I got on Facebook and I did a little rant about how annoyed I get when people (and this is both men and women) come onto my social media pages, whether it's Facebook or Instagram or TikTok, and they whine about how it's so not fair that I'm only helping women. I should know that men need help too. Shame on me.

I made the point that if I were helping new moms with infants and all my posts were created to help them with the kinds of issues that they were having like postpartum depression or nipple soreness or insomnia, how ridiculous would it be if someone came onto my social media pages and complained that I wasn't making free content for moms of teenagers? How rude of me! Moms of teens need free help too, so what gives?

Anyway, I ended up making a funny TikTok about this, and now I have something to link the whiners to when they freak out on my pages. I've already been able to do it. It's so convenient and awesome. But the reason I'm telling you this is I also got this amazing email from someone who has an adult son who was in an abusive marriage. Listen to what she said:

"I've been meaning to message you for months and just never think about it at the right time, and then, just now, I stumbled on your video rant about the people who give you a hard time about not helping male victims. I laughed. A lot. And I also thought, 'Good grief.' But anyway, I thought this might be a good time to tell you that ironically, you've helped my son so much. Together, he and I have read so many books, blogs, articles, and listened to so many podcasts on abuse, toxic relationships, narcissism, and so on, and I am thrilled to say he is healthy and strong and divorced.

But what I want you to know is that you helped him tremendously, and I think he read and/or listened to every single blog post and podcast you've done and just simply applied it to himself and his situation. Maybe these other people don't know that's actually possible or maybe he's just smarter than the average male to figure that out on his own. In all seriousness, I know he would tell you that he's so grateful for your work, for himself, of course, but also because he's keenly aware that as a male, he has had so

many more advantages and resources available to him through this grueling journey than most women have. He recognizes the great need for what you're doing. Thank you, Natalie."

So there you go. Brené Brown talks about an arena where we have the opportunity to get in the game and play. But on the edges are spectator stands where you have all these folks who don't want to play the game. They just want to shout criticism and complaints to the ones who are on the ground playing. This young man, just like so many hundreds of brave women I know, got off the stands and got in the game. He was smart enough to apply the correct gender term to his own situation so that he could benefit from the truths that were being taught, and then he could make his own badass choices to get out of his abusive relationship and move forward. And I think that's amazing.

So in this episode, I want to talk about the fear survivors have of their husband getting angry at them. Now, I am not addressing physical violence in this episode, okay? I want this to be crystal clear. If you are being physically abused, which includes hitting, slapping, pushing, pinching, biting, blocking you from going from one room to the other, keeping you from getting in your car and driving away, punching other objects in your home, destroying property, throwing things, screaming in your personal space, hurting pets (which is often a threat to you physically, believe it or not), forcing you to have sex when you don't want to (this is also called sexual abuse and physical abuse), waving a weapon around, or even verbally threatening to hurt you in some way — if you are experiencing any of these, then I encourage you to visit your local domestic violence center and access the resources they have there. I can't help you in a podcast episode. You are going to need hands-on, local support at the ground level, and I highly encourage you to get that support.

So this episode is not for you if you are experiencing physical violence. I'm not going to be addressing that here. I'm going to be addressing emotional abuse or anger that you may be experiencing from a partner that comes in the form of maybe the silent treatment, yelling, cursing, calling you names, treating you like you're worthless, gaslighting, withholding information, withholding affection, or rejecting you in other ways. And when I give you a list of these things, I have this emotional abuse quiz. If you've not taken it and you want to, you can. You just go to — this is really creative here — emotionalabusequiz.com. That's literally the URL. So you just go there and you can take the quiz. It's going to ask you a bunch of questions that are all examples of emotional abuse and whether or not you're experiencing those.

When you go through those, you might think, "Oh, well, that's not what my situation

looks like," or "I only am experiencing a few of those, but not all of them." No, you don't have to experience all of them. Abusers come in different flavors, and whatever flavor you... That flavor is going to be a certain... He's going to have his own style, right? Some abusers, their style is just simply to treat you as if you don't even exist. They just don't really acknowledge you much. They don't really want to have sex with you. They don't really want to cuddle with you. They don't really want to listen to you. If you ask them for help, they might even say, "Eh, okay," and then they won't help you. They just withhold everything from you. That is emotional abuse, alright? Others of you are getting just a lot of lying. He's just a liar, lying to you about everything, not giving you all the information you need. That's also abusive.

Alright, so, anyway, recently, one of the women in the Flying Free program posted a question about whether or not what she was experiencing was even abusive. And basically her husband just neglects her. And here's what she wrote. Now, I have removed anything that might identify her in any way, so just know that this is actually an example of many of the kinds of things that many of the women are saying inside of the program. So here's what she wrote:

"My situation is a bit different from most of what I've heard and learned here so far. The quick summary is, for the majority of my marriage, I've been emotionally neglected. I've gone to my husband countless times for many years, crying and pleading and begging for emotional connection and physical touch. Each time he says he understands, that he'll change, and that he loves me, and this is followed by no actions ever. It's like the conversation never even happened, never to be brought up again until enough time passes and I'm feeling so alone and sad and depressed and not understood and not cared about and not important and certainly not loved, and then I go to him again, explaining my needs. And he says the same things and I get the same results. Repeat for decades."

Then she went on to wonder if she had the right to leave a relationship like this. So here's part of what I wrote back to her. And by the way, all of this is taking place in the private forum, okay? This is where I hang out every single day with the women in my programs. This is what I wrote back to her:

"First of all, there are so many women here who can relate to what you wrote. You are not the oddball here by a long shot. Also, google 'still face experiment,' those words. Just google them for information on the effects of the lack of emotional connection. After you've watched a video showing what happens when a parent goes still face on the baby, then what I'm going to say will make sense."

And by the way, I'm just going to break in here and say that it's so sad, these videos. A baby will be interacting and happy with its mom, and the mom will be smiling back and talking back and the baby will be happy, and then all of a sudden the mom will just go still face. That means that she doesn't have any expression on her face at all. And you'll see the baby try to get the mom's attention... Not to get the mom's attention, but try to get the mom to engage with the baby. The baby will try to get the mom to engage. And pretty soon, when the mom doesn't engage, the baby gets visibly upset. His or her body starts convulsing, like, upset, arching their back. They start to cry, they are basically just emotionally triggered by the lack of connection, alright? Now, back to what I wrote to this lady:

"If a parent was doing still face with their child all the time or most of the time, we would 100% say that parent was being abusive. And that child would very likely grow up with severe emotional trauma. We might even call that parent a monster."

Oh, and the reason I wrote that is because... I didn't read the entire post that she sent, but in her post, her pastor had read the first chapter of my book, which I give out for free, by the way. If you go to my website, flyingfreenow.com, and get on my mailing list, I'll send you the first chapter free, and I'll send you the first chapter of my companion workbook as well. But anyway, this pastor had read the first chapter of my book, and it goes through a lot of the emotional abuse tactics or things that you might be experiencing if you are in an emotionally abusive relationship. And he said, "Oh, well, you know, this book is describing monsters. These men are monsters."

And so I wrote, "We might even call that parent a monster," and then I wrote, "Interesting choice of words your pastor picked. I wouldn't even describe these men as monsters, but..." And I wouldn't, you guys. These men are not monsters — they're abusers, okay? And that doesn't mean that we don't get away from them. We don't need to wait for someone to be a monster to say, "This person is destructive, and I need to create some space between me and this person." We don't have to do that. We could just say... Well, I'm going to get into that in a minute.

Anyway, then I told her, "This is what your husband is doing to you. So many survivors think that they need permission to end a destructive relationship, and they don't! You are an adult. You are the one who knows what is happening to your body and your health and your brain in this relationship, and you are the one who gets to decide what to do about it, not anyone else."

Now, I wanted to make sure that I gave you that last example of emotional abuse, when I just told you about that whole thing in the forum, because I think it's important that

you understand the full spectrum of what abuse looks like.

Okay, all of that was the introduction, believe it or not, to what I want to talk about in this episode. But I'm hoping now that we are very, very clear on what kind of fear I'm going to address now. It's not the kind of fear that is afraid of getting beaten or killed. It is the kind of fear that survivors of emotional abuse have. They are afraid of getting ignored, rejected, yelled at, called names, and so on. Now, women are often afraid of this kind of emotional abuse, and they will do whatever it takes to avoid being mistreated in these ways. And what we will do is we'll respond by either 1. fighting back, 2. hiding, 3. freezing, or 4. we try to appease the abuser.

Now one, when I say "fighting back," here's what I mean: I mean arguing, yelling back, cursing back, using sarcasm (I'm really good at that one), that kind of thing, okay? In my abusive marriage, I threw one of my treasured teacups. I collected teacups, and I threw one of them across the room and shattered it against the wall in my efforts, in that moment, to make my husband listen and understand how he was hurting me. And I did this actually twice during our twenty-five year marriage. And I also yelled, I also cursed sometimes, and I was very sarcastic, especially toward the end, okay? So that's fighting back. I was trying to make my husband be a good boy, and he just didn't want to.

Alright, when I say that sometimes survivors hide in fear or react in fear by hiding, I mean that they are pretending that things aren't as bad as they are. They make excuses for their husband's behavior, they might read the Bible and books about being a good wife and then pretend that they have the power to change their husband by the grace of God if they just work harder. These are the ways I hid. I also pretended to others that we had a good relationship and a happy family. Now yes, there were times I did go forward to get help, but since nobody ever wanted to believe me or help me, I learned that it was actually better to just pretend. Then I would be approved of and liked in my religious church circle, so I played that game: the game of hiding. Why? Because I was terrified and wanted to avoid emotional pain. I was afraid of emotional pain.

Now, ironically, hiding and fighting only increases emotional pain, but survivors don't know this when they are in the middle of it. Our lizard brain is just basically reacting to the trauma around us on the spot, and we're not necessarily thinking through anything.

Alright, when I say (this is the third one) that sometimes survivors freeze — so they're afraid so they freeze — that's their way of coping — I mean by that, that they shut down. They might sleep a lot or eat a lot or scroll social media a lot or binge on food or on Netflix. I guess I already said "eat a lot." Or they sit and stare out the window. They numb out in any way they believe is acceptable just to avoid feeling the emotional pain

of their relationship. Some people even drink.

Now here's how I did it — maybe you can relate to this. I would take up hobbies that would get my mind off the trouble and the pain. I would bake, I would cook, I sewed quilts for a while and children's clothing. I made some beautiful things. I would make handcrafted cards — "Stampin' Up!" And eventually I got into making hand-crafted cold-process soap, and I actually started a business that I eventually sold, and it is still thriving to this day. If you go visit Apple Valley Natural Soap online, that is my baby, born of a state of frozenness and numbing out. Freezing doesn't always mean standing still. It means freezing out the pain by numbing it in some way.

And number four, when I say that sometimes survivors respond or cope with the fear by trying to appease their abuser or their abusive circle of friends, what I mean is that they look to those people for approval. They don't have any boundaries, because they know that these abusive people do not like boundaries and will get mad. So if their abuser says "jump" or their pastor says "jump" or their small group leader says "jump," they jump. If the church says, "We need you to volunteer in the nursery," they're like, "Oh, okay." If their abuser cries and manipulates, they ask, "How can I sacrifice myself to manage your emotions?" They aim to please their abuser at a personal cost to their own mental, physical, and spiritual health. They take full responsibility for their abuser while neglecting to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

I did this too. I catered to my husband's wishes even if I didn't agree with him or when it came at a cost to me. And by the way, towards the end of my marriage, I stopped doing this. I just stopped — I didn't even explain myself. I just stopped doing a lot of the things that I was doing that were such heavy burdens on me. And of course, the outcry was just like, "How dare you? How dare you not do this?" And then I was accused of being negligent and doing all these things that I had been bending over backwards and busting my butt to do for decades. But as soon as I stopped doing it, I was suddenly the negligent person who was a lazy butt and didn't do anything. Just unreal.

Anyway, I catered to my church leaders and my small groups leaders by opening my home regularly to be hospitable even when I had nine kids and perpetual exhaustion and illness. I didn't even realize until I read through my journals a few years ago, I was sick constantly — literally sick on almost every page of my journal. I start off the journal, you know, "Dear Lord..." I prayed. "I'm sick again today. I've been dealing..." But I kept going. I didn't have any time to stay in bed. I had children to homeschool and fresh homemade bread to make and people coming over on Sunday, right? I had to keep going. Anyway, that was my Christian duty, and I determined I would do it. Why? Because I was terrified of being rejected and the emotional pain that it would cost me

to be rejected.

So these are four of the most common ways that we respond or try to accommodate for our fear or deal with our fear. And some of us respond, as you can see I did, in more than just one way. Now, some of us respond more in one way than another, okay? All of us are different. Depending on our personality and maybe our upbringing, we might respond in different ways, right? But as you can see, I did all four at different times, so I can relate to all of them.

Now when I think back on that marriage and my life, the predominant emotions that I had in my body were desolation — I remember just feeling a sense of desolation — hopelessness, shame, and fear. And those were very uncomfortable feelings that I needed to try to get away from. Now, my greatest fear underneath all of this was the fear of being unloved and rejected, which is just so freakishly ironic, because this is exactly the experience that I would have to go through on a massive scale in order to get to a place where I could finally experience true love and full acceptance within me. Not from people, but from my Creator, and also from myself.

Because, you see, when we are madly in love with our own self, taking care of all the parts inside of us, and we're reveling in the way that our Creator is madly in love with us, then the world can reject us and we're still okay. Because we can see that it isn't us that they're rejecting. They're actually rejecting themselves. Think about it. The world rejected Jesus. Did He lay down in shame and fear? No. He didn't, because He knew who He was. Do we? All of these young, protective parts inside of us believe that the way to solve this problem of being unloved and rejected is to do whatever it takes to get people to like us. Or sometimes these parts inside of us think that the way to deal with this problem is just to annihilate ourselves and kind of beat everyone else to the punch. Or some of the parts inside of us think that we need to control other people and try to force them to like us.

I'm telling ya, and you've probably experienced this, that none of these solutions work. In fact, they're all guaranteed to fail in colossal ways. The way to solve this problem of being unloved and rejected is not to involve anyone outside of us at all. It is to 100% be all in on accepting and loving all of our young parts inside of us who are trying so hard to protect the little, tiny child within. When our internal parts are fully seen and heard and known and loved, they're going to calm down and enter into peace and rest and love. They're going to be able to stop fighting and start loving not only themselves, but other people outside of us. So the work that we have to do is to get our focus off of trying to get others on the outside to love us, and then we need to learn to love ourselves.

If someone came up to you and criticized your purple hair, but you don't even have purple hair, and they said, "Oh, your purple hair is so ugly and stupid. Why in the world would you have purple hair," and you don't even have purple hair, are you going to feel shame in your body at that moment? Probably not. Shame comes from the thought that, "There's something wrong with me," and if there isn't anything wrong with your hair in this case, in the eyes of the other person, at least — purple hair is judged to be wrong — then you would not have this thought of, "Oh dear — there's something wrong with me to have purple hair!" Instead you might think, "Interesting. This person either has a problem with their eyeballs or their brain. I don't have purple hair." And we might actually feel concerned for the other person or we might be amused, but we wouldn't have shame.

However, let's say that our husband says something cruel to us, and we call him out and we say to him, "Hey, that wasn't kind. Stop it," and he says, "Wow. I was only joking. You have a real problem with not being able to take a joke. Lighten up." Then we might have the thought, "Yikes, maybe he's right. Maybe I can't take a joke. Maybe I made his words mean something they weren't supposed to mean. Maybe there's something wrong with me," and then we would feel shame. His criticism would trigger this shame only because on some level, there is a part of us that buys into his words and gives them credibility. There's a little part of us inside that thinks, "Maybe he's right. Maybe I do have a problem here." Now, if he was a three-year-old boy who called you a name, you might be amused or concerned, but you probably wouldn't feel shame in your body either, unless you believed that the three-year-old had more credibility than you did as far as what was real or true and what wasn't.

Back when I was a conservative, homeschooling blogger, I experienced shame in my body whenever someone called me out on my rigid beliefs. It's so funny — I used to be on the other side of all of this. The shame came from this thought: "Maybe I am a prick, and I need to have more compassion on people who aren't like me." Or I sometimes would have this thought: "I really need to be a better Christian. I'm obviously not a very good Christian if I'm upsetting people." I also felt shame in my body when I was finally getting out of that legalist environment myself and I would sometimes post a new thought that I had, and someone from those circles, the conservative circles, would then come and say some version of, "Oh, so you're a heretic now?" There was a while there when I had people condemning me on both sides of issues. It was kind of fascinating.

I knew that I had to deal with this, though, inside of my own self, because the fact is, there's always going to be people in this world who are only going to feel good if other people believe everything they believe. And these people will let you know if you

deviate. How do I know this? Because I used to be one. And you know, that's still inside of me, right? It's still inside of me. It's something that I have to be aware of. But I didn't want my own emotional well-being to rise and fall based on humans and their beliefs and opinions.

I know I've made some progress in this area because I'm having a lot of fun on TikTok with people who do this. TikTok is the social media platform that I have actually handed over on a silver platter to my snarky, sarcastic part. That's right — I have a part inside of me who's very snarky, very sarcastic. I actually really enjoy her quite a bit. She's a lot of fun. She loves to poke holes in abuser language and ideas. She likes to mock them and make fun of them and that kind of thing. She's the part of me that loves satire with a splash of dark humor, and when "good Christian people" come and they don't like her and they say, "Oh! So mean! That part of you is so mean," — well, they'll just say I'm mean: "You're just so mean," — she loves that. Like, she just feeds off of that. She's like, "You think that's mean? I have so many more mean things I could say." She's not actually trying to be mean. She's just trying to poke holes in the horrible, abusive, fake language of abusive Christians, really.

Now, I keep her under wraps on Instagram and Facebook for the most part. I don't think people over there like her that much, and that's totally fine. I get that. But on TikTok, I let her loose. So when a guy or even gal comes on and says some version of, "You are an unbiblical woman," I don't actually feel shame. I feel amused. This person, people who say that, they're just wolves pretending to be sheep. So they're just telling me a little bit about themselves. I think it's kind of funny, and I like it. And I use it to create more TikToks.

But what it doesn't do is fill me with shame, because I know who I am in relation to my Creator, and I know that my Creator is crazy in love with me and all of my parts, good and bad. So I don't have to live in fear and shame when a silly wolf is trying to pretend that he's a sheep — or even some of them try to pretend that they're actually God — and they do a little poopy on one of my videos. "You are an unbiblical woman." That's gross, but the gross thing isn't me. It's the little poopy. I know who I am. I think that statement is ridiculous, and honestly, that statement doesn't even make any sense. "You are an unbiblical woman"? What does that actually even mean? So what's gross in my book is him and his poopy. Do you guys see this?

Alright. When survivors say that they're afraid of their emotionally and spiritually abusive husband or pastor or other person like this, what they're actually afraid of is a feeling. They are afraid of the feeling or the emotion of shame in their body when the abuser says horrible things to them that make them think the thought, "Something's

wrong with me and I am unlovable.” But my point is that this feeling of shame is not coming from the little poopers. It’s coming from our belief that those little poopers have credibility and must be right about us: “Maybe we are a bitch or a terrible wife or a lazy butt or a horrible mom or a person with no sense of humor. Or maybe we are stupid or a bad cook” or whatever they’re projecting onto us at any given moment. And then when we think they are right to some degree and we feel shame, then that’s when we react in the ways that I already described, where we either fight or freeze or we appease or we hide.

The answer is not to get the little poopers to stop pooping. Poopers gonna poop. The answer is to stop giving them credibility. Stop believing their lies. Start seeing them for who they are, and start seeing yourself for who you are. That is what I will help you do in the Flying Free program. Wouldn’t it be nice to stop fighting, freezing, appeasing, and hiding, and just start living and being who you are? Now, if you show up who you are, that might mean you need to leave the relationship, and here’s why: When some women start showing up, their abuser gets meaner and his mask comes off, and then she has to decide if she wants to be with a wolf or not.

Then she may need to do some work around her belief that she has to have permission from all her mommies and daddies to make her own adult decisions. And by mommies and daddies, I mean everyone in her life who tries to tell her what she should and shouldn’t do. And if you go to a church, the church is full of mommies and daddies. Have you noticed that? These people can be anyone from her actual real mother to her young adult son — her young adult son could be one of her mommies or daddies — or the pastor’s wife or a friend. But here’s the thing: God hasn’t given any of these people the wisdom and responsibility to live her life. He’s only given that to her. So this is another thing I work on with her to further empower her in her life.

I’d like to share a real-life example of how the work a woman does in the Flying Free program has a huge impact on her entire future. This particular member that you’re going to be hearing from has only been in the program for four months, and she’s already seen massive changes in her thinking. Let’s listen to this short little clip.

FLYING FREE MEMBER: I’m so thankful I found Natalie’s book and joined the Flying Free program. It has dramatically changed my life. Before Flying Free, I cycled in an abusive marriage for sixteen years. I often felt confused, ashamed, and guilty. I thought that I was responsible to save my marriage and to save my husband, and I carried the weight of responsibility for my marriage and for my husband’s behaviors.

Flying Free has taught me how to see the patterns of abuse and let go of the

responsibility that never belonged to me and give it back to Jesus where it has belonged all along. I thought I had to be Jesus and save everyone around me, but I have learned that there is only one God, and I'm not Him. It's okay to let my husband suffer the consequences of his own actions and behaviors. In fact, it's actually loving to do so. I've enabled his abuse for so many years and carried the weight of managing his emotions and trying to make him happy and walking on eggshells. I actually started to have panic attacks from the stress my body was carrying.

Since joining Flying Free, I am learning how to manage my mind, my thoughts, and in turn, my emotions, and to get different results out of my life. I no longer carry the shame and guilt that I once did, and I have experienced God's love in a deeper way than I ever have before. I've learned that He died on the cross, not so that I could spend the rest of my life trying to earn that salvation by trying to be God and be perfect and save and change my husband, but He died on the cross because He cares about relationship with me. It was always about restored relationship with the Father. He loves me more than He loves the institution of marriage, and He even loves my abuser more than the institution of marriage.

Einstein says that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. I can tell you that my marriage definitely made me insane, but I felt trapped and felt like I had no other options or choices, but Flying Free has shown me that I do have other options and other choices, and I have the power to change the results in my life. I'm on a journey and I have a long way to go, but with the results that I have seen since being in the program for four months, I can't wait to see what a year can do. Thank you, Natalie, for this program.

NATALIE: Amazing, right? If you are a member of Flying Free or Flying Higher and you want to share what God is doing in your own life through these programs, I invite you to do that using the little voice recording app that's right on the podcast website. You can be anonymous — you don't have to say what your name is. Just leave out any identifiers, and you'll be good to know.

And if you're not a member... Well, first of all, if you're not a member and you want to be one, just go to joinflyingfree.com for more information about what the program is and how to get in. Or if you want to join Flying Higher... Flying Higher is for women who are already divorced. Flying Free is for women who are either in their relationship or they're separated or they're in the process of a divorce. But Flying Higher is joinflyinghigher.com.

Or if you can't join us in the program, that's totally fine. I'd still love to answer your

question. Just use the little voice recorder to leave a question that I can answer in an upcoming episode. Now, obviously I can't answer all of them. I pick ones that I haven't already answered. I get a lot of the same questions that come in, but I pick ones I haven't already answered. And I try to pick ones that I think a lot of people are struggling with, okay? So I really appreciate when people ask questions, because I think it's fun to answer people's questions.

Know that members of my program, they get to interact with me all of the time in the private forum, in live Q&As, in discussions, live coaching, but if you're not able to be part of those, this is how you can interact with me. You can also find me on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook. And I love to read your comments. My daughter does help me answer any DMs that come in. I'm not able to do all of that on my own. My priority really is the women who are in the program, and there are a lot of them, so it is a full-time job.

But finally, if you're not on my mailing list, why the heck not? Goodness gracious! I will even send you the first chapter of my book and the first chapter of the companion workbook if you just stop by for a visit and give me a safe email address that I can send it to. Just go to flyingfreenow.com — that's my public website — to sign up. You guys, that's all I have for you today. Thank you so much for listening. I can't wait to do it again next week. Until that time, fly free.