

WHAT IF I WANT A DIVORCE BUT MY ABUSIVE HUSBAND DOESN'T?

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 190 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today, we're going to answer a listener question about what to do if you want a divorce but your husband doesn't. Here's the question:

LISTENER: And I just want to know when you get to that point where you realize that you're like a mommy to your spouse and things are getting really heavy, how do you leave when they're not on board with a divorce? That's kind of where I'm at right now, and I just started counseling. It's been really hard.

NATALIE: So I'm glad that you're getting counseling, and yes, it is hard. It is definitely one of the hardest things that I've seen women have to go through, is just trying to make a decision about what they're going to do once they realize, "My relationship is abusive and I'm not doing well," emotionally, often not doing well physically, and in other ways.

So here's a question, though, that I would ask back. And by the way, I do hear this question a lot, actually. "My husband doesn't want a divorce, so now what do I do?" So here's what I would ask back: How often is your husband on board with anything you want? I mean, that's what abuse is, right? One person deciding what is right for the other person. One person controlling the other person. One person making the decisions or manipulating the decisions that should be made and agreed on together if it was a healthy relationship, right?

So now that you want a divorce, this kind of partner that you already know that you're married to is suddenly going to go, "Oh, you want a divorce? Absolutely. You want to leave me? Hey, I'm all in on supporting you even though that's not who I am or what I do, and even though it means I will no longer have control over you." Yeah, no. That's not going to happen. If you have a duck and if your duck quacks, then when you decide to leave your duck, it's not going to start meowing like a kitty all of sudden. It's just going to quack louder. So we don't need to be surprised when our abuser doesn't want us to get away from him. We don't need to wonder why he doesn't want his property to slip through his fingers. We don't need to be shocked when he wants to continue doing what he does best: control your life, right?

So what do we do next? Well, the whole point of a divorce is to get away from abuse and live a life that is abuse-free, for the most part. Sometimes you still have to deal with — especially if you have shared custody, you're still gonna — they can do things to control some parts of your life even after you get out, but believe me, it is much different and much better. What we want is we want a life where we can learn and grow into our full potential as Christian women without being daily beaten down emotionally and sometimes physically on a regular basis.

So in Episode 87... And if you haven't listened to that one, I highly recommend. It's a favorite. A lot of people loved that episode. But in that episode, I talked about how living in an abusive relationship is like sitting in a room next to someone who keeps kicking your shin. So imagine two chairs. You're in this room... In my imagination, it's like a white room. And I'm sitting in a chair next to another person, my husband, sitting in his chair, and he keeps kicking my shin. Just kicking my shin. And so then you ask him to stop — "Stop kicking my shin" — but he won't. He just keeps doing it. So you threaten to leave. And sometimes he'll stop temporarily, but as soon as he perceives that you have relaxed a bit, he kicks your shin again. He might start by kicking it very softly. He's just trying to test your limits to see what your boundary really is.

So how do we force the shin-kicker to stop? You don't. You can't force someone else to change or to do anything. I mean, you can try, but you're just going to beat your head against the wall. The only thing you can do is leave the room.

So let's reframe this question in light of that analogy: "My shin-kicker won't stop kicking me. So I was going to leave, but then he told me he doesn't want me to leave. So now what?" You tell me, because you are the one who gets to decide what you want to do now. I'm saying that your shin-kicker likes to kick your shin. It entertains him. He doesn't plan to stop. And he wants to keep doing it until you're dead. Now what? You still have a decision to make. You can stay and treat him to your lovely shin, or you can leave. You get to decide if you are going to manage his emotions, his desires, his whims, and his life, or if you are going to live your own.

Sometimes it helps to see what a healthy marriage is like. In a healthy marriage, two people are sitting next to each other in the room and nobody is kicking anyone's shins. Imagine the concept! Maybe once in a very great while one of the people accidentally kicks the other's shin, but then in a normal marriage if that happens, they feel terrible and they say so. "Oh my word — I'm so sorry! I will be more careful next time." But these times of accidental shin-kicking are very rare, and they're not the normal way of things in a healthy marriage.

How do I know this? Because I've been in a healthy marriage now for almost five years. That's a five-year stretch of no shin-kicking, ladies, other than an accidental one here and there that is quickly and deeply acknowledged and repaired on both sides. Never once in this marriage have I had the thought cross my mind, "Oh dear, I need help. It's painful to be sitting next to this person. I don't know what to do." And I had that thought almost every single day in my other marriage of twenty-five years.

If you are saying those things or thinking those things, your marriage is not a healthy marriage, nor, I dare say, is it a Christian marriage. There is nothing of Christ in a marriage where one person is constantly kicking the other person's shin. Nothing. And I'm mystified why the church in general wants to save so many of these corrupt, anti-Christian unions and prevent future, true Christian ones. I can only think it's the work of the devil, not the work of Jesus Christ.

So your husband doesn't want you to leave. Of course he doesn't. Now what? Now it's your turn to decide. He doesn't get to decide your life for you, and the law will back you up on this. Only one person has to file for divorce, and it's most often the victim because the abuser wants to hang on to his property. Do you see how that works? Now, are there exceptions to this? Of course there are exceptions — absolutely. So if you are one of the exceptions where your husband discarded you and maybe had an affair and wants to marry someone else or just wants to leave you for whatever reason, then my heart goes out to you, and your situation is 100% just as valid and just as real as this one. But honestly, this is the most common scenario that I see on a daily basis working with literally hundreds of women. And I actually talk more in depth about this in Episode 175. That episode is called, "I Don't Want to Look Like a Bad Christian if I Leave My Abusive Husband."

And by the way, if you ever want to find an episode by its number, in the URL of your browser, just write flyingfreenow.com/ and then the number. So like for this one, you'd just put flyingfreenow.com/175 and it'll take you directly to that episode. And same with the shin-kicker one, 87: flyingfreenow.com/87.

Okay, so, anyways. How do you actually leave as far as the logistics of it? That's what we're going to talk about next, just in case you're thinking, "You know, I guess it doesn't matter if he doesn't want me to leave. I want to leave, so now I'm going to figure out what I'm going to do next." So first of all, you've got to make your decision and then have your own back on that decision. If you're not sure yourself, then you're not going to be able to withstand the fiery trials, which, I promise, definitely await you in the exiting process. If you think things are hard now, I can assure you that leaving gets even harder. Now, that doesn't mean that it doesn't eventually get better, because it does.

But this is not a cake walk, and life on the other side is still going to be a normal human life with ups and downs. Not going to lie, it's not paradise on the other side. We're still living on planet Earth, after all. But I can tell you this: It will be, for the most part, abuse free — at least more so than what you are going through right now.

I have a comprehensive program designed to support you through that whole process. It's like you have this opportunity to leave the East... Remember in the old days? Did your kids ever play "Oregon Trail"? Remember when the internet first came out and there were these games? "Oregon Trail" — that was a big one for my kids. You have this opportunity to leave the East and travel across the wild new world to go West. And there are all kinds of dangers and hardships along the way.

But you guys, I've got a wagon train going there, and if you want some company and some help navigating all the pitfalls, then hop on board. Go to joinflyingfree.com. We help and support survivors who are staying or leaving their relationship. That's right. We don't tell people to do one thing or another. We don't make any distinctions. My goal is really to empower women to grow up into their God-given, adult agency and make their own decisions. That's what we do over there — one of the many things that we do.

So once you've made your decision, the next step is you're going to want to interview some divorce attorneys and then hire one. And then all the rest of it is going to unfold however it unfolds. It's almost like that decision is like jumping off the cliff, and then how you fall is how you fall. And you're just going to have to trust that God's going to catch you. He's caught every single person so far that I've watched jump off that cliff. And by the way, this is a metaphorical cliff, not a real one, so please don't get any ideas.

So it's going to be different for everyone. We actually have thirty-six, I call them "Butterfly Stories," in our Flying Free membership vault, and no two stories are alike. So if you want to hear what thirty-six different women had to go through to get out, hop on the wagon. We also have over thirty-six workshops and twelve courses in Flying Free, including a "Divorce Basics" course and a workshop called "The Ninety-Day Escape Plan," which gives you all the steps you need to take in their order in order to be able to leave within ninety days if that's what you want to do. So that course, "Divorce Basics" course, and the workshop are focused on divorce, but I just want to let you know if you're not going that route or if you haven't decided yet or whatever, we also have courses on how to detach and detox from your partner even while you're still living with him, how to deal with your dysfunctional relationship, what the Bible says about all the various issues that you're dealing with, and so much more, okay? I'm not going to go into all of it here.

In addition to all of this, you can hear me coach women every single week on all these same types of questions that I answer on this podcast. So if you like this podcast and you look forward to tuning in every week, it's like, how about this podcast on steroids? And actually, it's on a podcast too. We have a private podcast, so when I do these coaching calls, I just put the replays right on our private podcast. So the same app that you're using on your phone to listen to this podcast, you will get your very own secret link to download the private podcast on your app, and you can listen to this podcast and the private one on your same app. It's so convenient. But instead of just getting my takeaway like you do on this podcast, you get to actually hear me interact with the other person who has the question or who has the problem. And then together we find new ways to think about their situation that changes their lives. And guess what? Those new ways of thinking will end up changing your life too, alright?

So also, I am active every single day on our private forum, answering member questions and helping them unhook from the hamster wheel of abuse. If you want personal attention from me, that is where you're going to get it. I get a lot of emails at my email address, which is natalie@flyingfreenow.com, but our community support director actually fields all of those emails and answers them on my behalf. Unless there's something that absolutely needs my attention, she answers them for me. Her name is Aimee (she's actually my daughter), and the whole purpose of that is so that I'm freed up to pour my time and energy into the private forum. So if you want my personal attention, that's where you're going to have to go. Again, you can learn more about this program by going to joinflyingfree.com.

And you guys, that's all I have for you today. I have another question that came in. I thought about answering it on this podcast, but I'm going to wait until next time, and I'll answer it next week. And until that time, fly free.