

STOP WAITING FOR YOUR HUSBAND TO DIE SO YOU CAN LIVE

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 193 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I'm going to answer a couple of listener questions, but before we do that, I want to share something that one of our active members wrote. This particular member is such a huge encouragement to everyone in our private forum. She's funny, she's real, she's just the kind of person that you want to hang out with, and I am honored to share something that she had to say about her involvement in our Flying Free program. Here's what she said:

"I thought I was stuck with a fraud, enduring a life sentence — and it was probably punishment for my twenties. My 'Christian' husband used scripture, criticism, and anger to control, manipulate and isolate me. I was a martyr for my kids, sacrificing like Jesus to keep them in a two parent home. I chased the elusive dream of getting organized enough to keep the peace.

I felt hopelessness and regret when thinking of my personal future. In the volatile early years of marriage, I felt angry. I started lying and stuffing my thoughts and feelings to keep the peace. Several years into the marriage, my soon-to-be-ex repented of his sin. I fell on the floor and sobbed, amazed at God's grace. I was so relieved to stop walking on eggshells and thought my marriage was great, as I no longer wondered how I would fake cry at his funeral. But after more years, I felt numb and resigned, using disassociation to survive.

And then one day I googled, 'The effects on children of controlling parents.' Crying for the first time in years, I told God, 'If I have to go to hell to save my kids, so be it. I am no longer staying for the kids — I am leaving for the kids.' I stopped walking on eggshells and managing my husband's emotions, which ushered in the crazy train. My refined, intellectual abuser was losing control, yelling Ephesians 5 at me. With Flying Free, I realized 'fawning' is like negotiating with a terrorist. It is never enough. I went to work on the '90-Day Escape Plan' and surprised my husband with divorce papers. With that decision, I felt like my life sentence was commuted. The material in Flying Free was like drinking from a fire hose of life-giving water. I gained clarity and strength, which prepared me to climb the ladder out of hell.

Within twenty minutes of receiving divorce papers, I had a new husband. He declared himself, "Paul from Damascus." He cooked, cleaned, did laundry, stopped yelling, and played with the kids. I told myself, 'I will only know if he has truly changed if I stay on the divorce path.' My newly acquired black belt level training in identifying manipulation tactics served me well. Through his actions, my soon-to-be-ex denied my singular request and discussed divorce details with our kids. He also went to work gathering a 'multitude of counselors' who agreed with his interpretation of reconciliation. He sought out my counselor, my family, my friends, and my new pastor, requesting they negotiate a reconciliation deal. Before Flying Free, the fear of what people thought twisted me in knots. When my child suggested I tell my side of the story, I replied, 'Until they live with him for a couple of decades, they don't get a say in the matter.'

'Don't throw pearls to swine' is my favorite new thought that is serving me well in ALL relationships. Resigning from my Executive Emotional Manager job freed me up to be present in my new job of creating a safe home where my kids and I have freedom to have our own thoughts and feelings and we can try 'scary' new things without endless lectures. I have more grace for myself and others and space to detox from the severe spiritual abuse.

It isn't all roses, and I am battling emotional abuse clean up with my kids all while dodging grenades my soon-to-be-ex keeps throwing at me. But I know I have the tools, resources, and amazing women in Flying Free to walk this path. I feel hope again when I think of my future."

Okay, that was fun, wasn't it? We're going to listen to our first question.

LISTENER: I'm, of course, at the end of my decision to leave my abusive relationship. I have not told him because I have nowhere to go to quickly. I'm meeting with the pastor of our church tomorrow because my husband is a deacon there, and I truly feel led to expose him. I'm not sure how this is going to go. I'm sure it's not going to go the way I have planned. I'm just wondering what your thoughts might be on that. Thank you.

NATALIE: Okay, if I were coaching you this week in the Flying Free program, I would ask you what your plan was for exposing him. So what are you hoping to accomplish and why? Now, there's no right or wrong answer here at all, just a choice that you get to make. And the only thing I would offer is to see if you can make that choice from a place of love and peace. And either choice could be made from that place. You could decide to expose him from a place of love and peace, or you could decide to say nothing from that exact same place.

So what do I mean? First of all, since we're not coaching here, I can't ask you questions, so I can only try to make some educated guesses as to why you might want to expose him, and see if any of these ring true. You may want to expose him because he's a deacon, pretending to be one thing to a church full of human lives, basically pulling the wool over their eyes, when in reality, he has a totally different character inside the four walls of his home. And telling the truth about wolves matters. It has the potential to offer a protective effect depending on the character of the other leaders in that church. If their character is also wolf-ish, then they will identify with and defend your husband just as wolf-packs do. But if they are truly aligned with the heart of God, then they will do as Christ does, which is listen, love, learn, and drive out wolves from among the sheep.

Now, another reason why you may want to expose him — I don't know — but another reason could be that it might open the door to getting more help for yourself and your children. You can't get help if everyone thinks you're safe and everything's fine. And the only way to let them know that you aren't okay, you're not safe, and you're not fine, is to tell them the truth about your husband.

Another more subtle reason, which could be difficult to see depending on our level of self-awareness, is that we have been so hurt and traumatized by this person that all we feel is pain and anger and panic. And we want some justice. We want wrongs to be made right. And another subtle reason is maybe we just want permission to get a divorce, and so because we know the theology that our church teaches says "no divorce," we need to make a good case for why they should give us permission or make an exception for us to get away from our abuser permanently. We're kind of looking for that mommy or daddy figure for validation and approval, and we're hoping that if we expose our abuser, that we will get that validation and approval so that we can feel confidence with the decision that we want to make and not have to worry about being told that we're a bad person.

Now, I don't know what's motivating this particular listener to want to tell her church. But I do know this: I personally was motivated by all of these things at different points in my relationship when I had to go forward and try to get help at different times during my marriage. But the question that she's asking is, what will happen if she exposes the abuse? That's what she wants to know. And I don't know the answer to that question. But here are some potential things that could happen, and then you can decide what you think about these outcomes and whether or not you want to risk them.

One potential thing that could happen is that the church believes you and then turns to your abuser and tries to get him to change and be a nice boy. The church will need to

probably use threats, maybe a little manipulation, because that's the way we force people to do what we want them to do, right? I mean, that never works, but this is what they do. So the abuser might try to jump through those hoops at first, but when he gets kind of sick of that, he will just end up reverting back to his default ways of thinking and living, and we will be back at square one.

Except we really won't, because churches don't take it very well when people don't do what they want them to do. And right now, they just want this couple to get back together so that everyone in the church can look like good Christian kids and the church can look like an amazeballs church, and then more people will come and give more money.

So if the abuser isn't cooperating, they may then turn on the victim to try to get her to stop making a fuss about the abuse and just "Suck it up and suffer like Jesus. I mean, if He can suffer, so can you, right? Plus, that's what Jesus taught victims to do. Right? Right?" Wrong. So when that doesn't work, then they just will wash their hands of the whole lot of you and hope you go away. You're just a blight upon their community. Maybe if they ignore you, you'll disappear.

Now, let me be clear. If you're listening to this and you are part of a church community that is nothing like the one that I just described, then you are blessed. They do exist. I know they do. But I have worked with over three thousand women over the past almost six years, and by far the predominant story is the one I just told you. It is the most likely scenario, I'm sad to say. And I get slightly annoyed, honestly, when people say, "Well, that's not true of most churches," because it actually is true of most churches, at least the ones that are some version of conservative Baptist or Reformed. It's true of most of them because they have similar teachings when it comes to marriage, divorce, men, and women, and they read the Bible through their own very misogynist, entitled lens. So their interpretations of many portions of scripture are twisted to serve them, to serve their agenda.

It's gross. I personally think it's satanic, and I can hear their voices right now, because I've heard them many times in the past: "You are angry, Natalie. You must not know God." You know what my answer is to that? "You're darn-tootin' I'm angry, and it's because I know God and am aligned with His Spirit that I am. And I like it. And I'm going to keep it." In their ever-lovin' hearts, they burn me at the stake at that point and move on to their next victim.

Okay. Another way they could respond, though, is by simply blaming you outright. I've heard this too: "Well, you're not being a very good little girl when you tattle on your

master that way. If you were a good Christian girl, you would keep your master's dirty laundry to yourself. You know, respect and all." "Master" is the husband. That's what they teach. They don't use those words, obviously, because that sounds wacko and they know it, but I'm using those words because that's what they mean. And yeah, it's totally wacko. So what they and maybe some of you don't realize is that you are not a little girl and your master is Jesus Christ. So if Jesus inspires you to expose a wolf, you can be brave and do it if you want to. And if you don't want to, guess what? Jesus still loves you to itty bitty pieces either way. That's called the gospel. The good news. His kingdom is now on earth and this is how He calls the shots: with love and grace, not power and control and selfish entitlement and manipulation and spiritual abuse. Oofda. I'm getting riled up. But this stuff makes me mad, because it's so blasphemous to God and His character.

Here's how I imagine a healthy and truly God-centered church would respond: "Thank you for letting us know. We love you both, and that love for you means that we will emotionally help and support you as you leave him. And that love for him means that we will ask him to step down from leadership and offer him some ideas for how he can get professional help from a licensed therapist or an abuser program if he wants it. And if you want to make your separation from him legal and permanent in order to live the rest of your life in hope and safety, we will help you achieve that goal. How can we help you right now?" But I don't honestly think that's what's going to happen with this listener, and here's why. She says herself that she doesn't think it's going to go well. So this isn't a random guess. This is something that she senses out of raw instinct based on past experiences dealing with the people and the teachings in this particular church.

You know, it's also okay just to walk away from all of it. You don't owe anyone an explanation, a defense, a story, an apology, your time or attention, anything. And you don't actually need validation, permission, or agreement from anyone in your life to leave a man who has mistreated you throughout your marriage.

You only need two things: Number one, you need to know and really believe and trust that God is who He says He is and that He will never leave you or forsake you. Knowing and believing this will enable you to see His hand in so many things. It's amazing. His hand is always in so many things, whether you believe it or not. But if you believe it, then you get to see it and experience it more. And it really helps quite tremendously. The other thing you need to know is yourself. And you need to have your own back. You need to see yourself as an adult instead of a child who can't do anything without help or permission. Getting to the place where we have those two things is the work we do in Flying Free. And I hope as many of you as can will join us in that work by going to joinflyingfree.com.

Alright, let's listen to another question.

LISTENER: Hello. I just heard you talking on a podcast about how hateful people and abusers wish that other individuals were not existing or annihilated. And I wondered what you make of the victims or survivors also wishing that their abusers didn't exist, because they know that's the only way that they'll be free. I know that many people wish my abuser didn't exist, and they are Christian, loving people who have that anger and knowledge that it's because he's abusing, and they just wish he would go away. But they're trusting God and not trying to make that happen or not being hateful directly to him. That seems like a different kind of hate. Not hate — anger. Yes?

NATALIE: Okay, first of all, when I use the word "annihilate" in the context of what abusers are trying to do to their victims, I'm not referring to literal murder. I'm referring to the annihilation of the victim's identity and personhood and dignity as an adult human with human rights of her own. The abuser doesn't acknowledge or respect her personhood and her human rights and lives with her in such a way that annihilates those things. She disappears not literally, but figuratively. So that's different from the fact that many victims after being mistreated like this and seeing no way out, they believe that the only way out is if they or their abuser were literally dead.

So from my understanding of this question, the listener is asking, "How are these two things different?" And that's the difference. One is figurative, and yes, sometimes literal. I mean, abusers do murder their wives. But at least with the vast majority of women that I work with or that are listening to this podcast, we are dealing mostly with emotional and spiritual abuse and manipulation and control rather than physical. So the annihilation is more about the victim's personhood.

I want everyone to notice something, though. The question implies that the victim's only way out is if someone literally dies. That's pretty scary, right? But this is what abusive versions of Christianity actually give birth to. This is the fruit of abusive Christianity: entrapment, oppression, more abuse, and yes, death wishes. Now, other people in the world might see that there are other options to get away from an abusive partner other than killing them or hoping that they get hit by a bus or die of cancer. There is separation and divorce.

But the abusive versions of Christianity that are all about power and control over women, they will twist the Bible in order to draw a line in the sand that God never meant to be drawn. And they will adhere to this notion that God hates divorce. But for Christians who've been programmed with this false teaching, even if you are being chronically abused and mistreated, you must suck it up and suffer. This is what they will

say: "God wants you to suffer over getting a legal divorce from a man that you married probably in your youth who ended up being an abuser." If God is like that and we believe in a freaking scary God like that, then guess what? It's going to bear the fruit of more abuse in the world, more suffering, and victims wishing they had the guts to murder their abusers or themselves. This is so twisted, and again, we're just slapping the face of the character of God. He isn't like that. Jesus is not like that.

I want to read a quote by Patrick Weaver. He wrote this on his website, and he said this: "The Bible does not say, 'God hates divorce.' That's another Christian fable that has survived due to a traditional Christian response to fables: belief without question." I love the way he writes. "The literal and accurate translation of Malachi 2:16 is this: 'The man who hates and divorces his wife, says the Lord, the God of Israel, does violence to the one he should protect, says the Lord Almighty. So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful.' As well, Malachi 2:16 is the end of a passage in which God is addressing men who were being unfaithful and rebellious toward His daughters and using divorce to throw His daughters away to chase after ungodly women. Their rebellious and unfaithful behavior angered God. In context, Malachi 2:13-16 is actually a rebuke against abusive, rebellious, and unfaithful husbands."

Just imagine a scripture that rebukes rebellious, unfaithful, and abusive men being used to coerce women into staying in a relationship with rebellious, abusive, and unfaithful men. It's mind-blowing, isn't it? Many abuse victims are coerced to stay in abusive relationships with the false teaching that God hates divorce, which is not in the Bible. However, the Bible does say God hates abuse. In Psalm 11:5, the Lord tests the righteous, but His soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.

Okay, now let's talk about this death wish for a minute, because I want all of you to know that it's actually quite common and normal for Christian women who love Jesus who have been programmed under this abusive version of Christianity to wish death on their husbands or themselves. I hear it all the time, and I too wished death upon my ex. I used to hope he would get into a car accident on the way home from work. Sometimes when he was late, I would get my hopes up. I mean, it's horrible when I look back and I think about it, but even when I had those thoughts, I was full of fear and shame that thoughts like that were actually running through my head. There was another part of me, a really judgy part of me, who would lecture me and scold me for having such thoughts, and my self-loathing just increased.

I didn't actually have a thought about killing my ex husband, but if you have, that is normal as well if you really, truly believe there's no way out. I did, however, think a lot about killing myself. And there was a part of me inside that believed it just might be

best to kill myself and release everyone from the burden of dealing with my failures and release me from the burden of the pain that I couldn't see any way out of.

Interestingly enough, you know what ended all these dark thoughts about my ex and I dying? When God made it crystal clear to me that He not only approved of divorce, but that He wanted me to get one. Now, it took Him a long time to get me there. I was as deeply entrenched and indoctrinated as they come, I promise you, and there is a big, huge story behind that statement that I don't have time to get into here, but take my word for it. That God got me to that place of surrendering to Him and obeying Him in this area is nothing short of miraculous. And walking that obedience out was hell. And I had no guarantees of anything on the other side. I thought it might be poverty or scraping out a living making soap the rest of my life.

But I remember the day that I was on my face on the floor in a hotel room, and I had just spent two days reading through twenty-years worth of journals and praying and asking God, "This is it. What do you want me to do? I will follow you. I'm no longer going to follow my church, I'm not going to follow my family, I'm not going to follow my programming, I'm not going to follow my husband. I want You to direct me, You and You alone." And by the time I was done with that weekend, I was weeping on the floor and saying, "Yes, I will. I will do it. I will obey You even if everyone calls me a heretic and a liar. My allegiance is to You." And this gargantuan, I mean, this burden that I had been carrying around with me for so many years was just lifted. It was just lifted. I can't even describe the feeling I had. There were no more thoughts about dying or about my husband's death because God had a better plan, and it turned out to be a million times better than anything I could have dreamed at that point.

So that's when I stopped focusing on my husband and his change, and I filed for divorce and I started focusing on the life God gave me to live. I never looked back, because it was a deliberate and confident choice knowing full well that... I went into it with my eyes wide open that it was going to be very excruciating. I went into hell with my eyes wide open. And as I've said in other episodes, it did cost me dearly. I lost my family, my friends, my church, my reputation, my home, money.

Seven years later after filing, I can say that God has given me back everything I lost and so much more. No, I don't have my family of origin. I don't have my old home. I don't have my old job. I don't have my old church or my old friends. I have a more loving family and a beautiful home. I have a job that fulfills me, a church that goes beyond a building and forced small groups and programs. I have friends who have my back and hold space for me to be me, and I ended up amazingly and miraculously with a man who loves me, partners with me as equals and adults. A man who takes responsibility

when his crap shows up and works on his own self-development. Someone I can fully trust to tell me the truth and to show up. Someone who has never once, never even once criticized anything I say or do or who I am. Now, he doesn't agree with me on everything, but he's never once criticized or shamed me for my ideas or beliefs or thoughts or way of life. He has only ever shown me respect and honor. I used to dream about a relationship like that. I mean, it's what I wanted when I was a young girl, and now I have it.

But I would not have it if I had killed myself or if I had waited and hoped that my ex would die. I had to take responsibility for my own, one life that God gave to me and make my own adult choices about how I wanted to spend the rest of it. And God Himself is the one who inspired this stretching and growing me up, and I believe He wants this for every one of you. Now, that doesn't mean He's going to guide you in the same way or in the same timing. I trust His wisdom and His Spirit who lives within you to direct you. I don't have to tell you what to do. You have the Holy Spirit in you. You get to make your own choices. I love you no matter what, and so does Jesus. I trust that when you're ready, you will listen and hear.

Always remember the character of Jesus. Jesus came to show us what the Father is actually like. And when we know, I mean really, really know deep in our bones and believe that we are 100% loved and safe and accepted no matter what, that is the day that we become confident and empowered to make adult choices that will set us and the people around us free from fear and shame, two of the most common and debilitating emotions that modern-day Christians feel in their bodies on a regular basis due to worshipping twisted and mistranslated and misinterpreted Bible words rather than worshipping the living Word of God, who is Jesus Christ.

Okay, that's all I have for you today. If you haven't yet left a rating and review for this Flying Free Podcast, I would like to ask you with the very prettiest "please," along with heaps and heaps of pink and purple sugar on top, if you would do so. Because why not? It doesn't take that long, and yet it does go a long way in promoting this podcast so that more Christian women in sick relationships can learn some new ways of thinking about their situation and find hope for their futures as well. Thank you so much, and thank you for listening. Until next time, fly free.