

MY ABUSIVE HUSBAND SAYS I'M UNBIBLICAL UNLESS I RECONCILE WITH HIM

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 195 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I'm going to answer two questions that are very similar to each other, and I get some versions of these questions quite a bit. But Christian women basically want to know if they're justified in divorcing their abuser. And I've actually talked about this before, I think quite a bit, but since it's something that continues to come up over and over, it's worth addressing again, and there's always a little spin on it. So I think I'm going to say some things in this episode that maybe I haven't said before.

Anyways, before we do that, I do wanna read a couple of podcast reviews that women have left because I'm so thankful, first of all, for these reviews, and I'm also hoping that just hearing them will encourage the rest of you in a couple of ways. First of all, I want you to know that you are not the only one hiding in your corner subversively listening to a podcast that probably some people in your life would call naughty. "You naughty little girls." Can you just hear those voices in your head? I wanna call attention to those voices, because they're just little parts of you who have adopted the conditioning and brainwashing of modern, abusive Christian culture.

And it's just thoughts. Those voices are not actually powerful. The things they say do not define you. They're not facts. They're just ideas that men with a ton of bias have indoctrinated today's Christians with. And that's it. Once we can see these thoughts for what they are, they lose their power, okay? They're not the voice of God. They're just ideas that have been put out there by men who happen to have an agenda to power-grab. And once we see this, then we can unhook from their power and step into our own God-given power to follow the voice of Jesus in our lives. And trust me, His voice sounds very different, and He inspires zero fear or shame. That's actually how you know that a voice is from a devilish source or a Christ-centered source.

So anyway, I hope these reviews will encourage you that you're not alone. You are one of thousands of women who listen to this podcast every week. But secondly, I'm kind of hoping that some of you will be inspired to leave your own review so that we can catch the attention of the podcast apps, and then they'll say, "Oh, this podcast has listeners that are actively interested — interested enough to leave a review. So let's show this show to more people and see if they might be interested as well." And that's how we

organically spread the word about this.

Now, I don't know if you know this, but a single episode costs between \$300 - \$350 to produce, and nobody is charged a thing. I mean, someone pays for it, and I'll get to that in a minute. It is free content for all of you that's paid for by the funds that come in from members of Flying Free and Flying Higher. Those are my two programs for Christian women. So you're gonna hear me talk about these programs in some of these episodes. I don't take any advertisers to cover the costs of these episodes, because number one, ads are super annoying, and two, they're often just irrelevant. But I do promote my programs for your consideration, and I think they are totally relevant to what you're going through. But if you can't join my programs — and a lot of people can't — then these podcast episodes are for you with 100% of all my love. Okay?

All right. So here are some podcast reviews: “No-holds-barred honesty. Natalie will give you the hard truth and the steps to take to transform your life. She does this for free. This resource is a gift.” “Amazing resource for women. I'm a part of Flying Higher, and I faithfully listen to this podcast. I'm so grateful for Natalie and her mission to help women who have been affected by abuse. This is a safe place to process and grow, and I highly recommend this podcast and her programs.” “Episode 83, ‘Trusting God with Your Choices’ — what an incredible reminder that God wants us to make choices like our children. This is how we learn. This is how we grow. Thank you so much, Natalie, for all of your wisdom.”

And by the way, if that made you go, “Oh, I kinda would like to listen to Episode 83, you totally can. All you have to do is go to flyingfreenow.com/83. Or if you're in your podcast app... Some podcast apps like Apple Podcasts, they'll actually show the numbers of the episodes and you can find them more easily. Other podcast apps don't do that. They'll just show the title, but I think the title is “Trusting God While Making Your Own Adult Choices in Your Controlling Marriage.” But an easy way to find it is just to go to flyingfreenow.com/83. And then the last one I was gonna read is this one. It says, “So helpful. What a wonderful podcast. I wish I had heard this years ago. I would not have felt so alone in my struggles. Even though I have wonderful, loving friends and even a supportive church now, it's important to really examine our beliefs and behaviors in order to truly recover ourselves from the trap of the enemy. I feel safe with Natalie because she clearly loves God, His word, as well as all of His children.”

So anyway, thank you so much for those. Those are the most recent reviews that came in, and we love reading those — my team does, I do — because it makes what we do more meaningful to know that we're making a difference. All right, let's listen to these questions. We're going to listen to the first one first and I'm going to address the

nuances of this one, and then we'll listen to the next one and I'll talk about that one after that. Here we go.

LISTENER: Hey. About four-and-a-half months ago, I was finally able to see my way clear to escape an emotionally and mentally abusive marriage of over thirty years. I got out with my three youngest children to try to salvage what of their childhood they have left. My husband is now claiming that unless I desire to reconcile with him, then I'm not being scripturally accurate. He's approached my pastor about this, and I'm a little afraid that he's gonna make some kind of big stink. I know that forgiveness — which, I'm forgiving him and trying to daily forgive him and extend grace — does not equal trusting him again or does not equal that the relationship will ever look the same.

What advice would you have for me as to how to approach his trying to cherry-pick and wield the scriptures to beat me over the head with the fact that if I remain living separately from him, then I'm not doing things in a biblical manner? Thank you. I really appreciate it.

NATALIE: Aren't people fascinating? These guys are fascinating when you think about it. Okay, so what we have here is we have an adult woman who, after thirty years of investing her mind, body, and soul in an abusive relationship, she has now made the conscious, rational decision to leave. Now, there are a bazillion Bible verses about being around fools and why to avoid them and how they do damage to people who are in close proximity to them, along with lots of stories about fools like King Saul and Herod and Ahab and Pharaoh and literally on and on and on. And then there are a bazillion more Bible verses about how God loves us, about how God cares about victims, how He cares about women and the poor and the neglected. There are fifty-nine verses about how we are to treat one another in the New Testament as Christians.

And then Jesus came and showed us the heart and the character of God in person, and then He demonstrated how God actually sets aside rigid rules if they're hurting human people. Jesus tried to show and demonstrate how the law was made for people, not people for the law. Now, I'm speaking in big generalizations here, and I'm not going to go in and tell you all these verses, because number one, there's way too many of them. More of the Bible is about what I'm just talking about than about... And we could literally spend days going into all of this, alright? The evidence in the Bible is overwhelming in favor of abuse victims getting free from their abusers in God's kingdom, which is the kingdom, by the way, that we have been called to live in and live out while we have this short little vapor of a life on earth.

But enter onto the scene a man, an abuser no less, who's claiming that this woman is

not being scripturally accurate to escape his clutches. Now my first response is, "Of course an abuser would say that. LOL. That makes him not only an emotional abuser, but when he uses the Bible on his side to guilt trip his victim and hopefully manipulate her into coming back so he can abuse her some more, now he is a 100% pure and genuine spiritual abuser as well." My next knee-jerk thought is, "Hmm, he's not very familiar with the Bible, and he should really do a little more studying before trying to swing it like an ax. He's just not very skilled at it. But then again, people who don't understand the Bible or who think the Bible is supposed to be used for their own agenda of course would see it like an ax. They don't need to know it. They just need to use it to hit people with, and it has served its purpose in his life."

Now my third thought is that, "It is fascinating that he would accuse his wife of cherry-picking verses when that's exactly what he's doing. He's ignoring the whole scope of the message of Jesus Christ and the Bible, which teaches that God loves us and offers us a safe landing place through Christ, and instead he pulls out a random verse here and there to make his case for why he should get to continue to abuse and use a woman — 'Give me back my lollipop' — just like Christians use the Bible to make a case for why they should get to own black people as slaves." That's just one example.

Here's facts: Anyone can use the Bible book to make a case for absolutely anything, and they have throughout history. They've used the Bible book to make a case for genocide, slavery, rape, misogyny, or whatever your political party stands for. Everyone claims the Bible is on their side. Now how can this be? Because it's a book you guys — it's not God. Let me repeat that: The Bible is a book that gives us some information about God. Does it give us all the information about God, really? God is so small that we can describe Him completely and know everything about Him from one book?

In the gospels — I don't remember which gospel it says — I think it's John — it says that if there were books that could hold the scope of what Jesus taught and who He was, the whole world wouldn't even be big enough to hold them, all right? So the Bible itself says that, and yet so many people worship the Bible as God.

Now here's the thing: The Bible is not God and books have limitations, one of them being that they hold a specific amount of information. They do not hold an infinite amount of information. They just hold some information. So one of the other limitations that books have is they have the propensity to be misunderstood, mistranslated, and misinterpreted. Plus, this particular book was written quite a while ago to a very different culture of people and from different languages. So for us to have the audacity to think that we can just read our modern day translations and we completely know what they mean without knowing anything about the culture...

Now, there are people who have studied this. And if you wanna go learn more about it, there's plentiful information out there on the internet and elsewhere by Christian Bible scholars, okay? I'm not saying go out and listen to old Willie on the side of the road and ask him what he thinks because he said he studied it. I'm not saying that. I'm saying there are reputable Bible scholars out there who have studied these things, and we can learn more about this. We don't have to just listen to Pastor Johnny and everything he learned, which is also limited.

So if you're going to rely only on the Bible and the limited information that it has about God, then you're gonna have to get used to everyone else using that Bible to serve themselves too, okay? That means it's fair game for everyone to manipulate and twist and translate and use however they want to. If you wanna play that game, it's out there. Everyone's playing it. This means that I can have my own view — and I do — that the Bible has sweeping messages that point to Jesus Christ, but that Jesus Christ is my God.

And actually, the Bible says He is, that Jesus Christ is actually the Word of God. And again, the Bible actually says that in John 1:1. And that He said right before He left this earth — He said He was gonna leave behind something better. And guess what? It wasn't the Bible. The Bible as we know it today didn't even exist back then. Jesus said He was going to leave us the Spirit of God. We were now going to have the mind of Christ if we wanted to hook into Christ like a branch of the vine. That is the Word of God. That is what you can't shake. You can't argue against love. You can't argue against freedom. You can't argue against holding space and mental and emotional and spiritual health. You can't argue against those things, alright?

So here's my suggestion. What if we just let all the Christian folksies have their own personal, biased interpretations, and we just simply follow Jesus? Huh. I wonder what God could do in this world if we just lived lives of freedom and love in our God, Jesus Christ, and we just tapped into His wisdom and His purposes for our lives, which is to love God and love our neighbor in the same way that we love ourself. By the way, if you don't work on loving yourself, you'll never be good at loving your neighbor, but that's another episode for another day.

All right, let's listen to the next question.

LISTENER: I have two questions. I've been married for twenty-nine years and I have been diminished, dismissed, disregarded, and he has not been reliable. And he's been critical and detached emotionally, and very covertly controlling. So after years of counseling in which he quits because they always focus on him to change, we're

separated. And I told him for the purpose of him getting counseling and working on himself with the hopes that we can restore the marriage.

So my first question is, if he doesn't repent, I'm wondering if this treatment of me is biblical grounds for divorce. And secondly, what if he does do all the work and he wants to restore relationship and he is repentant and my body literally cannot reconcile? I can forgive — that part I don't have a problem with. But do I still have grounds for divorce or do I need to stay legally separated forever? I'm just so scared to go back to him emotionally. My body just can't do it right now even though it's only been a month. But I am just so much more happy and relieved right now. So those are my questions. Thank you.

NATALIE: Okay, so the first thing that I want to address is this idea that we have that after decades of abuse, we are now required to give them an ultimatum: "Change, or I'll divorce you." Really? I mean, that's just an idea. It's not a fact or something that we have to do if we don't want to. You actually had grounds for divorce the first year you were married and started being abused. All you had to do was file and be done with it, but you didn't know that or you didn't believe that because maybe what others taught you to believe, or maybe because you thought that he would get better or you wanted to believe that he would get better.

Then you could have divorced him the second year or the third year and every year since, but we have this idea that we have to go through this process and give the abuser a million-trillion chances to be a good boy. No, you don't. My guess is that you don't trust him, and now he's gonna go to counseling and say he's a changed man. And now you're supposed to gaslight yourself into believing that you can trust him. Really? I mean, you can if you want to, but why? Every time this guy dangles a juicy worm in front of you (the worm represents love or hope or a compliment or whatever), you take the bait. And what happens next? You find out that the worm was on a hook and you just got hooked back in. It doesn't feel good, and it happens every time.

So now your body actually knows very, very well what your brain is having a hard time catching up on because of its programming. And that is the truth that this guy is abusive and he can't be trusted. And all the worms that he gives you, they're always on hooks. In order to stop taking the bait after all these years, we need to accept this reality so that when we see the juicy worm of hope, we say, "Oh, there it is. The worm on a hook. Looks delicious, but I don't like the hook part, so I'll pass."

All right, so all I'm saying is that when they go to counseling and they go through this phase, it's just another worm on a hook, usually. I mean, rare... Such rare... I've literally

worked with thousands of women. I've seen maybe someone go through counseling... Maybe three or four times at the most. And that's just as far as I know. I don't know what happened long term. I've had people leave the program and then come back a few years later and go, "Yeah, I thought he changed, but I guess he didn't."

All right, so here's the thing to remember about repentance and change. It's internally motivated. It comes from inside a person, not outside. It doesn't come from you telling them to change or from their church telling them to change. Nobody has to tell anyone to change. If someone wants to change, they change. They'll figure it out. They google for help. They go to read books. They go to counseling. They'll go to counseling whether the partner stays with them or not. That's what all the victims are doing. Nobody's telling them, "You should really go to counseling and change." No. They're out there going, "How can I change? Let's see, let's try counseling and see if that helps," right? Because they want to change, not to manipulate their partner, but because they want to change. Period, end of story. And that has literally nothing to do with you in your life. That's them and their life.

The question for you is, "Do you wanna be with this person?" Even if they do change... Which, again, it's not likely, but even if by some miraculous chance they do change, your brain and your body have been already repeatedly traumatized by them for decades. So do you wanna spend the rest of your life trying to manage your healing while living with this person? And when he reverts back to old behavior because he's been programmed too — that's not easily rewired — are you gonna be all in on managing the fallout in your own life when he reverts back?

Your life is a vapor. Is this how you wanna spend it, or do you wanna decide that you've already invested enough time on eating hooks, and you wanna try some more creative endeavors for the rest of your vapor life? So do you have biblical grounds? This is what you're wondering. "Do I have biblical grounds?" Well, this goes back to what I said earlier about the Bible. Hundreds of thousands of Christians would say that you do have biblical grounds to divorce him. I would be amongst those. And also hundreds of thousands of other Christians would say, "You don't." And guess what? Hundreds of thousands of more other Christians would have their own caveats and nuances and opinions related to all the different aspects and details about your situation, and they could pontificate about it forever on Facebook.

Do you have time in your vapor of a life to figure out all these people's opinions and ideas for your life? Or alternatively, we could just decide who we're gonna put our faith in. Who is your God? This is an important question to ask yourself. I've talked about this on the podcast in the past. Is your God a petulant, angry, annoyed, displeased toddler

in the sky who wants His lollipop just like your husband? Or is God just a wee bit bigger than that? What if He loves you no matter what and really just wants you to be who He created you to be: someone who lives in freedom and walks in love? I'm sorry, but we aren't free and we don't live in love if we can't trust God to catch us if we jump. It really does all boil down to what you believe about God.

Now, if the Bible is your God, good luck with that, because now you've got to rely on your own understanding of what the Bible says in all the various different and sundry verses, including all the ones that seemingly contradict other ones, and there are a lot of them in there that do that. Or you have to rely on the understanding of our modern Bible scholars. Or you could study what ancient Bible scholars used to believe, because they believe different things from the modern ones, or the understanding of your women's ministry leader at church. Maybe she knows and has all the answers. Or maybe Pastor Johnny who went to seminary and passed by the skin of the teeth — maybe he knows.

But these are all just people. They're all just human beings. Or alternatively, we could walk with Jesus. What is God telling you to spend the rest of your vapor life focused on? If you're feeling sick in your body and fear in your soul when you think of living the rest of your vapor life with your abuser, what is that going to create more of in your life?

And how are we able to bring more love and hope and peace and life and influence into the world when we are filled to the brim with fear and anxiety? We could spend our vapor life in survival mode like a little caterpillar just trying to find the next leaf. Or we could spend it flying free, like the butterfly we were created to become.

But the metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly happens in the dark, small space of a chrysalis. If you want the butterfly life, you're gonna need to be willing to go through that painful process of losing who you are right now, your identity and who you've always been, who you've always known yourself to be, and you have to go through this goo phase. The caterpillar dissolves into this goo, and then it transforms into what you were meant to be.

Now, maybe what I just said is gonna resonate with some of you. What I just said might align with something deep inside your core even though I used no Bible verses to say it, and this is gonna be all it takes. You'll run with this. You'll be like, "I know this is the Holy Spirit of God speaking to me. I'm gonna run with this," all right? I think that will happen with some of you.

But if you're so deeply indoctrinated with certain ideas about God and the Bible and

divorce that what I just said sounds like gobbledygook to you, first of all, I get it. I was 100% right there with you at one point. Then for those of you who are in that space, you might need to study all the Bible verses and theological arguments for why God wants to set victims free and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

So I recommend Gretchen Baskerville's book and website. It's called "The Life-Saving Divorce." I think her website is actually called "The Life-Saving Divorce" too. All you have to do is look that up and you'll find it. She has a ton of YouTube videos as well that are awesome. Her book is awesome. I interviewed her on this podcast a few times as well, and I highly recommend that. And if you're scared to read that, then I guess you won't read it and I guess you won't find out any other ideas.

I'm actually teaching this lesson in Butterfly Bootcamp. I can say it now because by the time this episode comes out, Butterfly Bootcamp will be done. But people in my program were invited to Butterfly Bootcamp. It's gonna be in my hometown. We're gonna get together, and it's kind of like how it sounds. But one of the things I'm gonna talk to them about is any given experience, we have... And I heard this idea at a conference last spring. It's like five-million toothpicks are coming at us all at once, and our brain only has the capacity to grab two-hundred of them, so two-hundred out of the five-million. So our brain tends to grab the two-hundred toothpicks, two-hundred ideas that we're the most familiar with. And it's just the way the brain works. That's how the brain kind of repeats itself.

That's why we can be stuck for so many years, because the brain just keeps picking up the same ideas and saying, "Yes, this is true, this is true." And it doesn't wanna look at any of the other millions of toothpicks. What you're gonna have to do if you wanna change, if anyone wants to change, you have to be willing to be wrong about some things.

If you're the kind of person who's right about everything... And of course everyone thinks they're right about everything, right? But if you are that person, then you're not gonna change. Your brain will just keep picking out the same two-hundred toothpicks that it always has. And fifty years from now, you will be the exact same person that you are today.

And you can. I know people who've lived like that. But I'm just recommending or saying that there is an alternative, and there is another option, and that is to start looking at some other toothpicks. There are some other toothpicks out there, and I think that there's a lot of wisdom in some of those other toothpicks, and I think that they are very scripturally sound and also biblical and also Christ-like and also godly and also create

so much amazing love and beauty in this world. But we will never find them if we will only hang onto our two-hundred toothpicks that we're used to. So I guess I thought of that because I was thinking about the "Life-Saving Divorce" book. "The Life-Saving Divorce" book might be a toothpick you might wanna take a look at. So we'll put the links in the show notes.

You guys, that's all I have for you today. I'm excited to be with you again next week, and until that time, fly free.