

## HOW CAN YOU STILL HONOR YOURSELF IN AN ABUSIVE MARRIAGE?

*Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of [FlyingFreeNow.com](http://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 2 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I'd like to introduce you to a friend of mine, Rachel. She is going to be visiting with me, kind of like sitting down in your living room and having coffee, at least fifty percent of the time in these podcasts. I'm really excited to have conversations with Rachel that you guys can listen in on. These will be topics that are important to both Rachel and myself and I believe they will be important to you too. Rachel is the community support director within the private Flying Free membership group. She takes care of a lot of the administration in that group. I could not do that group without her. So I'm excited. But she's also a friend of mine, and I'm excited to have these conversations with her. So Rachel, tell us a bit about yourself, and then we'll get started.

RACHEL: I'm so excited to be talking with you today. I'm armed with coffee. I'm all set up for a conversation over coffee. My name is Rachel. I have been divorced about nine months now. Longer than that, I've been learning about this topic of emotional abuse, marriage, and life in general. I'm still a student of those things and always looking to learn more about what God says about marriage and who I am in Him. Personally, I have a 13-year-old and an energetic German shepherd. They both keep me busy. Also, God uses many things about life, so it is always surprising where things pop up like that. But I am excited to be here and looking forward to diving into this with you.

NATALIE: Yeah! Ladies, today we are going to talk about a question that you can ask yourself throughout 2019. I got the idea for this question... A friend of mine sent me a link to a YouTube video where this new-ager kind of person was suggesting a question for her listeners to ask themselves. The question she challenged her listeners to ask was, "In any decision that comes up in your life, what would a woman who loves herself do in this situation?" That question was so intriguing to me. I thought immediately as a Christian woman who was raised very conservative (I spent decades of my life in fundamentalist conservative religious circles) that question immediately caused the hair on my neck to stand up because I automatically have this visceral reaction to loving yourself. First, if you had brought that subject up to me ten years ago, I would have said, "That is such a cliché, and it's so stupid. We should love other people. We love God, we love others, but there is no room to love yourself. If you love yourself, that is just selfish." But now, ten years later, I really believe that learning how to love yourself

is one key to your healing and recovery. We'll get into that a little more in a minute. But I was thinking how could I rephrase that question for my readers and listeners so that it wouldn't have quite the knee-jerk reaction? Here's how I would ask that question: what would a woman who honors herself do, a woman who honors herself as a daughter of the King of kings and who is honored by the King of kings? Try to set yourself aside and picture a woman who is an ambassador and a daughter of the King of the whole universe. When I think of royalty, I think they honor themselves. Have you ever seen a person of royalty behave in a way that is dishonoring to themselves? (I suppose there are people who...)

RACHEL: Well but think about it. Absolutely not because then they are dishonoring the entire system, or maybe even the entire country, because they are representatives of that country, right?

NATALIE: Exactly. That's a good point because when you honor yourself you are also honoring your country, your family...

RACHEL: Right.

NATALIE: As a Christian, what would I do in this situation? You can use this question for anything. You can use it for decisions you have to make whether they are big decisions like, "Should I move or should I stay in my home?" You can ask it for medium-sized decisions like, "How am I going to respond to this child who is out of control?" Or you can ask it for a minor situation like, "What am I going to eat today for breakfast?" If you asked that question prior to making your decision, how would some of your decisions change? I thought what we would talk about is because of that hang-up that I have and am sure many of you have when you hear that kind of question, I think we should unravel that a bit. Why do we feel we cannot honor ourselves or love ourselves? What is in our way?

RACHEL: I think first that it is shame. Shame is very pervasive. It is part of the curse. Adam and Eve, immediately after they sinned against God by eating what He had told them not to eat, felt shame. They were aware of their own nakedness. They wanted to hide. Shame affects a lot of what we do, and most of the time we are not even aware of how it affects us. Learning to love yourself and to see yourself as worthy of God's love is a huge part. You have to really dive into what is the shame and how is it presenting itself and keeping me from stepping into the love of God and the truth of how He sees me because of what Jesus did on the cross. Does that make sense?

NATALIE: Yes. I think of the word “worth” as worthiness. A lot of times Christian women don’t feel that they are worth asking for respect, they’re not worth being able to have boundaries, or they are not worth dying for even if you want to bring it back to your relationship with God. I’m not worth dying for.

RACHEL: Yes. I also know personally that question of worth has been so big in my life. For me, I felt like if I didn’t work, work, work, and do, do, do, or asked something of someone else or asked something of God, I was going to out-step my worth. It was going to tip the scales, and I had asked for more than I could ever ask for and my worth was expired, or I had overstepped my bounds. I actually wear a bracelet on my wrist that is very simple. It is silver with a chain, and it has a cross. It is designed to remind myself that Jesus thought I was worthy to go to that cross and pay the price for me so I could go to be in relationship with God. That means I have infinite worth as a child of God, as a daughter of the King. I have to look at that quite a bit.

NATALIE: That’s beautiful. Have you felt like, “I have worth when I do certain things or fulfill certain obligations?” What are some things in the past that you have felt like, “I have to do these things in order to feel like I have some worth?”

RACHEL: A big one for me was: is my husband happy with me at this current moment? Because if he is not, I don’t feel worthy. I don’t feel like I’m doing what I need to be doing in my life to earn my worth. I must really step outside that because that was a bottomless pit that I could have kept pouring myself into. He was never happy with me. It was never enough. I think that question of enough is a big one also for women. “Am I enough? Am I, just as I am, going to be worthwhile?” Those are things we wrestle with. I was just reading yesterday in Galatians 3. I want to encourage that Galatians is a wonderful book. It is a beautiful picture of God and the story of not to fear man but to fear God. That has been big in my life. Paul is talking to the Galatians, and he says, “Does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law or by what you do? Or is it by hearing and with faith?” Hearing the truth of who Jesus is and what He did for us with faith. I love that verse and wrote it down for myself to look at over and over again. It is easy for us to get sucked into the works of the law, working and trying to earn perhaps not our salvation, because we know we cannot earn favor with God. No, it is just through faith. The other thing is having an accurate picture of how He sees us. Natalie, I want to tell this story because I realize the most accurate picture of God’s love for us is a parent looking at their newborn baby and seeing that love for them. That baby can’t do anything for them. There is no way that the baby earned their love. But the parent’s love is pure, and it’s out of this world. I think that’s because it originates from God. I think of my thirteen-year-old because when he was born, the

doctor put him on my stomach, and he immediately pooped and peed all over me. A lot of babies do that, right? But I was so excited to meet him. I kept saying, "Hi precious. Hi precious." (I was all hopped up on drugs.) He had just pooped and peed all over me, but he was more precious to me than I could have ever thought or pictured in my mind. That's how God sees us. We're dirty in our sin. We've pooped and peed all over, but He loves us in that. He loves us enough to make a way for us to be in relationship with Him. It makes the sweetness of what Christ did on the cross for us that much richer.

NATALIE: That analogy makes me think of... We don't think of our babies when they do those things—they cry, have diarrhea, or throw-up, or whatever—we don't think of those things as being barriers between us and our love for them. I grew up believing, even into adulthood, that my sin created a barrier between me and God. And it does. Sin creates a barrier between us. But even after I was saved, there was a barrier between God and myself every time I did something that I or someone else in my life determined was not acceptable, and then I wasn't acceptable to God to where I would go to a communion service on a Sunday morning and there may have been... I had nine children so Sunday mornings, getting everyone ready to go and nursing a baby and the whole nine yards, didn't always go smoothly. In fact, I don't think it ever went smoothly. Then I was living with someone who wasn't the most encouraging person on the planet. So by the time we got to church, I felt so much shame. We'd go to church, and we'd be smiling, but I knew I felt like such a hypocrite. I wouldn't take communion because I thought, "I'm not worthy to take communion." So the very point of communion, which is to remember Christ's... But see we were taught that in our church—that if you take communion when you have sin in your life then you are violating... You were in danger of... I can't remember the verse. But I felt it wasn't appropriate to take communion if you had sin in your life and that you had to have made everything right. I know there was at least once or twice where I would lean over. I knew my husband wasn't happy with me. I would lean over and say, "I'm sorry that I got upset about this. Will you please forgive me?" just so that I could take communion. Then at other times I would just not take communion. But he always took communion.

RACHEL: Yeah.

NATALIE: I realized one thing I had to learn to heal from all that is, as you said, the mother with her baby, God understands and knows that we are dust, and He doesn't expect us to be perfect. Really, if you were supposed to be perfect before you took communion, nobody could ever take communion.

RACHEL: Absolutely not.

NATALIE: So there is this double message of grace for salvation but after you are saved, you need to dot your i's and cross your t's or else you've put up a wall between you and God. If other people aren't happy... especially as a wife, if your husband is unhappy with you then of course God is not happy with you because your husband is God's representative in your life. I firmly believed that.

RACHEL: What an utter perversion of God's truth. That is so hard because what is the most deceptive to us? It is truth mixed with lies. I think that is what the devil excels at. He wants us mixed up in those lies; he wants us confused; and he wants us fearful that we're going to run afoul of God's love and His grace will run out on us because we had a hard time getting out of the house on a Sunday morning. You've finally out stepped the bounds of God's grace, and you'd better fix yourself. But it is mixed with this truth that if there is something between you and a brother, as it says in the Bible, then you are supposed to make amends. I think that truth can be twisted into, "This is all on you. You've not done enough. How dare you! The grace has run out." There are these good principles for making sure you are living in harmony with your brothers and sisters, which are then used as a weapon against you. How horrible! That is awful. I think it reflects the fallen nature of this world. Every day when I come to grips with how fallen this world is, it makes the prospect of heaven and living in communion with God so much sweeter. Natalie, I wanted to talk about this thought of honoring God with our actions by treating ourselves as an honored daughter of the King. We were talking earlier about asking yourself that question in 2019 in hard decisions, medium decisions, and simple decisions. (Or what should be simple decisions.) This is something I've been working through in my personal life—being aware of what's really going on inside of me because for my entire life I've been in a state of numbness or am trying to avoid pain. (Obviously, numbness does that—not being totally aware of what's going on inside of me and what my real motivations for things are.) I've always thought of myself as a self-aware person. Well, I was self-aware because other people told me what my motives were, which weren't necessarily true. That's one thing our husbands do that is so damaging to us. They tell us what we would do and why we would do it. But it has no basis in reality. If there is a daily decision that must be made, like, "What am I going to eat? Am I going to go shopping today?" these are neutral. We have to eat to live. We have to provide things, groceries, or clothes for our family and ourselves. But I think it is valuable to ask yourself, "What is going on inside of me as I do these things?" because it can be honoring to myself to eat a nutritious meal, but sometimes it is not honoring to eat. You might eat because you want to numb yourself or because it is comforting to you. That is something I have a lot of personal experience with.

NATALIE: Same.

RACHEL: Here's the other thing. I'm aware of it now, but there are times when I don't have any other tools other than that right at that moment. That's when grace comes in. I must realize I'm going to heal from this someday, but I'm not there yet. Honestly, it's not honoring to yourself to eat when you aren't hungry or to eat only sweets or something like that. I think it is important to be aware of how neutral things can play out in your life and in different situations and to not live by a certain set of rules because the situation changes. For example, I'm going to eat candy by myself in a closet because my husband was cruel to me today. That's not honoring to yourself, but maybe in a different situation eating candy would be honoring to yourself, like if you made candy with your kids and you are going to try it together and it's a place of community. It has to be... There are no hard and fast rules. There's no formula for these things. It's about being self-aware and open to what God's truth may tell you in that moment, no matter if it's painful.

NATALIE: It makes me think you see so many things on Facebook or the mommy bloggers who will talk about their health food journey, or some are selling products, and they bring in a lot of shame if you aren't doing your life or making the same decisions that they've made for their lives. I don't know that they intentionally mean to do that; I'm guessing probably not. But I remember often feeling like I would read things on Facebook and then I'd go to church and listen to different friends talking about what they were doing in their lives, and I would immediately analyze my own life for all the ways I was lacking in all that. Sometimes I would even say, "Oh my word, I never thought about that." Then they'd say, "Well, you should think about that." I'd go home and vex over it. I had lots of children. I was homeschooling, I had a destructive marriage. Some of my kids were special needs. I was under a tremendous amount of pressure to make my life work. I couldn't keep all... I felt like I was holding my arms out and people were piling more and more boxes on my arms, and I couldn't hold them all. If one of those boxes fell off, everyone would point their finger and say, "You dropped a box! Pick your boxes up! What are you doing? You can't drop boxes." It was a horrible way to live.

RACHEL: None of those people pointing fingers were going to help you pick up a box. Absolutely not. This was all on you. And what were they doing? They were accusing you. You are walking around with these boxes and drop one, and they are there to accuse you. Who is the accuser? It is the devil. That is not of God.

NATALIE: I think my worst accuser, honestly, was myself.

RACHEL: That is true, absolutely!

NATALIE: Which circles back around to this question of self-love. If you can't accept

yourself now... I'm still working on this. I'm a work in progress.

RACHEL: Me too.

NATALIE: But now, if someone were to say something to me that was kind of shaming, "I see that you're not doing this. You should really try this because this is what I do, and it makes my life amaze balls." Now my knee-jerk reaction would not be, "I've got to do that." Now my reaction would be to see it as a problem that they have of trying to put their shame on top of me, and it would roll off my back. It would bug me, but I wouldn't take it on. I wouldn't feel all this shame. I might feel a twinge, a twinge of residual shame, and then I would talk myself off that ledge because I've been rewiring my brain for the last several years. My knee-jerk reaction isn't to react in shame anymore; it's reacting from a place of self-acceptance and self-love, which I know sounds terrible but is healthy. It is healthy to say, "I'm glad that drinking that drink works for you. It's wonderful that you're even making some money off it. But I'm making some different choices for my life. I'm just not there right now, and that's okay." I think the bottom line is always love. It is not just love for ourselves but love for the other person and love for God as well. If you take away all the rules and regulations and just decide based on love for yourself, love for others, and love for God—and they're not exclusive! Just because you love yourself doesn't mean you don't love other people. That message is what you hear. "If you do something that is honoring to yourself, then you are basically dishonoring other people." No! I can say, "No," to this person in an honoring way that honors myself and them. They might not feel that. They might think the only honorable response to show them love is if I buy their product. I go to your church; I'm selling this product; I need money, and you are going to buy it. That is honoring me and showing love to me to buy my product. So you'd better do it now. I had to learn that someone can live in the uncomfortable feeling that someone has disapproved of me because I had to say, "No," to something—whether it is, "No, I can't buy that product," or "No, I can't work in the nursery," or "No, I can't take on this extra ministry responsibility because I have other responsibilities,"—the answer is, "No." It's not because I don't love you or don't want to help you. It's because I have priorities, and they don't include making sure you get everything that you want from me. I think this is huge. This is why so many of us stay stuck in destructive relationships because we are on this hamster wheel of trying to make everybody happy. That is a hamster wheel. You will never go anywhere ever.

RACHEL: One thing I've gone back to repeatedly is when Jesus was talking about what is the greatest commandment. He is boiling the law, these thousands of years of Jewish law and tradition, down to into this one sentence—love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. You cannot love your neighbor if you do not

honor yourself and love yourself. We are stepping aside from what God has called us to do. Let's think about that. If that person who is asking you, putting pressure on you, and shaming you to do those things truly loved you, they wouldn't be doing those things. They would say, "I want what's best for Natalie. If she is making that decision, I'm glad for her." What they are doing is that they aren't honoring you by acting in that way. We don't want to fall into that trap. We want to love people the way Jesus loved people. Jesus was the most well boundaried person we could ever look to. He told people no all the time, and He had people wanting things from Him all the time, whether the pharisees, the crowd, or anyone. He was skilled at taking time... Jesus went to rest all the time. He went to pray. He made sure that His needs were being met because He couldn't go out and serve the people He was meant to serve, put on Earth to serve, and to die for if He didn't do those things.

NATALIE: Right. The flip is also true because as we become okay with saying, "No," ourselves, we actually become okay with other people saying, "No," to us.

RACHEL: Exactly!

NATALIE: I always think about the fact that Jesus was okay with people saying, "No." Not everyone followed Him. He didn't go chasing after them or feel resentful. "I can't believe that rich, young ruler didn't follow me." He didn't feel resentful. He let everyone have freedom. When you have that, when you come from that place of strength, you are not only okay with saying, "No," to other people and being okay with yourself, but you are also okay with other people saying, "No," to you. If I'm honest, I would say that back when I was steeped in all this stuff, I not only felt obligated to say, "Yes," to other people to make them happy... I didn't always do it, but I always felt guilty when I said, "No." It's not that noble to say, "No," and then sit back and beat yourself up for it and feel bad. You want to say, "No," and walk away and not think about it again.

RACHEL: Right. Because your worth isn't coming from that person's approval.

NATALIE: Exactly. But then I would also feel that if they didn't say, "Yes," to me, if I had a favor that I... I rarely asked people for favors because I didn't want to put them out. But when I asked for a favor, when I did cash in my card, I kind of expected that they would say, "Yes." When they didn't, I would get mad and think, "Why didn't they say, 'Yes?' I've done all these things. I've earned enough points that I should be able to cash in and get a favor in return." That wasn't really loving for me either to give them the freedom. It comes down to me controlling my life but not controlling other people. Other people have the right to say, "No," to me; I have the right to say, "No," to them; and we can all



still have healthy relationships with each other despite that.

RACHEL: Because we love each other, and we want what is truly best for the other.

NATALIE: Exactly. Our time is up now, but we could go into how this relates to marriage, our marriage relationships, when we were in destructive relationships because this dynamic was huge in those relationships. But we are realizing and are trying to communicate here that it's not just the marriage. It is our relationships with everyone across the board. One sign we are getting healthy is seeing that we can say, "No," without feeling guilty, and we're able to accept other people's, "No." There has been a situation recently where I felt strongly that someone should make a certain decision that would affect my life. They didn't make the decision I thought they should make, and it was very upsetting to me. I had to step back and think, "That is their right to not make the decision I thought they should make." It wasn't kind. It wasn't loving. But I tried to put myself in their shoes and understand why they did what they did. This isn't an unhealthy person. This is a healthy, bounded person. But I could then see, as you were talking about being self-aware, I could see inside myself that there are still some problems inside with expectations of my own. So we're always going to be working on that. Anyway, this was good.

RACHEL: There's a final thought I want to share. As you are working through the shame and looking internally at what may cause you to act in ways that are based in shame and aren't the most honoring to yourself, I want to encourage the listeners to step into God's grace. Bring His grace into that place where you are, even if it is uncomfortable, even if you've been trying to hide that from God all your life. He knows, and He loves you just the same. He is patient and kind above all else. Surrender to Him and His healing. Surrender to how He wants to sanctify you, grow you, and help you be more mature in your walk with Him. He will, even if it is slow. That's how God works. At least that's how I see it in my own life. It's over a season. It's never in one day. Sometimes we get revelations in one day that are life changing, but more often it is plodding along every day with consistency, with a Bible in your lap, finding out about the character of God and what He says about you. So bring grace into that, not works of the law and striving and trying to earn anything because you can't.

NATALIE: Yep. I will close by reminding everyone of the one question to ask yourself throughout 2019 according to this new age guru person. She said, "If you ask yourself this question every time you come to make a decision, your life will be completely different one year from now." I'm going to say it in my kind of tone. I really believe that if you ask yourself this question, it will rewire your brain to view yourself not as this wormy

person on the ground who is worth nothing, full of shame, but view yourself the way God views you—as a woman of honor who belongs to Him. You are His daughter. You are a princess if you look at this from a royal perspective. Ask yourself, “What would a woman who honors herself and honors her Father do in this situation?” and not bring shame on yourself but see yourself as a person of honor. To close, if you are a new listener, hit the subscribe button, leave a comment if these topics are important to you. If you are interested in learning more, go to my website, [flyingfreenow.com](http://flyingfreenow.com), and sign up to get on my mailing list. The list is on the top of the page. Just put your email address in there, click the button, and you’ll be on my mailing list. I don’t spam, I just let you know when there’s a new podcast or new blog article. It’s usually a few times a month. That’s it! Thank you for joining me, Rachel, and I can’t wait until next time when we talk about a different topic.

RACHEL: It’s so much fun. Thank you.

NATALIE: Fly free!