

HELP! MY HUSBAND TWISTS WORDS TO CONFUSE ME, AND I FEEL GUILTY AND FULL OF SHAME

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 206 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we're going to explore two listener questions, and there will be some sarcasm involved, so buckle up. Before we do that, I want to let you know that this year, in 2023, I am going to be re-teaching live on Zoom several of the courses within the Flying Free program for Christian women in emotionally and spiritually abusive relationships.

Now, this month of January, we are focusing on our course called "Dealing with a Dysfunctional Relationship." I am going to be teaching workshops on the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, why we get addicted to our dysfunctional relationship, how to communicate with others about our relationship, and more. Coming up in February, I will be re-teaching our course on boundaries.

Now, here's the thing: You can't just sign up and get into the program, like, "Oh, I want to do that. I'm just going to sign up and register." We actually have an application process. It's not a huge deal, but it is a process. There are two reasons we have an application process in place. First of all, it allows us to get to know you just a little bit before you join, and secondly, the process itself filters out anyone who isn't quite ready to do this work. The questions that it asks you will help you kind of self-filter. You'll be like, "Oh, maybe this isn't for me," okay?

This program's not a cake walk. We're going to be taking a deeper look at our predicament and the beliefs we hold that are keeping us stuck in that predicament, and it can be a very painful process. It requires a bit of grit and gumption on your part. Now, the good news is that survivors have the most grit and gumption of anyone else on the planet, and I personally think that you are perfectly suited and prepared to do this work with us if you want to and you're able to. And this year, 2023, it's an excellent year to come along with us so that you can get in on the live classes as we re-teach them and redo them, okay?

I've made it super affordable. You're not going to be paying \$100 and more for a class. Instead, you're going to be paying \$29 a month for dozens of classes. You can come to the ones that I'm re-teaching live or you can dig into ones that have already been taught. You can watch classes on video or you can listen to them on our private podcast

the same way you listen to this podcast — only on that private podcast, we go much deeper and we get more practical. I'm just saying it's super easy, though, to consume the content because we have it all on the private podcast.

Plus, you're going to have access to our private forum where you can ask questions 24/7. You can interact with other Christian women just like yourself. You can listen to group coaching every single week. I coach live for my members, and you'll have access to literally hundreds of hours of replays and Q&As and workshops and survivor stories. It's chock full because I've been building this out over the last six years, and there's a lot of stuff there.

Yes, some have said it's too good to be true. The people that join, they're like, "I can't believe that I get all of this and it's only \$29 a month. It's worth so much more." We hear that all the time. We don't charge an arm and a leg not because it's not worth anything, but we do charge something because it is valuable and it is going to change your life.

If you would like to begin that application process and also get more details about the program, as well as read a bunch of reviews, you can go to joinflyingfree.com. And by the way, we have posted a lot of reviews on that page, but for every one review that you will read on that page, there are literally a hundred more in our files. We could publish a very thick volume with them.

LISTENER: I've been listening to your podcast for a little over a year now, and it's helped me a lot and encourages me and strengthens me. And I was reading in my devotional today, Genesis 3:16, and it says, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over." I have to tell you, that piece of scripture really disturbs me. Of course there are other ones that do, but reading that right now just really kind of rattled me. I wanted to know what your interpretation of that piece of scripture means, and I'm just trying to reconcile that inside my head.

NATALIE: Okay, so let's read Genesis 3:16. And first of all, I'm going to read it from the ESV version prior to August 2016. This is what the ESV version said, it said that Genesis 3:16 says: "To the woman, he said, I will surely multiply your pain and childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire," (which is the Hebrew word, "teshuqah") "shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Then the ESV translators decided to change it, and after August 2016, they had it read in their version, "To the woman, he said, I will surely multiply your pain and child bearing. In pain you should bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your

husband, but he shall rule over you," okay? So the first one said, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you," and the second one said, "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."

Now, my area of expertise is not in debating the meanings of Greek and Hebrew words. Those kinds of debates, I don't think they're ever going to be decisively finished and figured out. The people have been debating these things for centuries. What I like to do, though, for me personally, is to just ask myself if someone else's interpretation of scripture aligns with what I understand are the teachings of Jesus Christ, and also does their interpretation, is it saturated in love and grace — is it couched in those things?

And then I also check in with the wisdom inside of me, because I have the Holy Spirit living inside of me, according to the Bible. And the Holy Spirit has given me His wisdom, but also experiences, my own experiences, insights that are unique to my life, and I believe that I'm supposed to use those things in understanding things, but also hold them loosely because, of course, I am also always learning. Always learning. I might think I know what something is or what something means only to learn later that I was only seeing it from one perspective. And so my understanding prior to that was limited to that perspective. But as I learn and grow and change and whatever, I get to see things from more perspectives, and then I might change my views on things.

Now, I think it's important to remember that God's perspective, though, is not human and He is able to hold all of our collective views, and, of course, He is infinitely wiser than any of our one particular views. Just because I see something through my lens that the Holy Spirit showed me could be different from something He showed you, they both might be true, because they both might be two different truths looking at a truth from two different angles. I personally believe that God is so big and so mysterious and all truth belongs to Him, that there are layers and layers and layers of it, like an onion. And so far I haven't met any human beings who know it all, who are like gods and goddesses. So God definitely imparts His wisdom to us, but He doesn't give us everything, okay? I don't know what His reasons are for that, but I'm sure He has good ones.

So what I believe the Bible is, and we've talked about this in past podcasts, but I believe the Bible is like an invitation to engage with just a few delicious tastes of God's wisdom, kind of like a starter log for a fire, but the actual fire is the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is being open and teachable to this fire that we are actually going to learn and grow. So that said, all of that is like an introduction to what I'm going to say about this question and about this verse.

These are my own thoughts about this verse, and I'm 150% certain sure that there will be oodles of people who disagree, and those people may have Bible certifications and seminary degrees, okay? And Lord bless their souls. Each of them will even probably disagree with each other, and that's fine. Whatever. I'm not saying I have the answer and you all need to believe me. I'm just saying that this is the answer that I like for myself right now. It aligns with my own core values. It aligns with what I have experienced of Jesus and what I have experienced in my relationships with people and what I've observed in history and in the lives of women.

Now, you can take it or leave it. I mean, believe whatever works for you and aligns with your core values and helps you show up in a way that honors Jesus. This is just my own take. And I might change my mind one day. Who knows, okay?

All right, so what I did is I looked at a bunch of different translations of this verse in the Blue Letter Bible — which is an app, by the way, that you can get, and you can look up Greek and Hebrew words using this resource, you can look up all the different meanings. You can also do these translation comparisons side by side. It's a great little tool to have, and it can just be right on your phone.

But anyway, so I did this, I looked at all these different translations, and most of them translate it as, "Your desire shall be toward or for your husband." But there are a handful of translations that say, "Your desire shall be to rule over or to control your husband." That's what those translations are saying. Those are two pretty different things, aren't they, right? So the word "desire" here comes from the root meaning "to stretch out after." It's like a longing, to yearn for.

So which is it? Which translation is correct? I mean, let's take a look at them and just see. If we look at history, do we see, generally speaking, throughout the history that we know and understand, do we see the female part of the human race, women, striving really hard to subdue and control the men? Or do we see throughout history men striving to control and subdue women, and women seeking release from oppression at different times — at different times in history, women rising up and wanting to be released from oppression? I mean, there's an overwhelming evidence of the latter being the case, okay?

So what else do we see? I believe we see women in general tending to strive after, or yearn for or desire, the love and acceptance of their husbands. And this verse isn't saying... When you look at Adam and Eve, they both strove after the love and acceptance of God. Well, they lived in it. It was like the water that they swam in, right? But then after the fall, this was what was going to happen to Eve — she was going to

seek after the love and acceptance of her husband over the love and acceptance of God.

And this is the problem. This is the crux of the problem for the woman. And the result of this error on the part of the woman is that her husband then will have a hook to control her through this desire. Her desire to please him and get his acceptance and his love rather than getting all of that from God will then give her husband this temptation and this hook to control his wife through that desire. Does that make sense?

Now, I've worked with literally thousands of Christian women over the past six, seven years, and I've heard thousands of their stories, and it's all the same theme. And this story goes like this: "I'm a Christian woman and I wanted to be the best wife I could. I wanted to support my husband and help him be all he could be. I also wanted him to love and enjoy me. I was taught not to expect much, but that was okay, because if Jesus suffered, so must I. I was taught that mistreatment was my fault, and if I could be a better wife and work harder at winning my husband's heart, which I was already striving with all of my body, mind, and soul to do, then he would love me and not mistreat me.

But in the meantime, my husband was taught that he was supposed to be the ruler in our family, and the power dynamic in our family was God-ordained and good and wholesome and true to the Bible. So when he mistreated me, it was only to obey God and keep me in line for my rebelliousness in sharing my thoughts or feelings, which I should have kept to myself and suffered in silence if I was truly trusting God. My husband was also taught that his wife would be constantly desiring to control him." (See Genesis 3:16?) "So anytime I requested any type of change or reprieve, or anytime I mentioned another idea that might be different from his, he would assume that this was me desiring to control him. But really, I was just trying to be myself.

Eventually I realized that to be a good Christian under this teaching, I just couldn't show up at all. I had to die. I had to be silent and do as I'm told and not argue or say much of anything, lest I be labeled a rebellious witch with a Jezebel spirit. So I sank deeper and deeper into oblivion and depression, and I cannot leave because these same religious teachers also teach that divorce is the worst sin, and they will cast me out if I try to get out of this situation."

That's the story that I hear thousands of times. So when you look at those two verses, it's either you'll desire to control your husband or you'll yearn after your husband. Which one do you think is true? For me, I already know what I think. You're going to have to decide for yourself. And just again to reiterate, I decided to go with the

translation that says, "Your desire shall be for your husband," not the translation that says, "Your desire shall be to control your husband." Because my experience is that I deeply desired my husband and put him, in many ways, above God in my life. I experienced that.

I not only put my husband above God, but I put the church and the church pastors and whatever the hell they chose to teach — and I now believe some of what they taught is hellish and creates hell on earth for many people, both men and women... And when I did that, I gave them credibility and I ignored what God was trying to tell me because it didn't line up with what they were saying, until I took their teachings to their full course and I had my fill of the consequences of those teachings in my life, and also watching those consequences play out in the lives of my children. And I said, "Enough." And when I said "Enough," they kicked me out, and I was free.

Ladies, we think we have a yawning chasm of a hole in our hearts that can only be filled and satisfied by our husband. And you may have heard that only God can fill that hole, and I heard that, and then I was always trying to figure out how to get God to get in that hole and fill it. I had thought I had to do something to make that happen, and while I was seeking to figure that out — maybe read the Bible more, or pray more, or volunteer more — I was also continuing to try to get my husband to see me and to hear me and to validate me and to love me. My heart's desire was for my husband, not to control him. But I just wanted to be seen, loved, and known by him. And this is what I see on a massive scale when I interview Christian women and hear their stories.

Can we see and understand how if men have held all the power and control throughout history, they might be a little bit invested in making sure that women don't try to take that away? And what better way to ensure this than to appeal to the average woman's desire to please men and God and gain the attention and love of men and God and warn her that to try to get out from under a man's power and control is actually just to prove that she's just another contributing factor to God's curse on women? Her trying to gain freedom and autonomy and equality is actually just proof of that curse — shame on her.

So they take this Bible verse and they change the translation to say what they want it to say to achieve their goal and to shame women. I think this is a satanic twisting of truth designed to control and power-over the female part of the human race and lay the responsibility... Here's the maddening thing about it: They want to lay the responsibility for this sinful act of theirs at the feet of God. And that's why I choose not to believe it. It doesn't align with the heart of Jesus Christ for women, it doesn't fit the things He taught or the way He showed up. It's not loving or generous in its understanding of women or

men for that matter, and so I don't believe it.

But if you're listening to this and you want to believe it for your own reasons, don't let me stop you. You do whatever bears the fruit and results you want to see in your life, okay? I'm not going to get into debates about it. Once in a while I'll put something out on Facebook, and then, oh my gosh, all these people come out and they've got all their five-hundred different opinions, and it's like, whatever. I don't have time for this.

All right. Now, before we go on to the next question, I want to point out one last thing, or actually just reiterate it, because I did touch on it earlier. I believe that this verse has an important truth embedded in it, and that's this: When we as women yearn after the approval and love of our husbands over resting in what we already have, which is 100% of the approval and love of God, we create this hook that a man can use to control us because we are willing to do whatever it takes to gain their love and approval, including throwing ourselves under the bus, not having healthy boundaries, lying on their behalf, covering up their chronic abuse, pretending, being unwilling to face their disapproval or the disapproval of the church.

But when we know that we are safe and secure and always loved by our God, we no longer have to fear rejection of our husbands or the church. We no longer have to live in shame. We no longer have to try to get others to understand. We no longer have to blindly obey whatever they say. We no longer have to try to get any of them to change or be different.

If this sounds impossible or confusing, then I hope you'll join Flying Free, because this is what I help women do. I help them unhook from fear and shame and live in the love of Jesus to the point where they no longer need to yearn after men's approval. And this changes everything and every other relationship also in profound ways.

All right, let's listen to our second question.

LISTENER: And my question is if you set the boundary and you say, "I'm not comfortable giving my heart or my body to someone who isn't willing to do the hard work necessary to invest in our relationship," and if my husband's response is, "Well, that means we live in a transactional relationship. In other words, tit for tat, or, 'Well, I get what I want, so then you'll give me what I want. You'll get what you want from me when I get what I want from you.'" So he says that's a transactional relationship. And so I'm just curious what you would recommend in a situation like that?

NATALIE: Okay, my first knee-jerk reaction when I heard this was if my husband or

anyone had that response to my boundary, I'd probably say something like, "Okay. If in your universe my setting a boundary means that we have a transactional relationship, then I guess we have a transactional relationship by your definition. Personally, I think we have a sucky relationship, but transactional? Okay. You know what would be really amazeballs is if you decided to be a responsible adult and do your part of the work that it takes to have a mutually respectful and loving, emotionally mature relationship. But since you can't do that, transactional it is."

Now, I realize that's sarcastic and snarky. But in these irrational relationships, how else can one respond? These kinds of conversations are so ridiculous, it's hard not to roll the eyes so far back into one's head that you can't see straight anymore. Abusers love to twist language and throw their victim off balance. One of the best ways to counter that is to just follow their line of reasoning and go, "Okay, then I guess that's the way it is." They don't really know what to do with that. What people like this want to do is they want to get a rise out of you. They want to hook you back into their control loop by triggering your guilt or shame button, which is why I think those translators translated that verse that way — you know, changed it in 2016.

So when you are unhooked from guilt and shame, they actually lose their power over you. Do you see this? It's incredible. Let's look at some examples of how an emotional abuser uses language in an attempt to guilt and shame his target into silence, okay?

Let's say that you asked him if you could go to a homeschooling event and he never gave you an answer until it was too late, and now you can't go because you missed the registration or whatever. If you mention your disappointment because, you know, you're not allowed to have the emotion of disappointment, right? So if you'd happen to mention it to him, he might say, "You always make a mountain out of a molehill."

Let's do another example. Let's say that you ask him to change the baby's diaper because you're trying to get dinner on the table and the pasta needs to come off the stove and there's three other related things that you need to do, and the baby stinks. And let's say that you asked him ten minutes ago when you first smelled the baby, and now you're forced to ask him again because you know that if he doesn't do it before dinner, he won't do it once the food gets on the table. He might say, "I heard you the first time. Why do you have to be such a nag all the time?"

Or let's say that he's chronically late to things, and you have a concert that you need to get to on time because they close the doors and they don't let anyone in until intermission. And so for this particular event, you plead with him to aim for ten minutes earlier just on this one, special night. And he might say, "Why do you just assume that

"I'm not going to be on time? You're always assuming things. You know what assuming does, right?"

So what do we do with these kinds of comments that are designed to trigger our guilt and shame so that we feel bad or feel like a meanie, and then we just shrink into ourselves? What if we didn't feel one single ounce of guilt or shame? How would we react then? What if we could show up as ourselves and shine a light on them without feeling guilt or shame, even if they called us "Big bad meanie" for doing it? So let's look again at our examples and just see what we might be able to say.

So go back to the one about the homeschooling event. You asked him if you could go, he never gave you an answer. It was too late now and you can't go and you mention your disappointment, and he says, "You always make a mountain out of a molehill." You could maybe say something like this: "Huh, maybe you're right. Next time, I'm going to keep the molehill by not asking your permission in the first place. I'm just going to go. And if you don't like it, try not to make a mountain out of my molehill."

Let's go to the example about changing the baby's diaper. So you asked him to change a diaper. He didn't do it. Now you have to ask him again because you're about to put food on the table, and he says, "I heard you the first time. Why do you have to be such a nag all the time?" You might say something like this: "You might need to google the word 'nag' because you're using it incorrectly. Nobody should have to explain basic parenting skills to you. I will serve your dinner when you're done changing the diaper and not before. We can do hard things, all right?"

What about this last one? He's chronically late to things. You have a concert. You ask him to please aim to be ten minutes early this time. He says, "Why do you just assume I'm not going to be on time? You're always assuming things. You know what assuming does, right?" You might say something like this: "I know. The things you put up within me. I must be losing my ever-loving marbles to assume that you would repeat your habit."

Now, depending on your flavor of abuser, this may or may not work. If you have a violent man who does not tolerate this kind of response, then I don't recommend that you respond this way, all right? You need to look out for your safety above all else. But if you have more of a passive aggressive emotional abuser who uses these kind of tactics on a regular basis, then you have, for the most part, a coward on your hands — a coward who is unable to have a rational discussion because it would require him to man up and take personal responsibility *gasp*.

The weapon of choice for a coward is... I mean, what I'm trying to say is, the kind of weapon that a coward uses or likes to use are these passive aggressive, sideways jabs designed to throw you off balance and make you feel guilty and full of shame. So what's the best way to fight this? Get yourself out of the guilt and shame loop. We only have to defend ourselves when we think we've done something wrong. If we haven't done anything wrong, then we can be amused at their cowardly tactics and we can kind of play along with the stupid game.

Again, I gave you some examples of ways to do that, all right? Now, when I would get snarky like this with my ex, he would inevitably say something like this: "You're not very nice." He said that to me literally a million times. It was like my very existence just wasn't nice. And I'm going to tell you a little story about that in a minute, because this actually caused a lot of trauma in my life. But anyway, he would just try to keep jabbing to get a rise out of me. And then if I felt guilty or mean because I had been sarcastic or kind of sassy, I would want to defend myself. But just because your abuser says that you're mean doesn't actually mean that you're mean. I wasn't being mean. What I was trying to do was establish boundaries and trying to do it in kind of a sassy, lighthearted way.

But when he lobs a passive aggressive jab at you, it isn't mean to lob a lighthearted snark back. What it's doing is it's exposing his cruel intent to manipulate you through guilt and shame. And of course he's going to think that's mean. He doesn't want to be exposed. It's like you're holding up a flashlight and shining it on something disgusting, and he's mad. He wanted to keep that under the radar. He didn't want you to notice that he was doing that. So now he's going to be like, "You're mean. You're mean that you did that." What you are communicating when you're doing that is that you are un-manipulatable, and of course they're going to get mad about it because you've foiled them.

Now, if the examples that I just gave you, if you kind of felt uncomfortable inside, I get it. I would've too, back in the day. And even now, there's still a part of me, there's still a little part of me that's like, "Hmm, I think I might be kind of mean to be snarky like that." But when we think that, you guys, we continue to be shark bait for narcissistic abuse. I'm sorry — I hate to be the bearer of bad news, all right? I know we want to be good Christians. But okay, keep trying to find the Christian way, whatever you think is the Christian way. I wish you the best of luck.

But I also recommend as a Christian woman that you read the book of Proverbs from the beginning to the end, twenty-five times in a row. I think it will help you. It actually isn't a mark of a mature, humble, godly Christian, in my personal opinion, to feel like

roadkill all the time. The most mature, godly, humble Christians that I know are so real and honest and authentically themselves and completely unafraid to make a mistake or do something wrong, they are all in on admitting, "Okay, maybe you're right. Maybe I'm a nag. Maybe I don't know the Bible very well. Maybe I'm stupid. Maybe I assume things. Maybe I'm bitter. Maybe I'm a snarky jerk. Okay! Pray for me. And now could we get on with our day? Because my destiny requires more of me than to be gazing at my belly button fuzz all day long feeling guilty about everything you hurl at me so that you can silence me!"

Now I want to close with one last story because it illustrates this dynamic, and I want to talk about why it is such a trigger for survivors. It's actually a trauma trigger for survivors, okay? This past Thanksgiving, I wrote an email to the women on my mailing list. Now, in this email I talked about the joy that I had when I was with my whole family for Thanksgiving and all the kids could come over and all their partners, and also, though, I talked about the joy I have on the Thanksgivings when I'm only able to celebrate with a couple of people like my husband and my mother-in-law.

And being divorced means that you share custody and holidays. And then also, not only that, but my older kids, I've got one who's got a husband, one who has a wife, and two who have partners. So this means that there's even more sharing, because you're sharing with in-laws and partners' families and all of that. But you know what, I am in on all of it because, and I explain this in my email, there are precious moments no matter what our situation is like, all right?

So I sent out this nice email and I got some responses back. "Oh, this made me cry." "Love this." "This was so beautiful." And then I got this email: "Get out the violins!!! How many people are starving without a roof over their head, bombs exploding, turmoil, loved ones dying, including children of all ages. How dare you complain?"

Now, first of all, my email didn't even have the tiniest ounce of complaint in it. It was acknowledging reality and also celebrating what was beautiful about that reality. This person in her email to me implied that I wanted some violins, that I wanted some pity, that I wanted to be able to whine, but I didn't. It was so opposite of what I represented in the email, I was astounded. But it was the most fascinating thing. My brain was actually amused by the whole thing. I mean, it was pretty dramatic, like, "bombs exploding, turmoil, loved ones died, including children of all ages." I mean, wow — okay. But even while my brain was slightly amused, my body had a completely different reaction. My body reacted instantaneously by getting flushed with heat, and my heart began pounding, like, pounding out of my chest. So it went from slow and calm to ready to run in panic in one second flat. It was fascinating.

Now, this was a very familiar feeling and reaction, but I am at a place in my healing where I can actually observe this almost like an out-of-body-experience rather than get swallowed up by it. And so that gives me the advantage of being able to analyze it. Here's the thing about bodies. They store stuff just like the brain stores stuff. And while I have done a ton of work on my brain and rewiring my beliefs and healing many triggers, this reaction that I had allowed me to observe that my body is still storing some trauma in this area.

So I asked myself, "Okay, think, Natalie — where has this come up in my past? How is this similar to things I've experienced before that caused me trauma that has been stored in my body that I have not processed through yet?" And here's what I remembered. For as long as I can remember, first in my family of origin and then in my former marriage, there were many times, like, countless times when I would step out and show up as myself. I might share a thought, I might share an opinion, or oftentimes I would have an emotion of some kind. I would feel sad or I'd feel upset or whatever. And then someone would accuse me of the exact opposite of what I was saying or doing or feeling, and I'd be like, "But that wasn't what I meant." Just the exact same thing — this is a perfect example of what it was.

And this would leave me feeling like, "Am I crazy? Let's think through what I just said. How did I give that impression? It's so weird." So, my inner world was invalidated. I felt unseen. I felt unknown. I felt unloved. I felt dismissed, annihilated. I was accused of being bad when I was trying so hard to be good, to be loved. In fact, those exact words that this woman used in her email, "How dare you complain" or "How dare you _____," I heard those exact words thousands of times.

I was often told when I was sad or worried or frustrated that, "You're just feeling sorry for yourself, and self-pity is a tool of the devil." I heard that a million times too on repeat constantly throughout my childhood. What does a child do with that? I mean, how can she defend herself and make herself be understood if whenever she has a feeling of sadness or when she wants to cry, she's told that her feelings are from the devil or that she is just feeling sorry for herself because she's a bad person? She can't. In fact, the more she protests and tries to be seen and understood, the worse the accusations get — I experienced that as well — the more ugly and sinister until she actually embodies that shame and panic and desolation in her body.

And so as a result, what I experienced — and I've talked to many women about this — is that we often become high achievers, then. We try hard to prove that we deserve somehow to be alive. We deserve to have an opinion. We deserve to exist. And ladies, this is all embedded not only in my brain, but in my body, and that's what I realized

after reading this email.

So when I had a chance, I sat down and I connected with that part of me that felt panicked and full of shame and fear. I could locate that part of me. It was in my throat and my neck and my chest. It was tight, it was big, it was choking me. And then when I thought about what that part of me felt like, I pictured a scared cat in a corner — like a cat, you know, with its hair standing on end, ready to fight with fierceness, but also wild eyes full of fear and just desperately looking for a way out, a way to run and get out of the corner.

And I felt so much compassion for this scared cat part of me. I wanted to scoop this cat up in my arms and tell her, “I’m going to take care of you from now on.” I imagined myself as a child of God, safe and full of joy and love and light, and in my imagination, I not only saw the cat, but I also saw the little girl who flung the accusations at me. You know how my imagination imagined her? She was small. She had mud all over her face. Her hair was in snarls. Her dress was torn, and I could tell she was hungry. She was starving. She was starving for love. She was starving to be seen and known, just like my cat part. I could see that she did not know or trust me, so she was afraid.

I could also see that it wasn’t my job to change her mind about me. It was only my job to hold and love that cat part of me, and that love that I had for the cat part of me would flow over and around me, and maybe if the starving girl came close enough, she could feel it too. I can’t make her come closer to feel it, but I hope one day she finds the love that she’s starving for. It’s actually inside of her because God’s image is in her, according to the Word of God. But she may not have discovered that yet. Let’s hope she does.

In the meantime, what did I learn for my own life? That my body still holds trauma, but that I can also heal it by being aware of it, moving toward those big emotions, and allowing the image of God in me to love those wounded parts, not push them away.

Now, I really hope that you’re going to take away two things here. One, when people twist words, accuse you of being someone you’re not, tell lies, or attack you for existing, you can feel mad. You can feel sad. You can feel panicked. You can feel compassion. You can feel any of these things, and you are 100% loved and accepted and rejoiced over by God. You can yell back. You can sass off. You can say you’re sorry. You can laugh. You can cry. You can shut down. You can do any of those things, and you are 100% loved and accepted and rejoiced over by God, okay? 100%. And you can’t stop that or change that. He loves you, period.

And the second thing I want you to take away is that there is healing available to all the parts of you. It will require you to face your painful thoughts and emotions instead of running away, but it's worth it. And I would love to be your friend throughout that process if you'll let me. But you'll need to draw near.

That's all I have for you today. If you like this podcast and it's been helpful for you, don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss each new episode. And if you haven't already left a rating and review, would you do that please as well? It helps other Christian women find us so they can experience healing and hope as well. Thank you so much for listening, and until next time, fly free.