

NINE CODEPENDENCY BEHAVIORS RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES REWARD IN CHRISTIAN WOMEN

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 208 of the Flying Free Podcast. We are going to be talking about codependency today. But before we dig into our topic, I want to thank those of you who have left a rating and review for the Flying Free Podcast on your podcast app. Here's one of the more recent ones.

She writes, "I joined Flying Free shortly after I left my emotionally, verbally, and spiritually abusive husband of twenty-four years. The way Natalie explains things is the truth I needed to hear, and the resources she provides is the healing I needed to become a better person and mom. She teaches with truth, kindness, and humor. I joined other groups but didn't connect the way I did with Flying Free. I am three years out and one and a half years divorced and still get encouragement and education from this podcast. Rock on, Natalie. Continue to tell it like it is." Okay, I will. I love that enthusiasm. And I love hearing how this podcast is helping women grow into the next incredible version of themselves.

You should know that sometimes when women come into the Flying Free Sisterhood program and introduce themselves in the forum, they tell us that they found us when their podcast app recommended the Flying Free Podcast to them. And that only happens when people leave ratings and reviews. It helps the podcast app figure out what kind of people might be interested in whatever podcast you're reviewing, and it's basically the easiest, most pain-free way of spreading the word about this podcast, so I really appreciate your help with this.

Now, if you want to learn more about the Flying Free Sisterhood program that she mentioned in her review, it's super affordable and life-changing. Just go to joinflyingfree.com. You can read about all the details and complete an application if you're interested in joining us. Our focus in February is going to be on boundaries, so if creating and holding healthy boundaries is a challenge for you, come on in and join us as we deep dive into all things boundaries. That page again is joinflyingfree.com. It's \$29 for a month of classes, coaching, and personal interaction with me, other coaches, and hundreds of Christian women in our private forum.

Okay, I want to talk about codependency today because I think there's a lot of

confusion about what codependency is. And frankly, I hadn't done my homework on the subject and really had my own preconceived ideas based on random things people were saying on social media and cute little memes. And I just decided I needed to dig in and learn more about this subject.

So what did I do? I read five of Melody Beattie's books. She's kind of the codependency guru. She wrote the classic work on the subject over thirty-five years ago called "Codependent No More." Now since that time, she's gone on to write other books about codependency, including "The New Codependency," which is kind of her updated thoughts about how the ideas of codependency have changed and morphed over the last thirty-five years in our culture.

I also read her books "Beyond Codependency" (which we just finished studying in the Flying Higher Program), "Codependents' Guide to the Twelve Steps" and "The Language of Letting Go."

Now, I wanted to learn what I could about codependency because I think there's typically been a lot of shame and misunderstanding about what codependency is and how to treat it. And as I've read these books, I've seen my own story from my family of origin. And by the way, a lot of people think about codependency and alcoholism going together, or drug abuse or whatever. I don't come from a family with any kind of alcohol issues or drug issues, but codependency? 100%.

So anyway, I've seen my own life as it's unfolded, and I look back and see patterns in my own life from my family of origin, my prior marriage — my own ways of coping with trauma and dealing with life and relationships were reflected in the pages of these books. So they've been extremely validating and also given me more words, really, to describe and define what I've struggled with my whole life due to being taught a set of rules that actually train women to be codependent.

And here's the fascinating thing that I discovered: Many of the codependent behaviors and beliefs are actually taught and encouraged and rewarded by the version of the Christian religion that is popular in our current time in history. This version of Christianity actually teaches, promotes, and rewards codependent behavior — the kinds of codependent behavior that are defined in Melody's work. It's fascinating.

So I decided I wanted to do an episode that highlights some of this and how we can talk about what to do with this information in our own lives. If you go to positivepsychology.com, their definition of codependency is "People who feel extreme amounts of dependence on certain loved ones in their lives and who feel responsible

for the feelings and actions of those loved ones.”

I 100% can relate to that. And then I would expand that to include our religious circles. So I would write it like this: “People who feel extreme amounts of dependence on certain loved ones and communities in their lives, and who feel responsible for the feelings and actions of those loved ones and those communities.”

Now, here are some other codependent behaviors or beliefs that were listed on the Happier Human website: 1. “When you believe that you need to solve everyone else's problems.” How many Christian women feel like they just have to be the solution for everyone's problems? They have to help everybody, right? Doesn't a Christian woman do that? We help people.

2. “Feeling the urge to give advice, even if it isn't asked for.” I used to feel that all the time, and I've talked to literally hundreds of women who struggle with that. And again, that comes out of this belief that we are supposed to help people. So if we think that they're doing something wrong and we know that if they did it “right” that their lives would be better, then that's our job to do that, right? Especially if it's biblical.

3. “Unwilling to communicate your own wants, feelings, or needs because you're afraid you're going to be rejected.”

4. “You don't like change or upsetting the apple cart or being accused of upsetting the apple cart.”

5. “Difficulty in making decisions.” Because you don't want to be blamed or rejected if you make a mistake, right? So you don't trust your own thoughts and feelings on things. And also, in the Christian communities, we're taught that we come up to forks in the road, and you better make the right choice. That's why it's so hard to make a decision. You're just paralyzed, like, “What if I go the wrong way and I make the wrong choice? Then I'm going to be a bad Christian and I'm going to get criticized and my whole life is going to go to hell in a handbasket.”

6. “Chronic anger...” (And this doesn't have to be overt anger. It can be like stuffed anger.) “...mostly towards those who you feel responsible to change or manage...” (Don't we feel like this as Christian moms?) “...because they won't change the way we want them to, but also inward anger towards ourselves for being unable to make that change happen.” I was mad at myself for not being the wife who was able to make her husband change. Like, if I was a good enough wife, I should have been able to help my husband change and be the man he was created to be. So I must have been a bad wife.

I failed to do that, okay? That's codependent behavior.

7. "When we feel used and not appreciated."

8. "When we try to please others in order to be accepted and liked," or chronic people pleasers.

9. "Afraid of rejection."

10. "Making excuses for other people's bad behavior." So we kind of deny other people's bad behavior, especially if it's going to reflect on us or if it's going to get us into trouble in some way.

11. "When we feel helpless, anxious, and depressed because we keep hitting the same wall over and over and over again." Other people can't be controlled, and then we just get exhausted trying to manage it all.

12. "When you feel guilty if you have to say 'no,' so you mostly say 'yes' to anyone who asks for help."

13. "When you take all the responsibility in your relationships, even when the expectations placed on you are impossible or too much."

14. "When you feel obligated to do everything, so your schedule is too full and there isn't any margin."

15. "When you fear and avoid disagreements and conflict."

16. "When you feel powerless to protect yourself from harm."

17. "When you feel easily manipulated and exploited by self-serving individuals, or you see yourself as someone who has to do what other people want you to do, and you're unable to say 'no' or protect yourself."

18. "When we don't set firm boundaries, when we're mistreated or abused, or we make attempts to try to get those who neglect us or mistreat us to change."

Okay, now I want to give a caveat here. My work is primarily with Christian women in emotionally and spiritually abusive relationships. And I say that everywhere. It's on my website, it's on this podcast — I say it everywhere. That is who I work with: Christian

women in emotionally and spiritually abusive relationships. Not physically abusive relationships. Now, that doesn't mean that there aren't women in my program that are also being physically abused, and also, I am a firm believer that emotional abuse is physical abuse in that it ultimately destroys the physical body through constant exposure to stress hormones.

But a woman in an emotionally and spiritually abusive marriage isn't afraid that her husband's going to beat her to death if she says "no" to him or sets a boundary. How do I know this? Number one, that's the kind of relationship I was in, and number two, I've talked to literally thousands of women in these relationships, and I know this from just my experience talking to these women and also reading five-hundred-million books about the subject.

So if you're listening and that's your situation, please be aware that I'm not saying that if you set healthy boundaries you're going to be just fine. I don't know any legitimate advocates who would say that. It's ridiculous. If you're in a relationship where your life or physical safety is at stake, then the only safe boundary is getting professional and legal help to get out and stay out, and you may or may not want to do that. This would mean creating a safety plan at your local domestic violence center, filing a protection order, getting to a safe house where you can hide. Speaking up in a relationship like that can get you killed.

So this episode is not about that kind of help, okay? This episode is for the majority of the women that I focus on in my work — Christian women who, like me, were maybe raised in a hyper-conservative Christian home and taught a set of codependent rules and behaviors that, unless you followed them, would get you ostracized or even kicked out of your family of origin or your religious community. So if that sounds like you, then this episode is for you, so keep listening.

By the way, if you're getting hung up on the word "codependent," then just call it something else. Call it "vavoom-baboom" or whatever, because what it's called is not important. The rules and beliefs and behaviors that we're going to be focusing on today, that's what's important. So all of these codependent or "vavoom-baboom" beliefs and behaviors were things that were embedded in my psyche from the time that I was a small child, and they disabled me and kept me from healing and moving forward in my own life because I believed the only way to get the love and acceptance I craved was to follow these rules.

Now I'm going to read you a quote from one of Melodie's books, and she's quoting a guy named Robert Subby. She says this: "Robert Subby, another pioneer in the

development of family-centered chemical dependency and codependency treatment says, 'It's an emotional, psychological, and behavioral condition that develops as a result of an individual's prolonged exposure to and practice of a set of oppressive rules.'" I'm going to read that again, because it's so important: "'It's an emotional, psychological, and behavioral condition that develops as a result of an individual's prolonged exposure to and practice of a set of oppressive rules.'"

And here they are: 1. "Don't feel or talk about feelings."

2. "Don't think, figure things out, or make decisions, because you probably don't know what you want or what's best for you."

3. "Don't identify, talk about, or solve problems. It's not okay to have problems."

4. "Don't be who you are, because that's not good enough. Be good, right, strong, and perfect."

5. "Don't be selfish. Don't put yourself first. Don't say what you want or need. Don't say no. Don't set boundaries and don't take care of yourself. Always take care of others, and never hurt their feelings or make them angry."

6. "Don't have fun, be silly, or enjoy life. It costs money, makes noise, draws attention to yourself, and isn't necessary."

7. "Don't trust yourself, God, the process of life, or certain people. Instead, put your faith in untrustworthy people and then act surprised when they let you down."

8. "Don't be open, honest, and direct. Hint, get others to talk for you, guess what they want and need, and expect them to do the same for you."

9. "Don't grow, change or in any way rock this family's boat."

People don't make these rules. Crazy systems make these rules to protect and keep the crazy systems in place. But people follow these rules and people mindlessly pass them on from generation to generation. The rules are the guardians and protectors of the system — the crazy system. So I just think it's time for Christian women to take a hard look at these so that we can then decide if we want to follow them or not.

And then Melody also says, "Following these rules keeps us locked in codependency. Breaking them is the key to recovery." So let's look at these rules one by one, and I want

to show you how today's weird version of Christianity actually teaches these codependent rules and encourages and rewards women who obey these rules and who become codependent.

So the first rule is, "Don't feel or talk about your feelings." Now, if you google what the Bible says about emotions — just put this in your google search — and you're going to find all kinds of articles that will tell you these kinds of things: "Emotions need to be controlled." "Negative emotions need to be changed to positive ones." "We are driven further from God when we have negative emotions." "Jesus tells us that worry is silly in Matthew 6:28-30, and we shouldn't worry." You guys, I found all of these things in articles, Christian articles about emotions. "We shouldn't have those negative emotions, or if we do, we need to switch them to positive just as soon as possible so as to not be separated from God's presence any more than we already are."

I am not even kidding. Google it. All of these insane messages that I grew up with are right there online to continue to brainwash and shame people today, as well as, I believe, malign who God actually is and what He does and how He interacts with humans who experience the emotions that He actually created.

So when someone reads the Bible through the lens of an abuser or through the lens of someone who's been brainwashed with these codependent ideas... Because, by the way, the nature of someone with codependent beliefs and behaviors is that they give their abuser credibility. I did it, and I see this every single day in my private forum. Women will say, "Well, my abuser said such and such, and I think they're right, and so I feel guilty." Do you see this? They're giving their abuser credibility. So what if he said that? He's a freaking abuser. Why are we giving him credibility or thinking that just because he said that, that he's right?

So we also know how abusers are reading and interpreting the Bible, and then we give their readings and interpretations credibility. So then we read the Bible through their lens and we interpret these verses a certain way. And I'm going to demonstrate what this is. I'm going to show you what I'm talking about. Because when someone reads the Bible through the lens of Christ, which is pure love for God and God's creation, they will interpret the same verses in a very different way. So same Bible, but different interpretations and viewpoints depending on the character, the experience, and the programming of the person reading it. Isn't that fascinating? So what pair of glasses are you going to put on when you read the Bible?

So I'm just going to read some verses in Matthew 6 both ways. First, I'm going to read it through the eyes of an abuser. Or, I would've read this portion of the Bible through the

eyes of someone who bought into these codependent ideas, okay? This is how I would've read it. "Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you far more valuable to Him than they are? For crying out loud — are you stupid or what? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life — silly goosey. If God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, He's certainly going to care for you. Duh, you moron. Why do you have so little faith? What is your problem?"

Now, here's a different way to read it, believing that Jesus is filled with love and compassion and just adores the people He's talking to in the same way that we would feel towards a little three-year-old who's sitting on our lap and asking questions and maybe expressing fears and anxieties that that three-year-old is having.

This is a different way of reading it: "Look at the birds. I want to show you something fascinating, my little love. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. His love is unimaginable and so, so safe. Aren't you far more valuable to Him than they are? You are. Your value is above diamonds and precious jewels, my little precious child. Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Let's think together about this. Let me help you shift your perspective so that you can relax into safety and love and belonging. If God cares so wonderfully for these wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, He will certainly care for you — I promise. You are so loved and cared for. Why do you have so little faith? Let's figure out the little places inside your heart where you struggle to believe this and suffer in fear because of this. I am with you. Let's figure this out together."

Do you see the difference in these two readings? One is being read through the eyes and perspective of a shame-filled, critical, judgemental part inside of us, programmed to exist by the shame-filled, critical, judgemental parts inside of others around us, including maybe our parents, siblings, pastors, authors, friends. All of the shame and judgment foments more shame and judgment. "Don't worry, don't be afraid, don't be angry." These are all emotions, and so we zero in on all of these directives, not understanding the beautiful heart and love of the Creator behind them.

And also, we overlook verses that talk about having hard emotions and how it's part of a normal human life. It's not something to be ashamed of and to hide from. In Ecclesiastes, it says, "To everything there's a season. There's a time for every purpose under heaven. There's a time to weep, there's a time to laugh, there's a time to mourn, there's a time to dance." Romans 12: "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep."

And there's tons of examples in the Bible of people who expressed emotions — all kinds of emotions. Elijah was depressed and wanted to die, Jeremiah was weeping all the time, Jesus was angry and overturned tables, Peter was a scaredy-cat and ran away, David was constantly in despair, and God held space for all of it. And he had hard words in the book of Job for the guys who were sitting next to Job and being Little Mr. Judgey Pants when he was struggling with grief and anger toward God.

So this whole idea of being ashamed of our feelings and having to be stoic and hide our passionate grief and stuff our anger over injustice and keep it all inside, that is a symptom of codependency that is actually praised and admired in today's version of Christianity. But it is not the hallmark of Christ-likeness at all.

Okay, here's another rule, codependent rule, that we will find in Christianity: "Don't think, figure things out, or make decisions, because you probably don't know what you want or what's best for you." So Christian women especially are trained not to think. I was brought up in a family where thinking for myself and sharing my thoughts was frowned on because my mom already had all the right answers, and it was my job, if I was an obedient child and humble, to listen, learn, don't argue, and don't disagree. I thrived in college where thinking was encouraged and welcomed. But then again after college, I went back to my roots and became a member of a church that taught what my mom taught. The leaders already had all the answers: "Don't listen to any other teachers. Don't read books that disagree with what the leaders say is true. Don't argue, don't disagree. Don't bring up issues you have with the outcomes of any of their theology."

People who disagreed were labeled behind their backs and in small groups as "Unteachable and prideful." So if you didn't want to get that label or be talked about behind your back, you wanted to be loved and accepted, you had to be a teachable, humble woman, and that meant keeping your mouth shut and just believing whatever anyone told you.

I would actually pretend that I knew less than I did even though I had more Bible education at the time than my pastors did, because I went to a church where the pastors didn't have to go to seminary. None of them had — they were in their late twenties/early thirties and they had successful small groups and they were growing a successful church. There was a lot of charismatic teaching there, and they didn't have any Bible training at all. But they would get up and talk about what they learned in their little quiet times that morning and, "They were great preachers."

And so that's what I was learning from. So I would keep my mouth shut if I disagreed

with things, and I did. But I didn't want to be labeled as "unteachable." And also I really gaslit myself. I wanted so much to be accepted and loved, I would just think, "Well, maybe I learned it wrong, or maybe there was something wrong with my perspective and they knew better than I did."

And also, Christians teach women that their hearts are deceitful, so they ought to rely on their pastor or their husband or women's ministry leader, even if they're abusive, to tell them what's right and wrong. "And of course, there's always a right and a wrong — black and white. No exceptions, no nuance — no wisdom is required because we already have the hard-nosed rules and we've got all the answers."

I recently learned that in Judaism, people are encouraged actually not to know the answers but to ask questions. That's what's praised and encouraged over there. So when the leaders would get together to study the scriptures, they'd pick a passage and then they discuss it from all angles and ask questions. They never walk away having decided on any answers, because they have enough wisdom to understand that their perspectives are small and the wisdom of God is deep, and we can't ever get to the bottom of that wisdom. It's supposed to be a mystery, and it's our pleasure to seek it until we die. When one has all the answers, one does not have to think. Thinking is not required. All that's required is blindly obeying. And that is what abusive, controlling religions do to their people: Program them with the idea that they must not think — simply learn and obey. And this is also a symptom of codependency.

All right, here's another rule: "Don't be who you are. Be good, right, strong, and perfect." Have you been taught this? What happens if we aren't good, right, strong, and perfect? We get criticized. We displease God. We displease our parents. We displease our peers and teachers.

Now, there's nothing wrong with the message to do your best, to be authentic and honest, to look out for others the way we look out for ourselves. But we are taught overtly and covertly that it goes beyond that to pleasing the people around us. I used to run in the Bill Gothard circles, and in those circles we were taught there were only certain people who got to define what was good, right, strong and perfect. And that was our authorities, whoever was in authority over us, which was the perfect setup for control and abuse.

And this goes along with the next rule now, the next symptom of codependency also, which is, "Don't be selfish. Don't put yourself first or say what you need or want. Don't say 'no.' Don't set boundaries or take care of yourself, but always take care of others, and never hurt their feelings or make them angry. That's not very nice." This message

was drilled into us and used to get volunteers, used to get money, used to shame, blame, and guilt trip and control people into doing whatever someone else wanted them to do.

And you know what? It went both ways, because when I believed this, I also believed that others should be doing this for me, too. Because if I'm going to give, then I should expect other people to do the same, right? So when they don't do what we want them to do, then we think — I used to think — “Well, they're selfish.”

Here's an example in my own life. I would go to a cabin with my crew of children — I had nine kids — and I would basically hole up in the cabin all week watching my babies and toddlers so that my husband and older kids could enjoy themselves. I thought this was my unselfish duty, but honestly, I resented it. And I also would think that my husband was selfish not to notice or give me some time off. And he actually did offer a few times, but you know what I would do? I would say “no” because I believed that it was selfish of me to take him up on his offer. Do you see what a pickle we get into when we manage other people's lives and emotions and we don't manage our own, but we expect them to return the favor?

Now in my healthy relationship, my husband and I each manage our own selves. If we need to ask a favor, we do that and we don't feel guilty about it, and neither one of us takes advantage of the other one, nor do we expect the other one to do for us what we can do for ourselves. There have been times, and this has gone both ways with Tom and I, when I will ask him if he will do something, and he's like, “Well, I really can't do that right now.” And I'm like, “Okay, I guess I'll have to do that myself.” And there are times when he's asked me to do something and I've said, “Nope, I can't do that right now.” But I've seen this codependency symptom play itself out all the time in the churches I've been involved with, not only in partner relationships, but also in friendships.

Okay, so here's another codependent rule that I see in churches: “Don't be fun, be silly, or enjoy life, because it costs money, makes noise, and draws attention to yourself.” I remember walking through life looking at people doing fun things — dancing, listening to fun music, sun-tanning, going to concerts, singing on stage freely and without shame, trying new things, acting in the theater, having fun at parties — and I secretly judged them.

If I would've been honest back then, I would've said, “Yeah, I really want to do those fun things,” but I had learned this in my Bill Gothard upbringing: Others may, I cannot. I was special. I was a good girl, set apart for God. Those people were not going to do much

with their lives except have fun and fritter their lives away.

You know what? I walked around with my stomach in knots feeling so mixed up inside. I hated that feeling of being a judgy-pants, and I instinctively knew deep down inside that that was not from God. But there was so much cognitive dissonance between what the Holy Spirit was telling me internally and what I was being taught by all of my spiritual authorities. So I figured I must not be hearing the Holy Spirit correctly. I could not trust myself to know.

Another example of this is I was taught that looking in the mirror was vain, and laughing loud was also vain, drawing attention to yourself. And if I did that, then I would be reprimanded and people would say things like, "You know, you're just trying to show off." Also, crying. If I cried or let anyone see I was crying in my family of origin, I was told that was a bid for attention, and sometimes I was told I was faking it or making a big deal out of nothing just to get attention. So I grew up, then, internalizing all of that and feeling a ton of shame over doing those kinds of things. Just zero inner freedom to just be who I was. So do you see this? Codependent beliefs and behaviors also taught in my family of origin, which was religiously abusive, and in my church.

Another one: "Don't trust yourself, God, the process of life, or certain people. Instead, put your faith in untrustworthy people and then act surprised when they let you down." So I was taught that the only people that I could trust were my authorities — whoever God put in authority over me. So when growing up, that was my parents, then I got married, that was my husband, and then whatever church I went to, my pastors and the elders were my authorities, and any books they recommended. And I was told not to listen to certain preachers or to read certain books.

And then when all of these various authorities, one by one over the course of time, betrayed me or threw me under the bus, I was surprised, because they told me I could trust them. I remember one pastor inviting me into his home where his wife and some other elders and their wives had all gathered and asked me to tell my story and promised me they would believe me and have my back. And they apologized for having betrayed me the year before. And with tears in their eyes — I kid you not — they vowed to never do that again. And because I had not yet healed, I believed them. I opened myself up to them once again, desperate for their approval and their love, and literally less than a year later, they had betrayed me for the last time.

After that, I finally did my own healing work, and nobody is going to be able to fool me like that again because I don't need others to rescue me anymore. Part of healing is learning that you are the one that you've been waiting for all this time. There are no

gurus or authorities necessary other than Jesus Christ, who is our only authority.

All right. Another codependent behavior or belief is, "Don't be open, honest, and direct. Instead, hint, get others to talk for you..." (Have you ever done that? "Well, do you think you could let them know this?") "...guess what they want and need, and expect them to do the same for you." So in today's twisted version of Christianity, as well as in codependent relationships, you aren't allowed to make mistakes or do something wrong. So to admit to a mistake is basically to expose yourself or to be vulnerable to shame and criticism. So this makes it very difficult to be open, honest, and direct. So people do a lot of lying and covering up in codependent relationships and twisted religious environments. There's a lot of hiding going on.

Abusers hide their abuse and victims will cover up abuse that's been perpetrated on them because they are afraid of getting kicked out or blamed for it. You are required to play the game this way in order to avoid being criticized or rejected or kicked out. You can't be direct either, because that's viewed as rude and mean.

So in codependent relationships and abusive religious environments, we have a lot of trying to read the other person's mind. I mean, kind of a little funny... I guess it's not that funny — just a practical example — let's say that you want to ask someone if they want to go to a specific restaurant. They're supposed to say, "Whatever you want," if they're a good, unselfish person, right? And if they do say a specific restaurant and you don't like it, then they're being selfish. And if you say that you don't like that one, then you are being selfish. Wow. That's a lot of wacky.

And as a result, people experience a ton of pent-up frustration and rage and confusion. I know in the churches I was in, there were sideways comments about people who didn't wear skirts, who didn't homeschool, or who had older kids who had tattoos or piercings. That was taboo. Most of those outsiders would leave as soon as they had a chance, not because anyone necessarily came up to them and said, "You are in sin wearing those pants." There were a couple of people that I knew who would do that, but mostly because those were the unspoken rules, right? There's just a coolness and exclusivity surrounding the ones who are "doing it right" and the ones who weren't.

If you did actually see something that was truly problematic, like abuse or something, you weren't allowed to say anything about that, either. If you believed that an elder, for example, was taking advantage of his position to manipulate someone, you wouldn't dare speak up about it, or you'd be accused of gossiping or not believing the best about a brother or being unforgiving or not overlooking a wrong done to you or keeping a record of wrongs. Shame on you. So what you'd actually see, then, is all of this quiet

disrespect, people talking behind everyone else's backs about all the problems. Nobody willing to just speak up and get kicked out. Everyone's terrified of what that would mean to be kicked out and have to leave the sandbox.

All right, here's another one: "Don't grow, change, or in any way rock this family's boat." Status quo was the name of the game in twisted religious environments and codependent family relationships. The system is protected at all costs. If you speak out, you will get kicked out. Now, I always knew that this was true deep down inside, and I played the game until I didn't. And sure enough, I got excommunicated and my family of origin has nothing to do with me anymore.

This isn't just a gut feeling, you guys. If you have that gut feeling, it's the truth. This is the reality of coming out of a codependent environment. This is what you can expect. So what's the answer? Well, like Melody Beattie says, "If codependency is following all of these rules, then healing from codependency is breaking them."

If you bristled when you heard the words "breaking rules," then you're exactly who this episode is for. So what does breaking these rules look like for Christian women? First rule: "Don't feel or talk about feelings." What if you decided that you were going to hold space for your emotions, learn where they came from (they actually come from your thoughts and beliefs, which, by the way, are 100% in your power to change), and learn how to allow your feelings and process through them so you can learn and grow from them? What if God actually gave you feelings for a reason?

Number two rule: "Don't think, figure things out, or make decisions, because you probably don't know what you want or what's best for you." So what if you decided to think and figure things out and make your own decisions for your life because you decided that God gave you wisdom for your own life, and He wasn't going to give that same wisdom to anyone else on your behalf?

Rule number three: "Don't identify, talk about, or solve problems. It's not okay to have problems." So what if you decided to look honestly at the problems that you're having and interrupt the thought patterns that are keeping you stuck? What if you embraced your humanity and just decided to be okay with being the imperfect human that God made you to be?

Number four rule: "Don't be who you are, because that's not good enough. Be good, right, strong, and perfect." So what if you decided you were going to love yourself the way God loves you? That's a lot of love, people. What if you decided you were good enough and God wasn't looking for perfect — He was just loving you as you are, no

strings attached, like the Bible says? What if you were really safe with God, and He wasn't abusive like all the twisted authorities in your life?

Number five rule: "Don't be selfish or put yourself first or say what you want or. Don't say 'no.' Don't set boundaries or take care of yourself, but always take care of others and never hurt their feelings or make them angry." So what if you decided that you were your main responsibility that God gave to you, not anyone else, and you decided to have your own back and create healthy boundaries and have margin in your life and say "no" to most things so that you could say "yes" to the most important things to you? What if you could let other people have and manage their own emotions, and that they were no longer any of your business? What if it was okay if they were angry or sad or frustrated, and that just meant that they were having a human experience?

Number six rule: "Don't have fun, be silly, or enjoy life. It costs money, makes noise, draws attention to yourself, and isn't necessary." So what if you could just live and laugh and dance and enjoy this amazing, beautiful life God gave to you? What if you could not only look at yourself in the mirror without shame, but you regularly made it a daily practice to talk to that amazing person in your mirror?

Number seven rule: "Don't trust yourself, God, the process of life, or certain people. Instead, put your faith in untrustworthy people and then act surprised when they let you down." So what if you could let go and surrender your control of all the circumstances and people that are not in your control anyway, and trust that God was big enough and capable to manage all of it without you? What if you walked away from untrustworthy people and found communities with safe, healthy people who were capable of loving and holding space for everyone, not just the ones that fit their image of a perfect person?

Number eight rule: "Don't be open, honest, and direct. Instead, hint, get others to talk for you, guess what they want and need, and expect them to do the same for you." So what if you could be open, honest, and direct and you didn't have to hint at anything, and if someone didn't like what you said, they didn't have to and you'd still be okay?

Number nine rule: "Don't grow, change, or in any way rock this family's boat." So what if you could stop trying to manage your family or religious system and you could grow and change and tolerate the disapproval of everyone who demanded that you change back and maintain your role in the toxic game that they want you to keep playing because it serves them? What if you broke all of the codependent religious rules and decided to live the Christ life — a life of authenticity, love and peace? You will lose all the things that you think you must have to keep you happy, but that are really

destroying your life. And when you lose those things, you will find you. And when you find you, you will begin to experience Christ in you, where He's always been.

If learning a little bit about codependency has been helpful for you, and if you see your own beliefs and behaviors in what we just learned, please know that there's no shame in this. Would we look at a small child who was abused and say that she brought it upon herself, or that it was her fault if she had trauma in her life now, or that it was her fault if she used codependent coping mechanisms to avoid more abuse? Obviously not. So please don't do this to yourself, either. She doesn't deserve that.

What she does deserve is your love, compassion, and help to uncover where these beliefs came from and how to unhook from them so that she can be set free. When we pretend we don't have these kinds of beliefs or behaviors, then we can't ever decide to change them. Hiding from reality never heals people or sets them free. Facing reality with compassion and love is what sets us free.

And if you need help with this, join me inside the Flying Free Sisterhood program where we deep dive into all of these things. I've helped hundreds of women shed their codependent beliefs and replace them with empowering, life-giving beliefs that have not only transformed their own personal lives, but the lives of people around them as well. And I would love to help you, too. You can visit joinflyingfree.com for more information. And that's all I have for you today. Thank you so much for listening, and until next time, fly free.