

DEALING WITH GRIEF WHEN WAKING UP TO EMOTIONAL ABUSE

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 232 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we are going to be talking about the deep sadness that survivors experience as they begin to wake up to their reality and see the truth about their relationship. But before we do that, I want to read a beautiful review that one of our newest members sent in recently. It encouraged my socks off, and I think it might help any listeners who have been on the fence about joining Flying Free for a while, but maybe you aren't sure about the cost being worth it or maybe if it will be easy to follow or do or if you'll even learn anything that you don't already know. So here's what this member wrote:

"I've only been a member for about a week and a half, and I am floored by how much growth I've experienced in such a short period of time. I tell one of my relatives every day what I am learning, and she is learning from what I am sharing too. I cannot believe the wealth in this program and all that is offered with the unbelievable monthly price. I just can't believe it. I am beyond grateful for this program. Thank you so much, Natalie, for pouring your heart into this. You are absolutely changing lives. Everything in this program is so organized and set up in such an efficient format. I absolutely love everything from the live coaching, to the courses, to the workshops, to the forum. If I feel so much growth and difference in a matter of two weeks. Where will I be in two months? So grateful for both you and for this amazing program."

Now, she's talking about the Flying Free program, and you can get all the details about it by going to joinflyingfree.com. It's only \$29 a month or \$290 for an entire year, which is the average cost of two therapy sessions. And many of our members were actually referred to this program by their therapists who have found that working with clients who are also getting educated and supported in a program like this actually augments and enhances their private sessions together. Their clients go through a course in Flying Free or listen to a weekly coaching session, and then they take their light bulb moments or their questions to their therapy session to work on applying their insights into their own personal healing journey.

Now, if you can't afford a therapist and you don't have one, this program is a great way to get life-changing education and support at a fraction of the cost. We focus on radical acceptance of our reality, changing our brain's programming to accommodate new

growth, learning how to allow and process big emotions, and having a daily practice of self-acceptance, compassion, and love. I have a page that will answer a bunch of the most common questions that women have about the program. You can read dozens of member reviews and complete your application to join us if you go to joinflyingfree.com.

Now, if you're a divorced Christian woman and you're interested in being supported during the rebuilding process, I also have a program called Flying Higher, and you can learn more about that by going to joinflyinghigher.com. Now, that program is only for women who are already divorced, meaning your divorce is final. You're no longer in the middle of the divorce process — it's done and over with. So if you are in the middle of your divorce still, then Flying Free would be the place of support for you. I know there's been some confusion about that in the past. We help people who are actually in the process of divorce in Flying Free, as well as people who are staying and still in their marriage. But if you're already divorced, then you would want to join Flying Higher if you're interested in help over there.

Okay, so let's get into today's topic because this comes up a lot in our private forum. Women are realizing, "Oh my word. I hate to believe that this could possibly be true — it just seems so surreal — but I think my Christian husband is emotionally abusive. What does this mean for my future?" And wow, does this hurt. It's a sucker punch if there ever was one. I feel like I had to get knocked on the head a few times, actually, before I finally believed it.

I would read a book that described my relationship to a "T," and then I would cry and freak out, and then I kind of would slide back into a denial phase. And then I would get another book and they would talk about it from a different angle, and then I would realize, "Oh my word, this is my relationship. Dear God, what am I going to do?" I would cry and freak out, and then I would kind of go back into denial again. I just did not want to believe that the problems that I'd been having my entire marriage were actually this serious.

But each subsequent denial was less and less deeply rooted. I was slowly changing my brain. I was slowly accepting the truth because it is a traumatic thing to wake up, and the pain is intense. God made our beautiful, miraculous bodies so that we would actually not be able to absorb all of that pain all at once. So it comes in spurts and waves.

So what is this intense feeling of dark sadness that hits us like a wave when we wake up in the morning and hangs out with us all day long, and then it torments us when we go

back to bed at night? In the forum, women will express grief by explaining that they feel hopeless about the future, thinking about being alone for the rest of their lives. They feel angry that they didn't recognize the truth for so long, or they feel angry that their husband is the way he is and he won't change. They feel angry about the lost years that they have invested in this relationship and it just never went anywhere. Some women feel paralyzed and like they can't think clearly or they can't make decisions for themselves. They just feel totally paralyzed. They lack motivation. They lack inspiration or hope for their future.

Now, all of these things are different ways to describe grief. That's what they're describing when they talk about these things. And we don't like grief. It's very, very natural to want this to go away, to look for some way, any way, to get rid of it or to get some relief for it.

Have you ever been burned, like, had a burn? Maybe you've had a curling iron or something or accidentally burned your hand on a stove. I've actually tried to take something out of the oven and forgotten to put on oven mitts, okay? So a burn is like this. It hurts really, really bad. And when I get burned and I realize I've got a bad burn, I go running for a bucket of cold water — running for the sink — I run cold water on my burn, and then I put some water in a bucket to keep my finger or my hand in it if I've burned it. I need relief now. And if you take your hand out, that pain comes back — it's overwhelming. You stick your hand back in and it feels a little bit better.

So when we feel sad, it's the same way we try to make it go away. Even if it's only temporary relief, we will run for that relief. Sometimes we might find relief in overeating or overdrinking or smoking or overworking or oversleeping or shopping a lot or having sex. Sometimes survivors who are hurting will go back to their abuser for sex even in the middle of the divorce. They're in the middle of the divorce process and they'll go back just to make the pain go away for just a little bit. But when we're done buffering that pain, guess what happens? That pain is always waiting for us. It's waiting for us to feel it.

So what do we do? What can we do with this kind of pain? How can we deal with it? There are two things I want to talk about. One is called noticing and the second one is normalizing. So the first one is we need to notice it. The next time that you are feeling this kind of pain in your body we call grief, just hold still and tune your mind into that feeling in your body, that painful feeling. Notice it. Allow it. I've done this: Try saying out loud, "Okay, I guess this is the part where we feel the grief." Or you can say, "So this is what grief feels like," and then describe it out loud: "I feel pressure in my chest. I feel nauseated. I feel like there is a black hole in my abdomen, a black hole of emptiness,

and it throbs with pain. I feel tension in my shoulders. I feel like a heavy rock is sitting on my chest and I can hardly breathe.”

Give your grief your full attention. When we try to get away from it or we resist it or we try to fight it and make it go away, it actually gets bigger and more powerful, almost like a toddler who's going to scream even louder if mommy ignores her. But if we give our grief our full attention with compassion and we hold space for that grief to be there, we may feel a slight shift in our body as it relaxes. So it might wash over us like a wave and then we feel it all. It's like if you're a woman who's ever had a baby and you remember what those contractions were like, it's like that. The contraction washes over you, it feels horrible and unbearable, and then it kind of recedes and you feel a little bit better. The pain's still there, but you feel a little bit better.

So when we notice our grief, that's the opposite of denial, all right? Noticing means accepting the reality that we have lost something precious, even if that precious thing was just a dream, and now our body is sad and our body needs to grieve, and that is okay, which is the second thing that we need to do. We need to normalize it. That means accepting that grief is a normal part of a human life, and sometimes life hurts like this. Grief will not kill us, even though it might feel like it will sometimes. Grief is not picky and it doesn't play favorites. It comes into everyone's life and it will come into everyone's life more than once.

Once we realize this and accept that this is a part of our human life, then we will be less surprised or indignant or resistant when it shows up. We still are not going to like it, not by a long shot, and we don't have to — but we will not add to our clean pain of grief the dirty pain of denying or resisting or fighting it.

I'm telling you, this is the worst thing that we can do with our grief, is to think or believe that it's pathological or that it's problematic or that it's something that we need to immediately get rid of or deal with. No. Grief is a wise teacher and something that deepens us, grows us, and evolves us into the next version of ourselves. We are not bad, and our lives are not bad because we are experiencing grief. Grief is a sign that we are growing and changing. Nobody changes the world without having experienced and learned from deep grief.

Now, one of the hardest things for Christian survivors of emotional and spiritual abuse is that they are grieving, but others on the outside are telling them that their grief is not valid. They may hear things like, “You are doing this to yourself. If you don't want to be in so much pain, then submit and obey God and go back to your husband,” or “The reason you're feeling terrible is because you are in sin.”

There's actually a name for this in the world of psychology, and that is "disenfranchised grief." So when you're grieving and others don't believe that you should be and they're communicating that to you, you are experiencing disenfranchised grief, and this kind of grief is particularly traumatic and debilitating, and it can even prolong the grief and recovery process. Everyone needs to have an empathic witness to their experiences, including their experience of grief. So if you are experiencing this kind of feedback from your family or your religious community, it will be important for you to have a good therapist or to have some close friends who truly care about you and have that emotional capacity to offer you the support that you need. And this is also one of the things that we provide inside of our private Flying Free community as well.

Now, many women wonder how long their grief is going to last. They want to get it over with. "How long is it going to be? Is it going to be a year, two years? Is this going to last forever?" It's hard to say how long it's going to be for each person because everyone's journey is different. But once a person has come to the place of acceptance that she has lost something valuable and precious, then she's actually come a long way, perhaps even almost the full distance.

According to grief expert Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, the five stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Now, in my observations, women usually will come into the Flying Free program usually in stages one to three most of the time. They're either in denial or they're in anger or they're in the bargaining stage. And their work in the Flying Free program helps them to move through those stages and into the hardest stage of all: the depression stage. This is where things get very dark and sad, and we don't want to go there. Nobody wants to go there.

It's almost like a baptism, though. In baptism, you go under the water and then you come out. It's supposed to represent death and then rebirth. It's the same thing. You go under into that dark, dark place of loss, and then, only then, are you able to come out into the last stage, which is the acceptance stage.

Now, in the Flying Higher program where we work with Christian women who are already divorced, sometimes we'll get women who are actually stuck in that depression stage. They are divorced, they've gone through all of that mess, but they haven't been able to move out of that fourth stage, and they feel overwhelmed with life. And if you are feeling stuck in that stage, in that darkness, I really recommend that you find a good therapist and also that you visit with your doctor. It may be possible that you need medication that can help you clear your mind so that you can finish those last bits of grief work that will move you up and out into acceptance and get you back on your feet again so that you can really begin that rebuilding process.

Now, for me, when I start to feel things building up in my body, it's almost like a pressure of low-level sadness. It just slowly builds. And when I start to feel that, I know that I need to schedule some time to just cry. I'm like you, though. I do not like to feel pain. I avoid it like the plague. And my buffer of choice is to work. I just stay busy. I stay really, really busy and then I don't have to feel it. But when I do that, I pay the price because it actually builds up and then it starts impacting my sleep. I start having a lot of nightmares. It impacts my emotions and then the relationships of the people around me.

So I schedule my grief work. My place of choice to do it is in my bathtub, believe it or not. So I turn off all the lights except for a candle and I put in my earbuds and I play really sad music on Spotify. I have a playlist that I use — I'll share it in the show notes — it's called "Grief Work," and I will lay in the bath and I'll listen to that playlist and I'll just let whatever comes over me, come over me. I don't force myself to cry or anything, and sometimes I don't cry — I don't need to cry. I just sit and I feel sad and reflective. Now, other times, I might sob for a long time, depending on what's going on in my life or what's come up for me.

But when I'm done, there is a shift in my body. I'm still sad, the pain is still there, but I feel different. I feel a little lighter, honestly. I feel a little more seen and held, and this is one way that I am an empathic witness for my own inner child. This is one way that I move toward healing.

Hey, beautiful butterfly. Thank you so much for listening. If you liked this episode, be sure to subscribe, and then consider leaving a rating and review so others can find us. To connect with me and get a free chapter of my book, head over to flyingfreenow.com, and until next time, fly free.