

DOES AN ABUSER KNOW THEY ARE ABUSIVE?

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 268 of the Flying Free Podcast. You may or may not know that we have a way for you to ask questions if you want to that I can answer on the podcast, and that is simply by going to any of the show notes pages of any of the episodes, and the links would be in the show notes right here on your favorite podcast app, or you can always find an episode by just going to flyingfreenow.com/ and then the episode number. Today's episode is 268, so flyingfreenow.com/268. And then when you go there, you can actually read the transcripts if you want to and you can also leave a question if you have a question that you'd like me to answer on a future podcast.

Now, obviously, I can't answer every single question that comes in — we get a lot of them and some of them I've already answered many times before or whatever. But I try to pick questions I haven't really focused on, or maybe I've answered them but the person asked with a different angle that I haven't maybe covered or probably can't even remember if I've covered it or not. So anyway, that's what we're going to do today. I'm going to answer some questions. Let's listen to the first one.

LISTENER: Hi, I just recently found your Flying Free Podcast and have been enjoying listening to those and reading some of your work and stuff. I haven't gotten your book yet, but I hope to. I was curious after listening to the one about covert, hidden emotional abuse, I was just curious, is that always emotional abuse or is it possible that it's just that my husband is emotionally weak, emotionally unavailable, due to his own past and trauma that he hasn't dealt with yet? I guess if he's not willing to deal with it or change, I don't know, then is it actually turning into abuse or not?

I get confused because there's not a bunch of verbal or seriously obvious abuse happening, but I guess some of that covert stuff I really can relate to and very often unhappy and emotionally abandoned is how I feel. So anyway, I was just curious about that. Is it always emotional abuse or possibly just a weakness in him that I need to support and love and could possibly make better? Thank you for your time.

NATALIE: Okay, this is a good question. I get a version of this question quite a bit, so it's something that people are concerned about, and I get it. Not everything is emotional abuse. Just because we're unhappy in our marriage, that doesn't necessarily mean that we're being emotionally abused. I can think of examples, actually, of people that I know personally who, they're unhappy in their marriage, but they're not actually in an abusive marriage.

I've created a quiz that specifically focuses on emotional and spiritual abuse. So it

doesn't necessarily cover other types of abuse. There are all kinds of abuse: financial abuse and physical abuse and sexual abuse, and all of these things can happen inside of a marriage as well.

But my focus with the Flying Free Podcast and with the work that I do is on emotional and spiritual abuse. So I have a quiz that specifically targets that type of abuse, and if you are wondering if your relationship is emotionally or spiritually abusive, you can go to emotionalabusequiz.com. It's really easy to remember: emotionalabusequiz.com. And then just take the quiz and if you answer the questions honestly, at the end you can find out or get at least a very good idea about whether or not your relationship is emotionally abusive. Okay, let's listen to the next question.

LISTENER: Hi, I just listened to, I believe it was Episode 214. The question that keeps coming up into my mind that I want to ask is how does the abuser become an abuser, and do they know they are abusing? Are they doing it on purpose? Do they mentally know, "Hey, I'm doing this to really F this person up," or is it just their belief system? They're so messed up in their own pain and agony that they act that way and don't even know it? I don't even know. I'm so lost and broken. I just need to know if he knows what the heck he is doing to me.

I know I've tried over and over, twenty-six years. My brother beat me up when I was a kid, so it kind of started when I was really young. And then I got saved and met Jesus and I thought it was fine until I met my husband, and we have been married twenty-six years and have four kids, and this whole time I felt like I'd been on eggshells and never understanding. "There's really something wrong with me because I cannot feel normal." And now I'm, "Yeah, he's an ass." That's all I've always thought: he's just an asshole. And it's me, it's me, it's me, it's always me. I'm always trying to fix myself and be better and learn and grow and react different and blah, blah, blah. And then I give up and then I get quiet and then I'm drawn and I'm disassociated and all those things. But so back to my question: he's doing this and does he know?

NATALIE: Yeah, I think you have articulated the crucible that women who are stuck in these positions are in and the complex situation that it is. Here's what I want to ask you. Again, believe me, you're not the only person who's asked this question. I've heard this before. Why do you need to know if he knows? I would just think about that for a little bit. If someone kidnapped your child, would you care about that person's psychological state of being and all the reasons why they have your child? I mean, maybe if it could help you to get your child back, right?

But you wouldn't necessarily be thinking, "I wonder what's going through their mind. I

wonder how they're thinking and how they feel, and I wonder if they really know what they're doing and maybe they don't — maybe they have no idea." Probably not. Your focus would not be on the perpetrator, but more on the getting the child out and wondering how your child was doing.

And so I want you to kind of think that way as far as yourself. There are two people in this situation. There's this guy that's your husband, and we're so focused on all of what's going on in his brain that we're not able to focus on what's going on in yours, and there's plenty going on in your brain that we can work with.

So at the end of the day, it really doesn't matter if they know, although I have a class in the Flying Free program that will teach you that they do know and how we know that they know. So if you're interested and you're not a part of Flying Free, that's a class I'd recommend.

It doesn't matter what their motives are. Asking these kinds of questions indicates this continued focus on the abuser and evolving around his world. And when you're caught in their vortex — think about it like a little tornado — you're going to spin in there forever. The way to break out of that tornado is to stop focusing on them and turn your focus to your own self.

And by the way, when I say that, I know I heard that a lot in Christian circles: "Well, you need to focus on your own sin." That's not what I mean. I'm not saying, "Take your eyes off of his sin and focus on your own sin." No. I'm saying take your eyes off of what he's doing and all of his drama and focus on your own healing, focus on your own perspective, focus on what your brain and body are trying to tell you, because that's why you're so conflicted inside, that's why you're dissociating, that's why you've got brain fog. Your body is screaming at you to do something to help you, but you're too focused on him.

If you knew all of the answers and all of the psychological reasons behind why your husband abuses you, that wouldn't change anything. He would still abuse you and you would still be his victim. So why waste your energy, right? But if you had an incredible self-awareness around the programming in your own brain that keeps you stuck in that loop and if you were able to do that personal hard work on rewiring that programming and basically uploading a new programming, that would change everything, and then you would start moving forward in your life because your new programming would assist you in powerful ways in that journey up and out of abuse.

I have many classes inside of Flying Free that teach women everything they need to

know about abusers and how to deal with them. But what you're ultimately going to learn is that for your life, it isn't about your abuser at all. It's about your own power. And if you're ready to find that and tap into it, consider completing an application and joining Flying Free. You can go to joinflyingfree.com for more information. All right, let's listen to the next question.

LISTENER: Hi, Natalie. Thank you so much for your Flying Free Podcast and emails. I really appreciate them and I'm soaking them up like a sponge. My question for you today is, I will soon be celebrating my 27th wedding anniversary. It's a second marriage for both of us. About ten years into the marriage, I discovered my husband using pornography. He's visited strip clubs. He also had what he describes as an emotional affair. In the years that have come, in the last, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years, our relationship has been very rocky.

My question is, at what point do you know that there is absolutely no hope? I have waited and prayed and waited and prayed, and I don't see any change in him. He won't do counseling, he won't do any of the requests that I have given him as far as accountability software on his electronic devices, having an accountability partner, none of those things, no counseling. How do I know when it's time? I feel it's time, but I don't know if it's fear of being alone — I'm sixty-eight years old — or is it just I don't want to be disobedient to the Lord? I don't want a divorce, but at this point it's taking a toll on my health and I need to be a healthy person for my mother and my children and my grandchildren.

NATALIE: Okay, there is no hope when you decide not to hope anymore. That's when there's no hope. Hope is just something we generate within ourselves. And sometimes hope serves us. Hope can keep us moving toward our goal. But in the case of hoping that an abuser is going to change and become your knight in shining armor, that is, in my opinion, misplaced hope.

That isn't really even hoping in God. I know we like to say, "Well, I'm just hoping that God can change him." It's hoping that God will do what you want Him to do or what I want Him to do. But when we truly hope in God rather than in God doing what we want, that's when we accept reality. That's truly hoping in God. We embrace truth even if it hurts, and then we trust that God is going to take care of us.

But hoping that God will take control of another person and make him or her do whatever it is that we want them to do, that's misplaced hope. God is not a control freak, no matter how much you hope for that to be the case. And your husband is not a nice man, no matter how much you hope for that to be the case.

Proverbs 13:20 says, "He who walks with the wise will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." It's just a principle. It's like, if you drop a rock from the top of a hill, it will roll down the hill. It's just the law of gravity. If you walk with wise people, they're going to rub off on you and you also will grow wise, but if you hang out with a fool, you're going to suffer harm. If you are living with a fool, you will suffer harm. And every person who's listening to this who is living with a fool knows exactly what that verse is talking about.

So you get to decide when you want to be done. You are the architect of your life in many ways. Now, of course, we all have limitations and constraints on our lives of different kinds. You're dealt a hand of cards, right? But within that hand of cards, my husband, Tom, he'll say, "Well, you can actually win a game of poker even with a bad hand of cards." So I don't know anything about that because I don't play poker, but I'll just take his word for it. But within the limitations that we have, we have choices, and then we have power within those choices. So how do you want to use your own power of choice?

So many times I think as Christians, we use God as our excuse for not making a decision. And in Christian circles, this is super easy to do. I'm just going to throw out a few Christian cliches that tend to paralyze people: "Well, how do I know for sure which way to go? I mean, my heart is deceitful above all else, and who can know it?" "Well, if I choose the wrong path, I'll be destroyed." "Well, it's a slippery slope to hell." If you read my memoir that's called *All the Scary Little Gods*, you'll hear these things woven throughout where I was programmed with these ideas.

"Well, do you want God's plan A or God's plan B?" "Are you avoiding suffering? You must not avoid suffering if you want to be like Christ." "God is going to be glorified in your obedience, and let me tell you exactly what He wants you to do because I know," and then they'll tell you their opinion based on their own interpretation of cherry-picked Bible verses taken out of context and twisted to justify their personal beliefs.

Here's what I suggest for you. Write out where you want to be in five years. What does your life look like if you leave your abuser? And just really think about this. What are you doing in your life five years from now? How are you showing up for your life? You talked about your kids and your grandkids. Where are you living? What is your relationship with God like when you are no longer walking with a fool every day of your life? What is your relationship with yourself like? What is your relationship with the people around you like? Who are you hanging out with? Who are your companions five years from now?

Then I want you to write down everything that you can think of about what your life would look like if you stayed with this man. And then when you get done, I want you to read both of those, and I want you to put yourself in the position of your future self who's looking back. What does your future self hope that you'll do? Which life does she want to be living? And then it's just a matter of choosing and having your own back.

And if you need support walking through this process, again, join me inside Flying Free. We have all the education, group coaching, camaraderie, and support that you need to go from this side to the other side if you want to.

I just want to read something here. I got this message from someone who started Flying Free one year ago this month. Well, actually, I'm recording this in January, and I think this is going to air in March. She started Flying Free in January of 2023, and then one year later, a couple of months ago, she sent me this. And by the way, I've removed any identifying details so no one will ever know who she is, but she sent me this:

"It was on this day that I woke up from a nap after crying all morning and contemplating my life, what was wrong with me, and what I could do differently to save my marriage and continue to rescue him while burning myself alive. I opened Facebook to doom scroll..." I love that. When I read that, I was just laughing because that's what it is. Have you been there where you're just so zoned out and depressed that it's like you just brainlessly scroll? It's like a numbing thing. Anyway, I thought that was funny. Doom scroll, what a great term for it. It's not funny, actually. It's just a good term.

Anyway, "...and Natalie's face with the question, 'Are you a Christian woman who is in an abusive marriage?' was at the top of my feed. I took the quiz, downloaded the free chapter, read it, called my mom, and read it to her. I cried, celebrated, and felt like I had found my new best friend. I put on my walking shoes and walked for two hours listening to the free podcasts. God used Natalie to show me that there were so many things I didn't need to keep doing.

I joined the Flying Free Sisterhood in early January and began digging into the coursework. I found so much validation and reassurance and began to gain confidence in putting together what I was learning from Natalie, a year of counseling, and began to share little, tiny pieces of what I was beginning to make sense of with the closest people in my circle.

This year has been a year of learning, growing, grieving, and saving me. It has not been easy, but I have climbed every rung of that ladder out of hell. One year later, I will walk into 2024 a free, confident, and empowered woman. Yes, I chose to leave, yes, I filed for

divorce, and yes, I am a work in progress to believe that I deserve better and more than lies, manipulation, secret porn use, and abuse.

What I had wasn't a marriage. What I had was a man who knew I would love him unconditionally, and he thought he could talk his way out of anything. I had a man-child, a fool, and one who knew all the masks. Is every day easy? Hell no. I have to make a conscious choice every day that his words, his narrative, and his behavior do not impact me. On the hard days I cry, I sulk, and I feel sorry for myself. Then I pull myself up by the bootstraps and know that I loved him fiercely."

I love that she said that because we do. Many of us did and do love these men fiercely and have done everything that we could. I also love that she's not afraid — and this honestly is someone who's done her work — she's not afraid to be able to say, "Yeah, you know what? Some days I'm a basket case." And she doesn't feel ashamed about that. She embraces that life can be hard and she's all in on it.

Anyway, then she said, "I listen to coaching sessions, I read the forum, and I go back to the courses. I remind the young girl," she's talking about herself there, "and sit with her and remind her that I will never allow anyone to treat us that way again. I remind her that her heart is filled with love and that I loved with all my heart and soul. I will never blindly trust again. I have learned that not everyone has my best interest at heart, and I know that I need to carefully select who is on the inner circle. I am so thankful I know I don't have to continue self-sacrificing for people who don't return the same.

Thank you and the Flying Free Sisterhood. This celebration wouldn't have been possible without this godsend. If you are still in the darkness, keep going. The light is there. Use this space to learn and allow Natalie to shine the light for you. One day you will hold the light for others, too. Keep going. Keep growing. Choose you."

LISTENER: My abuser talks about how much he's changed, and he does appear like he's changed and he's not screaming and yelling and hurling insults, but he sublingually is telling me — because I've told him I don't want to be with him anymore and we're selling our house — but he'll say, "Oh, God hates divorce," and "God said that in the end days, people would be lovers of themselves," and he also says, "It's better to be together," and this, that, and the other, and "We're in such dangerous times," and really trying to strike fear in me.

And then he said that I wasn't treated that badly. I tried to get a protective order and I would have gotten it, but he begged me and cried and talked about his reputation, that it would be ruined, and to have mercy on him. And so I did, and now it's months and

months and months and months later and we're trying to sell our house, and with the interest rates it's a little difficult, and then getting him to sign that piece of paper.

So obviously he's not changed because he does say those things to me. He says, "Things weren't that bad. You weren't hurt that badly." Yes, I was. And his brother and sister have never been in our house, let alone know how he treats me, and they said he's not an abuser. And he is spiritually, mentally, emotionally, financially and physically.... We can't even talk about that. So I don't know if you can do a message on... He's doing the dishes, he's doing this, he's doing that, and all appearances is he's this knight in shining armor.

And it's so confusing and I'm thinking, "God wants me to stay. Maybe He does want me to stay because of the economy. I'm going to be sixty-six years old. I've been with this guy for thirty-five years. What am I going to do? I'm going to Florida and it's really crowded there and expensive, and I don't even know where I'm going or what I'm doing." If you could touch on that.

NATALIE: I would love to touch on that. And you know how I'm going to do it? I'm going to actually let God speak for Himself from the Bible, all right? I'm going to just read you several verses and just let the Holy Spirit tell you what He wants to tell you, okay? 2 Timothy 3:13: "But evil people who pretend to be what they are not will become worse than ever as they fool others and are fooled themselves."

Matthew 7:15: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Jeremiah 23:16: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.'"

Titus 1:16 talks about people who claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for anything good. Isaiah 50:20: "Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."

1 Corinthians 13: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

2 Corinthians 11:13-14: "For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers,

masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light." They're just following in Satan's footsteps, right? "It is not surprising then if his servants, also, masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve."

Ezekiel 34: "The Lord's message came to me: 'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them — to the shepherds: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the choice animals, but you do not feed the sheep! You have not strengthened the weak, healed the sick, bandaged the injured, brought back the strays, or sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled over them.

They were scattered because they had no shepherd, and they became food for every wild beast. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over the entire face of the earth with no one looking or searching for them.

Therefore, you shepherds, listen to the Lord's message: As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, my sheep have become prey and have become food for all the wild beasts. There was no shepherd, and my shepherds did not search for my flock, but fed themselves and did not feed my sheep,

Therefore, you shepherds, listen to the Lord's message: This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand my sheep from their hand. I will no longer let them be shepherds; the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore. I will rescue my sheep from their mouth, so that they will no longer be food for them.

For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look, I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will seek out my flock. I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a cloudy, dark day.

I will bring them out from among the peoples and gather them from foreign countries; I will bring them to their own land. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams and all the inhabited places of the land. In a good pasture I will feed them; the mountain heights of Israel will be their pasture.

There they will lie down in a lush pasture, and they will feed on rich grass on the mountains of Israel. I myself will feed my sheep and I myself will make them lie down,

declares the Sovereign Lord. I will seek the lost and bring back the strays; I will bandage the injured and strengthen the sick, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them — with judgment!""

So that's how God would answer this question, I think. When someone says to me, "Well, but he talks about God all the time, and he reads the Bible and he quotes it constantly, and he tells me what I'm doing wrong and how I need to protect his reputation and how I need to have mercy," I know immediately what's going on. Someone is confused by a liar.

It's interesting because I actually know some truly godly people, and they don't have to talk about God. They don't have to quote scripture. They don't have to beg me to save their reputation or have mercy on them. They would never tell me what I should do with my life. Why not? Because they're not frauds. They actually love Christ and they live it. They don't have to convince anyone about it. They just live the way Christ lived and they love the way Christ loved. They trust God to work in my life and they don't feel the need to pretend to know what God wants for me, to control and manipulate me so that I will do their bidding. They are faith-filled in all of the right ways. They are generous. They are kind. They are compassionate. They are empathetic. They are good listeners. They are respectful.

I hope you can tell the difference between a fraud or a fake and the real thing. Just because your abuser wears pretty masks does not make him a good person. The real question to be asking yourself is, "Why do I believe the mask when he puts it on?" Because as long as you give him credibility when he is wearing the pretty mask, he will continue to wear it. Why? It works. When you walk away or you set a boundary, that's when the mask comes off. If you want more concentrated help with understanding the truth about these kinds of relationships, go to joinflyingfree.com for more information.