

I FEEL GUILTY BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH HE'S CHANGING, I STILL WANT TO LEAVE

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 48 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I have Rachel, Kim, and Becky with me, and we're going to be answering two listener questions. I want to especially thank those of you who have left questions via the recording. It's great to have questions through email, but I think it's nice when the listeners can actually hear your voice and hear your heart behind your voice. I know that the questions that have come in are questions that a lot of women have, so it's really important that you ask those questions. Please know that when you do, there are so many other people that want to have information about those same topics.

The two questions that we have today have to do with homeschooling. If you were to be separated or to get divorced, how would you continue to homeschool and what are your options there? The other question had to do with what if your husband starts to change or you think he might be changing, but you just really don't trust him anymore and you don't trust the process, you are burnt out, and you would just like the marriage to end? What then? We're going to be talking about those two really important questions.

I also especially want to thank those of you who have taken time out of your schedules to go over to Apple Podcasts and leave a rating and a review for this podcast. Here's the thing about those ratings and reviews. When you do them, they actually help other people find the podcast when you do that. I don't know how the algorithms work, but Apple Podcasts has a way of knowing if people are really interested in a certain podcast. So those podcasts will come up in the searches more often than those that aren't getting any traction that way. When you do leave a rating and review, please know that you are helping to get this podcast out there and seen more often. Also, you need to know that Rachel and I and the other gals who are helping me with this, we love reading those! It is super encouraging. Thank you to those who have already done that.

I make it easy. On my website, flyingfree.com/podcast, click on any of the podcast episodes and there will be a place where you can record a question as well as a link to Apple Podcasts where you can leave a rating and review. Without any further ado, let's get started. Thank you so much for joining us for this episode of Flying Free. Welcome,

ladies. I'm super excited about this episode. I've got a couple of great, important questions. We're going to play the first one and dive in.

CALLER ONE: Hi, Natalie. I'm hoping you can speak into my situation. My husband and I have been married about thirteen years, and maybe six years into our marriage I started feeling like there were things that were wrong, but I couldn't really identify them. About a year and a half ago, I really started awakening to the fact that I was in an emotionally abusive relationship. I told him at that point that if it continued that way, I wanted to leave. He saw how serious I was about leaving, and then he began to look into things that were happening and looking inward. It has been a process, but I think he's finally starting to realize a lot of the things that he was doing were abusive. I see some genuine desire in him to want to change. Despite that, though, I still feel like I want to leave, and I feel guilty that I want to leave. I feel like I need to stay, considering that we have three kids and all of that. I just feel deep down that I can't be vulnerable to him because of the abuse. I feel like I've shut down my heart towards him, and even though he's changing, I still want to leave.

RACHEL: You know, I think I can speak for everyone here on this podcast. We just feel for you, whoever you are, wherever you are. This is a really hard situation. It's confusing. It's painful. You want to do the right thing, but there are so many different ideas about what the right thing is pulling at you. It's definitely understandable that you don't feel that you can trust your husband. I really identify with you, because I was married for thirteen years to my abusive ex-husband as well. That is a long time, and you've seen these patterns of behavior sustained for a very long time. So there's a reason why you don't feel like you can trust him. Those reasons have been added up day after day, minute after minute where he shows himself untrustworthy.

It's nice that maybe he is seeking to change. Speaking personally, we don't see that a whole lot. In my situation, there were some efforts to change that made me so hopeful, but then it really wasn't authentic. It was manipulation, unfortunately, and I had to come to the reality of that. I think you have to come to where you are most comfortable. But I want to tell you that what I came to in my own life was that he had broken our marriage vows over and over and over again. There was no trust, because even though he wasn't unfaithful to my knowledge, he had been unfaithful to who I was as a person. He had abandoned me over and over again. That is what brought me to the realization that our marriage was over a long time ago, and filing the legal paperwork was just the public evidence of what's been going on for years.

You've got three kids. It's hard to know what is best for them. In my situation, I've got one son, and I realized that I did not want to keep showing him that this is the way that

families work, that this is the way you treat your wife. It was time for me to say, “No. This is not okay, and I’m reversing direction on what I’ve been living with for the last thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years.” That’s where I came to.

The only thing I’d say is try to tune out all the messages of the world that says, “Save the marriage at all costs.” You are more important than the institution of your marriage, because marriage was made for man. Man was not made for marriage. That is the opposite of what is often the impression we get from the church. Realizing that was so eye-opening to me, because I had been acting as a slave to my marriage trying to do whatever it took to keep it together at all costs. As long as I didn’t file that paperwork, we were “good in God’s eyes.” Actually, no — God is interested in the truth. If you need to file that legal paperwork to live in truth, then that’s what you need to do.

NATALIE: All of us here that are on this podcast, we all have relationships with healthy people now. The difference is so astounding. But if our ex-husbands had really had that inner transformation and become the way our current spouses are, we would have probably warmed to them, don’t you think? Don’t you think that over time we would have warmed to them, that eventually we would have felt very safe with them and our desire would have been to stay, because all we were looking for was love and safety, right?

RACHEL: Absolutely! The transformation would have been so remarkable and so obvious. There was no getting around it. We wouldn’t have been looking for subtle tiny clues that maybe give us a spark of hope that maybe he actually is changing.

BECKY: Right. I was going to say too, to this gal who is asking this question... My heart just sank, because if you go back to your fundamental beliefs in your question, you’re saying that he deserves grace. He deserves a happy life. He deserves everything — you don’t. Most often that is because Christianity has told us that our whole lives that we are second in line. “It’s all about him,” as Rachel was saying.

But in reality, reverse the situation for a minute. If you had been this horrible person and you are now who you are today, if your spouse came to you and said, “I just don’t think I can ever trust you again,” true humility and repentance would say, “I understand that, and I want to release you. Not only that, I want to make it as painless as possible. I want to do everything I can to support you in a happy life.”

You know what, if you ever go to your husband and say that, that will tell you if it is true repentance or not. If he throws a hissy fit saying, “What do you mean? I’ve done all this changing. You can’t divorce me,” that is going to tell you a lot about where it’s really at.

I've never known of a situation where a man actually changed. Everything is possible. But I think I'd go back to your fundamental belief of why does he deserve all grace and all goodness, and why do you have to be the one that shoulders all the burden and all the blame?

NATALIE: Yeah. Someone told me once, when I was trying to figure out if I should stay or go, if he has truly changed, then he will give you an amazing divorce. I thought, "Wow." I did not have an amazing divorce. I had a divorce that took nineteen months, and it was painful. But that was when the reveal really came. That was when I really got my proof 100,000 times that this person was not repentant and there was no inner transformation. It was all aesthetic on the outside. I love that, Becky. Thanks for bringing that point out. I think that's important.

When someone has had an inner transformation, you should be able to press a pressure point in them. You should be able to press for your own autonomy and for your own voice to be heard. You should be able to show up as a whole person, and they will respect your space and your voice, they will listen and care, they will make room for you to live and move and breathe in their world, and it will be a beautiful, safe, healthy thing. I hope that that's what this man is doing. But I really think if he was truly doing that, then this listener, after a year and a half, would be starting to feel that safety.

BECKY: Natalie, I would add to that. She might be listening to us and saying, "But y'all don't understand; he's come so far." Obviously, true repentance is overnight. Becoming a different person does take time. But I just have a hard time believing that men who have operated this way as normal for thirty, forty, or fifty years of their lives, they may repent, but I'm not sure they are going to change. If they do, are you willing to wait thirty or forty more years of your life all for them? No church would ever ask a man to do that.

RACHEL: Yeah. So grace can be present here, but grace does not mean a lack of consequences. What has happened here, you cannot avoid consequences when you treat someone horribly for years upon end.

NATALIE: That's right.

KIM: I was thinking about what Rachel said. Yes, it is so understandable that this woman is feeling hurt. Definitely that pain is real with the broken vows. I just wanted to reiterate that. Also, I liked Becky's viewpoint about why is the grace focused on him? I think one of us mentioned putting a pressure point on a spouse. Maybe for this woman

that would be a physical separation for a while from her husband and see how her husband would handle that and what would happen with that. Would the change be sustained throughout that period of separation? But I feel like it would also give her a taste of what life would be like divorced also, because there are so many things that I didn't really consider when I was still married, like what the ins and out of divorce look like.

NATALIE: Yeah, that's good. I'll put a link in the show notes. If you go to flyingfreenow.com/48 — that is this episode number — I will put a link to an online resource. I can't think of the name of the guy who does it, but it's called "Can Your Relationship Be Saved?" He's got an audio that you can listen to and ask yourself a whole bunch of questions. But then he has this workbook kind of thing. I did this workbook back when I was trying to figure things out, and it really helped open my eyes to see the reality of my situation. It helps you to play the movie out in the future.

So you watch the movie of what would happen if you stayed, where would you be ten years from now, and where would your kids be? Then you play out the movie if you leave — what would that look like, what would your life look like then? It really helped me to make my final decision. I was close to making a decision anyway. But I recommend that worksheet all the time to people. If you are on the fence, go there.

I also want to put in a shameless plug for Flying Free, the support and community group. If you go to joinflyingfree.com, you can learn more. But that group will also help you to figure this out. If you spend a year in that group, we will help you walk through whether you are staying with your spouse, separating from him, are going through the divorce process, or if you are already divorced and are trying to figure out the rubble of your life. Go there and read more about it. We're going to move on to the next question now.

CALLER TWO: Hi. I would love to hear a podcast on the topic of how a homeschooling mom can navigate through a divorce with her abuser who is a covert narcissist most likely, and continue to homeschool after the divorce is over. Thank you very much.

NATALIE: Okay, Becky. I think you'd be a great person to kick this one off because of your experience in this area.

BECKY: Thanks, Natalie. I have five kids who I had homeschooled all the way through until I divorced. They were eighteen, sixteen, fourteen, twelve, and ten. I think if I could relate to you in one way, it would be the fear that I had. If you're like many homeschoolers, you have homeschooled since the beginning. You have these fears that

have built up from the homeschool jargon that goes on that says, "Public school will destroy your children," "You're the only influence that really matters," yada yada yada.

I think the first thing I would say is to challenge your thinking. Homeschooling is not the only way. For me, with the three girls, I had already graduated my oldest daughter. The next two girls were in a high school co-op tutorial two days a week. I let them finish homeschooling all the way through. The boys, however, especially since I had been in a relationship with a covert narcissist and a very abusive man, I really felt it was important that they had another male figure in their life. So I specifically sought a school where they would have a male teacher. I found a small Christian school for a couple of years.

Even after that with my youngest, who was ten when I divorced and is now turning seventeen next week, we put him in public school because he wanted to join ROTC. We felt like what ROTC could do for his life plus the input of my new, amazing husband had transformed him completely. Had I homeschooled him, I really believe it would have been more detrimental to him at that point.

I think you need to address your fears. Write them down. Are they true? Depending on the age of your kids, is this the best thing for them? And it depends on their sex. If you have boys and they have been under a man who has treated women the way that these men treat women for eight, ten, fifteen years, they need other influences to see that that is not how men treat women. Typically if your husband is treating you like that, you are probably going to a church where that is acceptable and sometimes even promoted. So I would say part of the privilege of divorcing is allowing your children to get away from these toxic environments.

Lastly, I was going to say that one of the main things you have to think about is the practicality of the finances. Can you work at home? Do you need to work, or will you have other means so that you can homeschool? I was a working mom, and I homeschooled all my kids and worked full-time the whole time. It is not for the soft-hearted. It was very hard. I gave up every other aspect of my life in order to do it. But I knew at that time with an abusive husband, the best thing I could do was be close to my kids and keep them close. Once I divorced, I felt it was more important to let them expand their wings and see the world without the tainted vision that their father would give them.

NATALIE: I want to jump in here too, because I have nine kids. I homeschooled for twenty years. The first two I homeschooled all the way through. I won't go into all the details, but I've got a couple of kids in public school. I've got some kids in a private

school now, and a child in a private Christian university, and two other children in a secular university. I've experienced it across the gamut. I think we can all relate to the idea that we want to homeschool our kids because we're trying to give them the best start possible. We want them to be grounded in the Word of God. We want them to be grounded in the Truth. We want to protect them from bad influences so they can grow up and do all these great things for God. Or at least have a happy, satisfying life with a strong faith, right?

We think, at least I did, that if they go to a secular school that they are going to lose that. They will learn about evolution. They will hear a bunch of lies. They are going to become gay — whatever. I just want to say that the outcomes of my older kids have been across the board. My conclusion after all of this — my oldest is twenty-six — and my conclusion is that it doesn't really matter, at the end of the day, what kind of education they had. I mean, it does in the sense of what Becky said as individuals.

For example, one of my kids really thrived in homeschooling. He has his own business now and is making money hand over fist. (Not that that is a sign of success, but I'm just saying.) He graduated at age sixteen. He did PSEO and got a college degree basically without paying anything. So he's the poster child for the homeschooling thing. You'd think that all the rest of my kids would have followed suit — but no. I've had kids that have dabbled in drugs (like, serious drugs), kids that have slept around... We've got a lot of issues. And those kids were the ones that went to Christian school and were homeschooled. The ones that are in public school so far are doing well. (We'll see what happens.)

Here's what I think the big problem was in our family. It wasn't the education piece — it was the abuse. That was the thing that screwed up my family. It didn't matter how much I was praying, how much I was homeschooling, or what I was bending over backwards working my butt off to do to turn everything around to fix everything and make it all good. It was the abuse, which I had absolutely no control over. That is what caused so much dysfunction and so many false beliefs.

It wasn't just the abuse that my husband was doing. It was the spiritual abuse that was happening at our church. It was the way that my kids were being raised to believe certain things. I recently wrote a blog article about the abuser god, and we were basically believing in not just a daddy who was abusive, but in a god who was abusive. That really messes with your head, and I believe it's a satanic movement in the church that is destroying families. The education piece is not the whole answer. The answer is "Who are we worshipping?" We can worship that God whether we go to public school or private school. I just wanted to address that. I wonder if anyone could address the

financial aspect. How did the rest of you guys deal with that?

KIM: For me — this isn't really the financial aspect. Three years ago I was going through my separation and divorce, and my kids were twelve, nine, seven, five, and one and a half. I continued homeschooling them for a little while when I was separated. I had always done it alone. I did not have help from my ex in childcare, schooling, cleaning — anything at home. It was always all on me, but the emotional trauma of that separation was so exhausting and heavy. I had so many people — the flying monkeys — contacting me and showing up at my house and telling me I had to go back. I could hardly get out of bed in the morning.

I came to a point where I knew, "I cannot continue to do this — to homeschool." I had cancer seven years ago, and I remember God telling me through that, "I love the kids more than you do." So that came back to me through the separation, that "He loves them more than I do. He's going to take care of them if I send them to school. It will, in a sense, be okay, because He loves them more than me." I didn't re-enroll them back into their private Christian school. They had gone there before I started homeschooling. I homeschooled for about three years.

They are doing quite well now. My oldest is in high school, and that's going well. For the most part, they enjoy it. There are, of course, bad days. Once my kids went back to school, I knew the weight of homeschooling was heavy. I'm sure, Natalie and Becky, you guys get that. Homeschooling is a full-time job. Becky, I don't know how you worked full-time and did homeschooling. I can't quite fathom that. But that weight was lifted, and it was amazing. It was difficult for me when I sent them those initial weeks. That first day was horrible. I remember it so vividly. But I do believe the Holy Spirit spoke to me that day (and that's a whole other story) and released me from that marriage. Even thinking about that, you may not fully realize the weight of what you are carrying just in the homeschooling aspect of your life until that might be gone for you. Then you can try and focus on what else is going on in your life and through your divorce.

BECKY: Kim, I was going to add for the financial part, and like you said, that feeling of guilt: I actually felt guilty when I put my kids in school because I was glad I didn't have to homeschool them and because I had so much else going on. Beside a full-time job, there was navigating all the flying monkeys, like you said. My divorce took nearly a year, and that was not in any way pleasant.

But regarding the financial part, it's very rare that we have ex-spouses who pay their child support and pay their alimony if you get alimony. So I would never, ever lean on that. I would make sure that the number one stress you are going to encounter when

you divorce is that you have to put a roof over their head and food on the table. That's priority one, and if you can get help sending them to public school or sending them to private school on a sliding income scale, it will help you. You may be thinking, "No way." I meet a lot of homeschool moms in what I do. They really are afraid of school. I want you to remember that you probably went to school yourself. It will be okay. Like Natalie said, all five of my kids are at different places. The education was not the primary part that played into who they are today.

KIM: One more thing, Natalie, that might be beneficial to this woman that's deciding the homeschooling, but I think for other major decisions that we have to make in our life, especially during these traumatic times, is to maybe refer back to Episode 47 that we recorded. Sarah was in that discussion with us, and she had four little nuggets or questions when you are trying to make a decision. A couple of the questions were, "Does it align with who I want to be or who your kids want to be?" "Where do you want to head in life or in your kids' lives?" At one point in that episode she had four of these good, analyze-your-thoughts questions. Maybe if she wants to go back and listen to that it might help her, too.

NATALIE: Yes. She can do that by going to flyingfreenow.com/47, and that will take her straight to that episode. I wanted to say one last thing too. My kids have thrived in school — thrive in a way that they did not thrive in homeschool. Honestly, if I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't have homeschooled. My second son, I think he really needed to have been in school. I grieve over that a lot. I grieve over my decision to have kept him in homeschool. He was athletic. He could have played sports. Back then, we thought that sports were evil. I know this sounds totally over the top, but we thought... Yeah, I won't go into that. But I just want to say I was petrified of putting my kids in school, and it turned out that they absolutely love school. They all really enjoy school. They have wonderful friends. They've made wonderful relationships with other adults who have kept an eye on them and helped them and helped support me in my parenting.

I don't know if you ever heard that Hillary Clinton said it takes a village. All of us Christians were like, "That's anathema! It just takes a family." I do believe now it takes a village. I'm so grateful for all the adults in our lives that have reached out — not Christians, unfortunately. The Christians abandoned me. But the secular community has reached out and offered support and love and care for our family in a way that we really needed. It's a sad statement about where our church is at. It's not like that everywhere. I don't think my experience is the exception. I think it's the rule. But I'm sure there are exceptions, and I'm grateful for those, too.

We are going to close now. I want to end by saying that this episode of the Flying Free podcast is made financially possible through the private Flying Free Sisterhood program. This community offers courses, workshops, live coaching and more for women of faith seeking hope and healing from emotionally and spiritually abusive relationships, but also communities. You can find out more at joinflyingfree.com. Thank you so much for stopping by to listen. Until next time, fly free!