

WHEN YOUR PASTOR SAYS YOUR NOT BEING ABUSED IF YOU DON'T HAVE BRUISES

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 52 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today, Becky and I are going to be answering four listener questions. These questions are not recorded. We got them from the Flying Free Facebook page. I threw out a post asking for questions for the podcast, and I got tons of questions. We had to pick four of them, and we're going to answer those questions today. If you aren't familiar with the Flying Free Facebook page, go to Facebook and search for Flying Free on the top search bar. It is a public page, so be aware of that if you do decide to follow it. I'm not sure if you can follow it "stealthily." Do you know, Becky?

BECKY: I don't. I just know that if someone is looking to find what you are writing, don't post. Join the private group, because anyone can find your comments.

NATALIE: Right. So don't comment if you feel someone might be seeing your stuff. I think there is some confusion around that Facebook page. So you do need to be careful. But I do post stuff every day over there: articles (not just mine, but others I find on the web), quotes, memes, stuff like that. Once in a while I will ask a question and get feedback from people over there.

BECKY: It's one of my top pages.

NATALIE: Well, thank you. I was going to say it was one of my top pages, too. It's one of my top pages because I get to talk with people that are my kindred spirits, and that's who is over there. It's an amazing group, but you must be careful. If you want to be in the private group Becky just mentioned, I don't have a private Facebook group anymore. I do everything in a private community forum. It's on the locked membership site, and you'd have to join the Flying Free Sisterhood to be part of that. If you are interested in learning more about that group, go to joinflyingfree.com and you'll get all the details. It answers tons of questions. It gives you people who've been part of that group for a long time and what they think about it. There are even some video testimonies there because we got a bunch of us together last spring. We're going to do it again this year in North Carolina. I was able to interview some of those women in person, and it was super fun. That video is on that page. [This video is no longer available.] All the information you need is there as well as a link to apply. Let's get

started with our questions. Here's the first one.

QUESTION ONE: Since a lot of abuse involves financial abuse, lots of us are short of cash. What are some good low-cost ways a survivor can move forward in the healing process? For example, they don't have money for counselors, therapists, or even the Flying Free group.

BECKY: I would say that first it is priorities. I know we are all tight on cash. It doesn't matter what stage of life you are in, it just seems that it's expensive these days. I think I would ask myself the question, is there a resource that I'm already interested in? It would be the Flying Free group for me. So I need so much a month. Then I would go look at my budget and think, "I can do one of two things. I can either increase income, or I can decrease an expense." That's the decision making process. There are tons of resources on Natalie's website and on other websites. I really like the Think Differently Academy. They only have one free thing on abuse, but there are little things here and there you can get as well. But to me, the most healing has come through friendships, and they are all online because it's hard to strike up a conversation at the Kroger and find out the woman behind you went through the same thing.

I was going to give a couple of examples. I work from home. My story was different than a lot of people. I had five kids in seven years. My husband refused to work. My abuser (not my current husband) refused to work. So I was left raising five kids, homeschooling them, having to pay the mortgage and put food on the table. I always worked from home, and I started simply. I do know coding and website design, but before that I was good at baking. So I created a simple flyer on the computer that said... because most women who are working today don't have time to make homemade goods. If you go to the store, a homemade cake is expensive! So I thought, "I will be the same price as the store." The margin on baking is incredible. I didn't need a lot of money. I had slimmed down my budget to bare bones. So I went to every door in my neighborhood and passed out my flyers and I started getting orders. This was back when we still had phones that had cords attached. But I'd get the order and the date. I couldn't decorate the cake, but I could bake cakes, pies, danishes, and tarts. If someone asked for something, I'd be honest and say, "I haven't done that before, but let me give it a try and I'll give you half price."

If you just need \$20 a month for some incredible life saving support or \$30 a month, that's one cake. It's literally one or two cakes. That's just a simple thing. Maybe you are crafty. Maybe you hate the kitchen but you love needlework. A lot of us women tend to be stay-at-home moms. My girls are younger and doing more modern stuff. I'm used to needlework. They are doing more looming and creating wall art with fabric. But it

doesn't take long to make \$20 or \$30 a month to put towards an online support group. If you are wanting a counselor or therapist that is one-on-one in person at \$40 to \$100 per hour, that will take a bit more effort.

I would also say when your friends or family ask what they can get you for your birthday or Christmas, say "Cash. I would like to go to therapy this year, so I would like cash so I can pay for that." Then you put it away in a cookie jar and go hire a therapist. There are lots of ways. You have to be creative. But we are creative. We have navigated abuse for years, and that causes us to become so skilled. We are creative. We can see things from different perspectives. We're go-getters. If you really want to move forward in the healing process, just start getting creative.

NATALIE: That was a beautiful answer. I have so many things I want to piggyback off that. I agree with you that friends are where it's at. It's such a bummer because when you go through this, especially when you start talking about separating (which I don't recommend that you do until you are ready to do that), your super religious friends will start to abandon you. A lot of us lost a lot of friends. You said most of your friends now are online. Most of my friends are online too. I have a couple of local friends.

BECKY: The friends that I have locally, except for one, do not understand. Part of healing, I think, is when somebody understands you. A person who has had an amazing husband her whole marriage, who has never wanted for anything, she's never had a financial struggle or sickness struggle, they just don't get it. You just don't get any support from those friends.

NATALIE: Right. I'm going to be talking about this... well, it will be done by the time this airs, but at the time of this recording, I am going to be speaking next weekend at Bob and Polly Hamp's Reclaim Conference. One of the things I will talk about at the very beginning is how to heal... imagine when you are unhealed you are like a ghost. You are a faded picture of yourself. Then when you are healed you are in full color. You are solid. You are multidimensional. You are living your life. You are who God created you to be. You are who God created you to be when you are a ghost, but you are not living in that reality when you are a ghost. You allowed yourself to get faded and you hid yourself.

The process of healing is coming to the place of becoming real. Part of becoming real is having someone mirror what you have experienced. So when Becky talks about needing someone who knows exactly what you have gone through, you need someone who can validate what you've gone through and say "Yes. I know exactly what you are talking about. I went through that myself." What you are talking about is real. You really

went through that. What so many victims have experienced is that they tell someone on the outside what has happened to them, and then are told exactly what their abuser told them: “No. That’s not a big deal. That’s not really real. That shouldn’t really hurt. That shouldn’t bother you.”

BECKY: “Why are you being so sensitive?”

NATALIE: Exactly. They take a big eraser and they erase you even more than you had already felt before. It is retraumatizing. It’s extremely traumatizing for anyone, child or adult, to go through that kind of thing.

BECKY: I do want to add a little addendum. A good therapist (and “good” is hard to find) does not necessarily have to have lived through it, but they have enough training and have seen enough clients to understand it.

NATALIE: Yeah. Although I haven’t really experienced that in my life.

BECKY: I had an amazing therapist. He actually experienced it, too.

NATALIE: As far as the therapy part of it, I was going to say... I’m sorry, but I keep doing shameless plugs for Flying Free Sisterhood. It is an amazing program. It provides both things. It provides the fellowship that you need, the validation that you need, but we also do coach in there. Normally I would charge \$125 for my coaching fee. Probably more, now, because I have so much more experience at it. I’m good at it! I’m good at coaching. When you find someone who is a good counselor or a good coach, you are willing to pay for that. But I don’t do any coaching anymore. I decided not to do any private coaching but to focus on the women in that group. So I do coach inside that group. It doesn’t cost anyone anything extra. You pay the \$29 per month fee and you can come to any or all the four coaching opportunities called “Office Hours.” There are four opportunities for that a month, as well as one live two-hour Q&A per month to ask questions and listen to other people get coached. Most of these women have the exact same questions that you have. It’s a wonderful resource.

BECKY: And it’s at their convenience, too, in many ways. For me, I live out in the country.

NATALIE: Exactly. You don’t have to drive somewhere.

BECKY: And it could be where something comes up and you are dealing with that emotion or trigger at that moment and you have a place to go get help immediately.

NATALIE: Yes. On the forum, there are lots of different topics. One of them is just a dump called "Rant and Raves." You can go on there and just rant and rave. There is absolutely zero judgment. I have never seen anyone judge anyone else. Never. But I do know people who have no wiggle room. They are barely making their mortgage payment. They are living on next to nothing.

A couple of suggestions I would have for that. First, as Becky said, look to see if there is any way you can raise your income. I'll throw out some ideas of jobs that pay better than some office jobs or retail jobs. Waitressing or serving in restaurants pays really well, and you can usually get a job right away because... nicer restaurants are hard to get work at because most of those servers are career servers. You could be a career server. But my daughter, right out of the gate from high school, got a serving job, and she makes money hand over fist in a local mom-and-pop pie shop. Another idea is house cleaning. I know some people might think, "I'm not going to go clean houses," but it makes good money.

BECKY: Very good.

NATALIE: If you put out flyers in wealthy neighborhoods in your area, even if you must drive a little bit... I live in a pretty nice, middle-class area in Rosemount, Minnesota. But there are a lot of nice apartment buildings. I have a friend who lives in an apartment, a single mom, who is trying to make ends meet. If I lived in an apartment, I would go to all the wealthy areas around me and drop off flyers and say, "I can house clean for you. Here are my prices." I'd do that when my kids were in school. Again, you can make good money, \$50 an hour, doing house cleaning.

BECKY: Right. That was my first job. To piggyback on that, I worked and cleaned offices at night. Every situation is different. You might have your kids at night, sometimes you might not. But they had a lot of turnover. So I said, "Can I work on these specific days and times?" I had to drive to the big city and cleaned offices. I made about \$40 - \$50 an hour, though. I only did it a couple of hours every day, but it was great pay. I think it just takes creativity to really look. There are even apps now. My brother babysat dogs through an app. Three or four people would come over in the morning and drop their dogs off. He already had a couple dogs of his own. He had a big fence. He was making money hand over fist just babysitting dogs.

NATALIE: Or walking dogs. You could have a dog walking business. You could babysit a couple of kids in your home.

BECKY: You can use the internet for that at care.com. (Not to put in a plug for them.)

But that's where we found someone to help us with our dog. I've gone there to help us do a thorough house cleaning before a wedding. So lots of ideas.

NATALIE: Then I was going to say, Becky started a business in her home baking. I started a little business in my home making soap. That business became a thriving business that made me great money over the course of ten years. Here's the thing. It starts in increments. It doesn't start big. You can't just jump in and have this great home business. It starts small. You work your butt off and then it grows. I started without taking any classes on how to make soap. I did everything on the internet. Everything I learned was from Google and YouTube videos. I started with just little dinky equipment and just small little loaves. I started by giving my soap away. Then I started selling it for small amounts of money just to get people hooked on it. Then I put the money I made back into the business, so I didn't really make any money for about a year and a half. I took everything I made and bought better equipment and made bigger loaves. I got better and better at it until soon I had a soap business. You can look it up online. I sold that business. It belongs to someone else now, but it's called Apple Valley Natural Soap. It's almost thirteen years old, and it's been going strong.

BECKY: That's awesome! You know, one year the kids wanted to go to Christian camp in the summer. I didn't have two pennies to rub together so I went to the Walmart manager. I said, "My kids want to go to camp and I don't have the money. Do you mind if I set up a table and sell baked goods just for one morning?" We lived out in, not the sticks, but a suburb that was far from the main city. He said, "Sure." I cooked for three days. We made \$1,500 in four hours.

NATALIE: Wow! That is amazing!

BECKY: I know. The kids helped me, and they understood that if we want to do something special, we have to give a little extra work towards that. So it was good for all of us.

NATALIE: That is a great story. We're almost done with this podcast episode, and we've only done one question. So I think we will only get to two questions. Is there one that you really want to talk about?

BECKY: I do.

QUESTION TWO: When I went to my church for help in my emotionally abusive, abandoned marriage, my pastor said that there are always two sides to every story, that he couldn't choose sides, that we are all sinners, and that it is against the Bible for

a woman to separate from her husband. He basically said that unless I had marks on my body to prove abuse, there is no way for him to know how best to advise me. How would you, in the moment of conversation, have responded? How should I have responded?

BECKY: That is a great, in-depth question. I wanted to really pinpoint a few things. First, obviously, what we know now we did not know back then. So I will say what I would have done, but I don't know that I would have done it in the moment because I was still in the cloud of abuse. I would never go to a pastor. I don't mean that all pastors are bad. What I mean is that they are not trained. They don't understand it.

Let me give you an example of what I imagined when I read this. I have a problem with my car. It's the carburetor. (Not that I know what that is, but let's say that it is.) I'm not going to the Jiffy Lube and I'm not going to the local mechanic shop. I'm going to the car wash. I'm going to the car wash and I'm going to expect them to fix my carburetor. That is exactly what it is when you are going to a pastor. There are a few, and they are rare, pastors who have taken strides to understand the responsibilities that are expected of a pastor and have gotten trained in these areas. But those are like one in a million. So first, that isn't who you should be talking to.

The second thing I read in the question is the assumption that for some reason that pastor has power over you. If I come to Natalie, who is very skilled and trained in emotional abuse, and I ask her a question, none of us would think, "She has the power to tell me exactly what to do and I have to obey it." We would come knowing we are equals. But Natalie has more experience. She is wiser, she understands, she sees it from different perspectives. I'm coming to her to gather information so I can make an informed decision. It seems to me that we women think that somehow pastors and churches have this power to give us permission. When you are talking to your pastor next time, I want you to mentally think, "I am equal to him. I'm only asking him because he's more well-versed. He has more knowledge." What you will find is that you will instantly think, "Wait a minute. No, he's not! He has no idea about anything I'm talking about." So why would you go ask him? Why go to the car wash?

NATALIE: Just the fact that they would say, "You don't have marks on your body, so therefore you are not being abused," that just goes against... he doesn't even know the beginning of what abuse actually is, so how can he possibly help you with it?

BECKY: And with all that has been in the news in the last four years, whether it is MeToo or Harvey Weinstein or any of that stuff, does he not have a television? Does he not understand that there's coercion? You'd have to literally be living under a rock not

to know in this day and age that abuse is not physically hitting.

NATALIE: I work with women of faith who have experienced emotional and spiritual abuse. That's where all my research is. That's where all my work is. I can tell you that emotional abuse is present in every other kind of abuse. It is present in sexual abuse. It's present in physical abuse. It's present in financial abuse. You will always find spiritual abuse wherever anyone is using religion. This actually answers one of the other questions, so we won't bring up the question, but it touches on it. Wherever people are using God or the Bible or anything of a religious nature to manipulate or cause another human being to do something they want that person to do... in other words, "God says you should do this, so therefore you should do it," that's spiritual abuse. You can say or a pastor can say, "This is what God's word says..." but it turns into abuse when they say, "...so therefore you have to do it," because that is taking away the other person's power. You can't do that. God gives all people autonomy to make our own decisions.

BECKY: Exactly. I was going to say, if I had to respond, here is my snarky response.

NATALIE: Oh, good!

BECKY: Essentially, when he is saying he has to listen to two sides to every story, I would have snarkily said, "Do you say that to rape victims, too?" Then I would just mic drop. Walk away. Now, that's me being snarky and I try not to do that. But to be honest, what I would have said is, "I don't think you understand what is happening in my home. I think it takes a professional who understands what is going on. Though I appreciate your advice and I appreciate that you probably have the best intentions, this is outside your wheelhouse. So I'm going to go and get professional help. I'm going to make decisions that are best for me and my children. I hope you can respect and support that."

The response of the pastor at that point is going to tell you if you need to just get out of Dodge because most of the time, men who believe that women are subservient (and one of the things he's saying is that he does believe that women are second and that you have no autonomy) can't handle it. So they are going to get angry. They are going to cause you other problems. I've seen it time and time again. Pastors and men who have this belief system cannot handle a woman standing up and showing her autonomy. When you show up and you are no longer opaque like Natalie was describing, you are full-color and you are telling them what you are going to do and telling them where they are in your life and they aren't telling you that, that's when you will know if it is someone that you can really trust or if it is a situation where you need to get out of

Dodge.

NATALIE: Because a true, real man who is also a real person and like Jesus Christ, in full-color, multi-dimensional, and no longer in his own shame, is going to embrace and love you in full color. Whether it is your pastor, your husband, your neighbor, they love all human beings in their full color. It doesn't matter if you have a penis or not. It doesn't matter how old you are. It doesn't matter what your social status is, what your financial status is, what color you are, what country you come from. They will embrace other human beings in their full color. That is when you know you are safe.

BECKY: Because they think, at the end of the day, that we are all equal and that they are no better. So a man who says, "I have to hear both sides of the story, and it's against the Bible for a woman to separate," (and I could go on and on about how this man has probably never actually read or studied the Bible in any way, shape, or form because it is such a surface reading) that man believes that he has the right to power over you. And that is not Jesus.

NATALIE: That's right. This isn't something I would say to that pastor, but I think we all need to understand (well, I guess you could say this) that there are two sides to every story. But when you have an abusive situation, you could say this: "You're right. There are two sides. In an abusive relationship, one side says, 'I'm being hurt. This person is hurting me in different ways.' The other side, his story says 'No. That's not true.' Those are the two sides. So you must decide which story you are going to believe because they are opposites. They cannot both be true at the same time." That is what I think some pastors think. They think we can put those two things together and we can validate the woman: "Yeah, I know you are really hurting," and we can validate the man: "Yeah, you probably didn't mean it." But here is how they put it together: "You, sir, didn't really mean to hurt her, but you, ma'am, are taking it too far and are a little too sensitive and you need to calm down."

BECKY: When you look at Christian counseling education materials and books, they come in with two flawed ideas. One is that there is never a victim and a perpetrator. Both are wrong no matter what. Both people are sinners, so therefore they are both wrong. The second thing... honestly, I just forgot it. That would be the most important thing. I've used the "So a rape victim is wrong," a lot because that is the one that stops people in their tracks when they say, "There's two sides to every story," or "Both people are always wrong." Then their response is usually, "You are talking about someone perpetrating a violent act on someone else." I'd say, "Yeah, it's called abuse. It is what I experienced in my marriage. It wasn't physical all the time, but it was violating me internally."

NATALIE: Anytime that anyone is being erased on a regular basis, that is definitely a violent violation because being erased is... in the Bible, Jesus said, "If you hate someone, you are murdering them in your heart." That's what it is. They are murdering you in a way that nobody else can see. Even the victim may not be fully aware that they are slowly dying. It affects their psyche and their emotions. It affects their spiritual life. But it also affects them physically. That's a whole topic for another time, the physical ramifications of emotional abuse. Anyway, this was a great episode. Becky, I always love talking with you, and I'm super glad that we got to talk just the two of us. Thank you so much for being on the Flying Free Podcast, and we will do it again.

BECKY: Thank you. I enjoyed it.

NATALIE: And to the rest of you, thanks for listening. Until next time, fly free!