

ARE WE "TEARING DOWN OUR HOUSE" WHEN WE SET HEALTHY BOUNDARIES?

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 60 of the Flying Free Podcast! Today I have with me Rachel and Rebecca, and no, it is not the Rachel and Rebecca of the Bible. These are modern day women of God. Welcome, Rachel and Rebecca. You guys have heard them before if you have listened to this podcast in the past. It's Rachel and Rebecca. We know them. Hello!

RACHEL: Hi.

REBECCA: Hello.

NATALIE: We are going to answer two listener questions today. The first one has been recorded, and we're going to listen to that right now.

CALLER 1: Thank you for taking my question. I intend to separate soon, and I do not know how to answer the questions that I'm sure many people are going to have. I don't feel like they need any explanation, necessarily, but there are going to be people at work and many others that will ask, and I'm not sure how to respond. Yes, he is abusive, but there are people who don't need to know that. I don't want to begin mud-slinging, and that will begin mud-slinging back. I do expect a tidal wave of people asking questions, though. My husband is a very well-respected elder, and I know it's going to bring complications. So I was curious what feedback you would give me on that.

NATALIE: Okay Rachel and Rebecca, what would you guys say to this woman? She doesn't want to mud-sling. It sounds like she really wants there to be peace. So what advice would you give her?

RACHEL: I think her instincts are good. She's anticipating that there is going to be all these questions, and maybe she's thinking to herself, "There is so much to this." We all know that. There is so much that you could say, and we know that it's not necessarily wise even though it may be a little bit cathartic (at least, just speaking from my own experience). But it's so hard to explain to people who don't know or who haven't educated themselves about emotional abuse. I think it's wise to be thinking these things through. I think a practical idea that you could take is before you separate, sit

down and write essentially a two-sentence elevator speech. "My husband has patterns of behavior that have persisted throughout the course of our marriage that he is not willing to deal with and that I can no longer shoulder for him. That is why we are separated."

NATALIE: I love that.

REBECCA: That's a great response.

NATALIE: Yeah.

RACHEL: Just say it over and over again, and if people don't understand, depending on your relationship with them, maybe you could go a little deeper, or not. It's not any of their business. But having that, which you can rely on, that doesn't take any brain space and is an automatic go-to, is really going to help anyone who is trying to figure out what to say when the questions come or people look at you curiously and you know that they want to inquire about what is going on with you.

NATALIE: Also, you can always say to people if they want to keep pursuing... Most people, when you say what you just said, they are going to back off. But you will get a few that will keep pursuing. All you have to do is say, "I'm really just not comfortable talking about that." That's all you have to say, and they will back off at that point. If they start accusing you or saying, "Well, you are this," or "You are that," you can say, "Well, everyone is entitled to their own opinion. But it's my life. I have to live it. I'm the one with the experience in this relationship." (I would get snarky. I'd say, "If you want to try him out, feel free! But I'm done!")

RACHEL: I don't recommend it!

NATALIE: Exactly!

REBECCA: You know, I shared way too much.

RACHEL: Yeah, me too.

NATALIE: Yeah, me too.

REBECCA: I thought, beyond the cathartic, it was like, "Surely if I just explain it, then..."

RACHEL: "...then they will understand." The need to have people understand is so deep.

"If only they would validate me and tell me that, 'Oh man. Your marriage is horrible. I'm so glad you're out.' That would make everything okay."

REBECCA: Right, but when you start dropping words like "cluster B" or "narcissist," you lose them really fast.

RACHEL: Oh, for sure.

REBECCA: Because you have spent all this time researching what your husband is, and if you're like me you've tried to fix it, too. You want that validation. But I came off looking like the crazy one.

NATALIE: Yeah, me too.

REBECCA: Because the further I explained the further I dug myself a hole that I couldn't get out of. So nowadays, obviously it doesn't come up as much because it is five to six years gone. Something I say in the back of my mind is, "Okay, what does this person..." because we all have different levels of relationships and some people really do care. I love Rachel's response, but they might also go one step further and say, "What do you mean patterns of behavior? What patterns are you talking about?" I would think about that person and ask myself, "Do they have the ability to make an impact or a difference here?" Most often it is "no." Because it is just you and your partner or ex who can change anything, right? Or maybe a counselor or a lawyer or a judge. Those are the only kind of people who can take action.

At that point you think it is wasted breath. As much as they might love you and you might love them, if they don't understand this issue it is just going to cause problems to try to help them understand it if they are not open to it. You will get a feeling immediately. You will totally understand when you start talking to someone if they really want to understand. My best friend knew something was wrong because she had observed us for twenty years, but she didn't know exactly because she wasn't in my home. When I started explaining to her she said, "That totally makes sense." For people who really do love you and are really for you, they are going to understand. You will see the light bulbs go off in their eyes, and that's where you draw your strength and your affirmation from.

RACHEL: That is so true, Rebecca. One thing a counselor just said to me recently (and it was so freeing), she said that she has walked with me for three years now. There are certain aspects of my story that were so difficult to wrap your mind around from the beginning. She said to me that she saw me from the beginning. She believed me and

what I was saying. People who truly love you and who are in it without an ulterior motive are going to see if they want to, if they can handle it. If they can't, you are probably better off without them, and that's hard.

REBECCA: Yeah. Unfortunately, I would say the majority of the Christian community tend to insert themselves only for the purpose of trying to fix it with their Biblical interpretations. I agree, Rachel. It is the people who have been there since the beginning.

RACHEL: And are willing to see. Some people are just not. They cannot get past whatever they think about what the Bible says and they aren't willing to examine it. That's just the way they are. There's one other thing I want to say. This is something I have come to understand. Anytime that someone announces that they're getting divorced, whatever the circumstances may be, people around them get into a period of grief because no one wants to see that there is a marriage that wasn't what they thought it was. I just experienced this in the past couple of weeks where a couple I know is getting divorced. I have no idea what the circumstances are. It's not any of my business. But there is that sadness there. I think some people don't know that they are sad. They aren't able to handle that grief, so instead they just want to meddle and try to fix it even though it is way beyond that and you've been doing that for years and years and years. So be prepared for that grief response and understand what it is and what it looks like. It's not about you: it's about them and their own emotions. It's understandable.

REBECCA: They are trying to work out their issues on you.

RACHEL: Exactly, and that's not okay, but it is understandable. I think we all have a natural response to do that because life is hard, and marriages are not fairy tales even if there is no emotional abuse.

NATALIE: In the same vein, one of the girls on one of the Facebook groups that I am a part of, a woman said, "A friend asked me if I feel believed. Yes, I feel believed, but I am absolutely desperate to find a Christian in my church that believes my healing is more important than saving my marriage." So this person felt like people were believing that her marriage was dysfunctional, but they weren't validating her decision to end it. My response to that was, "What if that never happens? What if nobody ever gave you their permission to get divorced or to get separated or whatever you decide to do? But what if you could get yourself to that place where you valued your own opinion, your own experience, and your own perspective more than you value the support and agreement of others?"

That is the opportunity that we all have. That's going from emotional childhood or thinking like a child to thinking like an adult. I lived a life and I had an experience and I'm responsible for making decisions for the person that I am. Nobody has to agree with me. Nobody has to validate that. Nobody has to support me in that. But I support myself in that because I am an adult. That is what I do. Then I made the point that we live in our heads, so the things that we are thinking about, that is the most important space to manage: what is going on between our two ears. If we don't want to live in that desperate feeling for the rest of our lives, we must change the way that we are thinking about the situation. Instead of giving all this power to everybody else, we need to take that power back for ourselves. That's when you rise up. Fascinatingly, when you do that and you become more confident in who you are and your decisions, some people will leave you. They will say, "You can't be like that! You're supposed to be an emotional child for the rest of your life because I am. Therefore, you have to be." But you will start to gravitate towards and attract other emotional adults, and you are going to find out that your life becomes much more mature, richer, and a safer space to be in.

REBECCA: You're so right, Natalie. I love the word "responsibility." This word is just in my head all the time because I think at the end of the day much of what all of us went through, much of what women are going through, always comes back to that word "responsibility." I think we spend years being responsible for the wrong things, and we allow our responsibility for ourselves to be handed over to an abusive husband, an abusive church, or other people. When we take it back on ourselves and we clearly draw the lines and say, "You know what, I'm responsible for this and he's responsible for that," things clarify so intensely.

RACHEL: Yes.

NATALIE: They really do. Let's carry that into the next question, because I think we can expound on that a little more. The second question is this. She says, "My question is in regard to Proverbs 14:1 that says, 'The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.'" She goes on to say, "This verse was shared with me at one point in a conversation with an older woman who knows what's been going on in my marriage. Lately, the verse comes back to my mind and triggers anxiety in me that I am somehow tearing my marriage, my family, and my home down through my sin or my decision to stand up to my husband's oppressive behavior. So basically, my question is how do you view the wife's responsibility as far as her influence in her husband's life?"

REBECCA: I love this question because there is just a huge background to what she is saying. Have y'all ever watched the movie from World War II? I'm going to go off on a

tangent for a second. It's about the enigma decoding machine.

RACHEL: Yes.

NATALIE: Is that with Cumberbatch?

REBECCA: Yes. What I kept thinking this morning (again, this word "responsibility" is on my mind) is that the way she is reading the scriptures, as we all did, is like trying to figure out the enigma decoding machine instead of the simplicity of the Gospel. She is sitting there thinking, "What is my responsibility to create a result?" I think if she would step back and say, "Okay, wait a minute. What does the word 'responsibility' even mean?" You have two words there. You have the ability to respond. That means to take action. You have control in the predicament. I always think of first responders, too. If there is a burning building, a fire fighter has responsibility because he is able to respond to that situation. He has the control. So she must come to her home and first decide what is her responsibility. She didn't give specifics of what her husband was doing, but I think we can all imagine the emotional abuse and all that is there and this feeling of responsibility. That feeling comes from an inappropriate theology of Christianity.

RACHEL: Yes.

REBECCA: I want to give an example because an example is so much easier to understand. My husband does not have a gallbladder, and because of that he does not eat pork. As a woman, what is my responsibility to build my home? Is it to make sure that he never eats pork? No. Because why? I don't have the ability to respond to every situation. He can go out to lunch and eat pork. That's me babysitting him. He's a grown adult. He needs to not eat pork or else he's going to have a problem. But my responsibility at home as it intersects with his issue is to not prepare pork for dinner. My responsibility as it intersects with his problem is that I provide the meals. I cook the dinners. If I were to cook a bunch of pork, that is obviously me tearing my house down. I know this is the simplest example. It has none of the components of emotional abuse.

RACHEL: It's good, though.

NATALIE: It is.

REBECCA: But instead, my responsibility is very simple. First, it is something I can completely control. I can decide what to make for dinner and I can cook it. By not making pork, I am ensuring the health of my loved one. Here's the thing. What we live

in as women in these abusive homes is that the husband goes to lunch and eats a plate of pork and then comes home and blames you. Then you are saying, "I've plucked down my house with my own hands." But you haven't. He has. When you can ask the question, "What is the problem, and where does my responsibility intersect with that problem?"

Here's what I came to in my life. I was in an abusive marriage. I was plucking it down because I allowed it. But as a wise woman, I began to build my home when I divorced. Now that's not to say that everyone's solution is divorce, but mine was. That is so counterintuitive to the way we go to our enigma coding machine called "Christianity" these days where it should just be a simple Gospel. I shouldn't be plagued with the feeling that I'm not doing my part. The two questions I ask are, "What is the problem?" "Where does my responsibility intersect?" The third question I ask is, "Is this a reasonable person?" When you read the Scripture, you must be careful how you read it when you are dealing with an unreasonable/irresponsible person.

NATALIE: A fool.

REBECCA: Yes, absolutely.

NATALIE: Exactly. There are different responses to people like that depending upon the situation. That requires not black and white rules that are rigid, but the Bible says that it requires wisdom. In Proverbs it says, on the one hand, to answer a fool according to his folly, and on the other hand it says to not answer a fool according to his folly lest you become like him. That is because in different situations you need to apply wisdom. That's where I think women run into a lot of problems with trying to figure things out. Like you said, the enigma code. "What do I do? Where is the exact black and white rule that will tell me exactly what to do?"

The Holy Spirit lives inside of us. The Holy Spirit will give us wisdom for our situation. We don't get our wisdom from other people. We get our mail from God. He's the one who tells us what to do in our given situation depending on our children, where their needs are, how old they are, what our finances are like, what our husband is actually doing in the home, what we are actually able to do. Some women have the ability to do more depending on the abuse level than other women do.

REBECCA: I completely agree with you Natalie, but I am going to say that twenty years ago, fifteen years ago, ten years ago, I would not even have understood what the Holy Spirit was saying because my theology was the enigma machine. It was changing. Remember, the code changed every single day. They had 24 hours to figure it out, and

there were so many different possible responses. My marriage was so confusing that I could not figure out... I remember saying one time, "I feel led by God, I feel convicted, to do such-and-such." Looking back, there was no conviction there. There were these emotional feelings tied up with bad theology. God works with us as whole beings, so we have our instruments of knowledge, our brains, and the capacity of what we know. But if we are believing a wrong thing, it is hard for the Holy Spirit to come in. What I thought the Holy Spirit was saying, what He really was saying, I thought was my sinful flesh.

NATALIE: Yep.

REBECCA: I remember reading the book "Boundaries" for the first time and I couldn't understand it because I was so messed up with bad theology and bad thinking. I was so busy taking on the responsibility of everyone that it took seven reads over ten years to finally get "Boundaries".

NATALIE: It's because if you've been brainwashed... let's pretend you've been brainwashed from the time you were a child to believe that if you wore the color red that you were blaspheming God because Jesus shed His blood for us. Just pretend that's one of them. Then you would grow up and even when you heard the idea that it wasn't true, if you wore red you would still have this conscience-driven response that, "I shouldn't be doing this. I feel so guilty. I'm rebelling," because of how you have been brainwashed with that idea. That's what I believe, that a lot of Christian women have been brainwashed with these false ideas about what these verses are saying, and that's why they feel this conviction, this fear, and this guilt. It's completely false. It's not rooted in reality. The opportunity is there to rewire their brains, to find out what the Bible really does say about these different things, and then to live that out in a healthy, positive way that brings you emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

REBECCA: Amen.

RACHEL: Yes. To build on what you just said, our consciences can become damaged. I think all of us have had damaged consciences. That is not the Holy Spirit. That is not the work of the Holy Spirit. That is the work of our circumstances and the sin that we are experiencing. There was one verse in 1 John that talks about how God, even if our conscience convicts us unfairly (I am paraphrasing here), that God sees our motivations. That verse was so freeing for me because I had such a distorted view of myself and my ex-husband. It just was so confusing, and you must basically re-work your understanding of who God is. If you are feeling heaviness or if you are feeling a burdensome yoke, that is not Jesus. Jesus came to set us free and He bears our burdens. He does not put more on us. It feels so wrong because we've been told that

we are responsible for everything. But it's just not true. Come to the freedom of the true Gospel. It is wonderful here.

REBECCA: I love that analogy of the color red. If the Holy Spirit is coming to you and saying, "You should wear the red dress today," you really think that is your flesh. So if you are that messed up, where do you start? You're not messed up. You have been used. God wants to use you now instead of letting men use you. I say "men" in the sense of whether it is the church or your husband. I would say in my experience, you are right, Rachel. The Lord knew I wanted to do the right thing. It took years. I was very brainwashed as a child and then doubly as an adult married to an abuser in an abusive church. It took years, but I think the Lord started slowly peeling back the layers one at a time. I loved it in one sense because it was all these new epiphanies. Like, "Wow! God really doesn't say that. That's not my responsibility and I'm not going to go to hell for that."

Going back to that gal's question, my ex-husband versus my new husband, my new husband is so reasonable. Let's say it's not a problem of eating pork, but I know right now he is dealing with an issue at work that really gets him down. When he comes in and I can see the frustration on his face, I question myself with, "What is my responsibility? Where does my responsibility intersect with this problem?" There is absolutely nothing I can do about this problem. This is his. It is at his work. But what I can do is affirm him and then place that responsibility back on him. I may say, "That is so not right what they are doing. But I know you are smart and I know you are going to make the right decision in correcting this." Now with an abuser I could not say that.

NATALIE: Because they probably wouldn't be able to do that.

REBECCA: Exactly, and they are probably lying to you about their workplace problem anyway.

NATALIE: Exactly. They are probably the problem that other people are going home and complaining about.

REBECCA: Exactly. I don't know about you girls, but towards the end of my marriage is when all this stuff started coming out and I started thinking better. I stopped the exchanges. If he was upset, I would do an evaluation and say, "Is it something I have done? If it is something I have done then I do have a responsibility there, but if it's not something I've done, if it's not something where my responsibility intersects with his problems, I walk away from it. I would like to say loving and kind things and like to affirm him and give him back responsibility, but he's a fool. He's not going to take it." So

for me, I just would walk away and say, "I'm sorry to hear that."

RACHEL: I found a verse and I just want to share it as a word of encouragement. From the Apostle John in 1 John 3:18: "Little children, we must not love with word or speech but with truth and action. This is how we know we belong to the truth and will convince our conscience in His presence, even if our conscience condemns us, that God is greater than our conscience, and He knows all things."

NATALIE: I love that.

REBECCA: That is awesome.

NATALIE: We are going to close with another verse. This one is from Galatians 5:1 and it says, "So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law." I think that applies here.

RACHEL: Yes.

REBECCA: Absolutely.

NATALIE: I want to close. First, thank you, Rachel and Rebecca, for being willing to come on the podcast here with me. I want to say to those of you who are listening, this podcast costs money to produce. We have an editor of the final episode. I pay \$35 for that. Then we pay a woman, a single mom, to do the transcriptions. They are usually between \$30 and \$40 for those. Then we pay to host the podcast on Transistor, and there are other small costs to it. What I want you to know is that once in a while, someone will sponsor the podcast. [Sponsorship is no longer available.] But for the most part, the episodes that you are listening to are sponsored by the Flying Free Sisterhood Group, which is an education and support community that offers courses, expert workshops, live coaching, and a lot more for women of faith who are seeking hope and healing from emotional and/or spiritual abuse in either their relationships or their communities. You can find out more about this group at joinflyingfree.com.

I will say in relation to this particular episode that there are three courses of the twelve core courses you would take in that group that speak to the things we talked about today. One is about healing your relationship with God. One is about dealing with and recovering from spiritual abuse from religious communities. The other one is called "Bible Flippers" because we take ten common Bible verses that are used as weapons against women and we flip them on their head to find out what they actually say. Amazingly enough (and this is such a satanic tactic), Satan takes the Word of God that

communicates hope and freedom for people and he gets people to believe the opposite about what those verses are actually communicating. It's absolutely crazy, and I believe it needs to be flipped. That is why the course is called "Bible Flippers." Again, you can find out more about this group. You can always apply at joinflyingfree.com. Thank you so much for listening. Until next time, fly free!