

IS IT REBELLIOUS FOR CHRISTIAN WOMEN TO SAY NO?

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 71 of the Flying Free Podcast! This episode is sponsored by the private Flying Free Sisterhood community, a group made up of hundreds of women like yourself who are getting education and support and healing from their dysfunctional relationships. You can learn more about this group and apply today at joinflyingfree.com.

Let's dive into our topic for today. I want to talk about the difficulty so many Christian women have in saying a two letter word. N.O. To say "no" is to be mean and selfish. Let me read a verse that might be familiar to you.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:1-2)

How many times have we heard these verses quoted when somebody wants us to serve in some way? "Come make my church or ministry big and great by becoming a living sacrifice! This is your spiritual worship! If you don't, you haven't been sufficiently renewed in your mind, and you'll need to come to our '12 Step Discipleship' program so we can indoctrinate you with our agenda for your life."

I'm sort of exaggerating, but it can feel like that sometimes. Right? You maybe tried saying "no" a time or two. You maybe tried saying, "No thanks, I've got some other things God wants me to be doing these days." And when you said "no," did you get kick-back from the person or group of people who asked?

Or maybe you said "no" and you got kick-back from YOUR OWN BRAIN. When we serve because we've been called by God to do it, we will know it is right. You feel it in your guts. You do it with joy that just kind of automatically bubbles up. The work has deep meaning to you. You don't need outside motivation because it is something that you are compelled to do.

When God says He loves a cheerful giver, He is saying it gives Him pleasure to see His child giving out of the joyful bubbling over of that child's heart. That is a beautiful thing.

On the other hand, it is not such a beautiful thing to see a child serve begrudgingly or resentfully because they "have to." How many times do we serve because we feel obligated because we know our brain is going to tell us things that make us feel guilty if we don't?

And how many times were we supposed to actually say "no" to something, but we said "yes" out of fear?

I think women in particular are susceptible (please note that word) to serving in some capacity out of a sense of obligation rather than true calling. Not because women are naturally wired that way, but because women are conditioned to think that way in our culture and in our religious culture as well.

Because think about it: how many men are easily guilt-manipulated into doing something? I mean, some are. But I think men in our culture are viewed as already contributing important things while women are raising the children and doing home management while also, many of them, holding down jobs of their own.

When a man says "no" in the church, who gives them a hard time about it? You know, generally speaking? We tend to assume the man has other, more important things to do. But a woman? What would they be doing that could be more important than what somebody else in authority over them thinks they ought to be doing?

So we've got pressure to say "yes" coming from within ourselves and also coming externally. How do we deal with that? Because when we say "yes" to something, we have to say "no" to something else. There is ALWAYS an exchange. And often we say "yes" to the thing that others will see and notice and give kudos for, while we then have to say "no" to the things we feel deeply inside we are actually called to do even though nobody may know that we are doing them.

God has given responsibilities to the human race in general and to individuals specifically. He places you in control of some things. You are responsible regardless of your gender. Remember the parable about the talents? Each person gets to steward what God gives to them. Whether you take control of what God gives to you or you give up your control, you are responsible. Taking responsibility is a mark of adulthood. There are a lot of people running around in adult bodies who have a hard time practicing this adult skill. They are still giving up their own responsibility and letting

someone else live their life for them. Why? Because they want to. Or because someone told them they had to. Or because they think that's what God says. Or because they are so full of shame that they've cut off the ability to see where they have gone sideways. It doesn't really matter WHY they do it. The issue is that their inability to take responsibility for their life is destroying their life.

Where are your property lines? Do you let naughty people come traipsing through your home at will, or do you lock your door at night to keep them out? You are the steward of your property. You can grow flowers or you can let the weeds take over. Your neighbor has no right to come over and plant flowers if you've chosen to let the flower beds rot. Your neighbor understands that while he may not like your ugly yard, it is yours. Not his. He can plant all the flowers he wants in his yard, but you get to control yours. We've all seen this play out in some neighborhoods.

We would all be shocked if someone came over to our home, barged in, and started cleaning up the dishes saying, "Your kitchen is a pigsty from Hades. I'll take care of this for you." Likewise, we would be annoyed if the same person got in our faces and said, "I need you to clean up MY kitchen. This is God's will for you."

Who is in control of your life? The simple answer is God, with you being the steward of what He gives you to steward. Not God and your pastor or God and your husband or God and your children or God and your mother-in-law.

If you are an adult, He is going to hold you and you alone responsible for your choices, your time, your body, your gifts, your tongue, your emotional health, and your opportunities. This is part of growing up. If you think your husband or your father or your pastor is responsible for you as an adult woman, you are wrong. And we can't blame them for our choices as adult women.

If you feel like your life is out of control, it is probably because you have not taken ownership of it. You've abdicated that responsibility to those around you. I know, first hand, what this is all about. It was very difficult for me to grow up. I tended to just let all my "mommies and daddies" make the stewardship decisions for me. And then I would get angry because the things in "my yard" were out of control and I felt powerless. I couldn't do anything unless I had everyone else's permission. It was a yucky way to live. AND you know what else? I would get angry inside when I couldn't control other people. See how messed up this is? I abdicated responsibility for myself, yet I took responsibility for others and tried to control them. If we all simply exercised SELF-control (a fruit that demonstrates the Holy Spirit is controlling our lives, by the way), our relationships would be much healthier, and so would we.

We are responsible to say “no” to what doesn’t align with our values and priorities and “yes” to what does. And it may be different in different seasons of our lives. And what may be right for one woman today may actually be the wrong thing for someone else, so we need to avoid getting all judgmental. A friend once shared with me that after a few weeks of staying home from church with her baby for various reasons, someone sent her a letter chiding her for her absence. That person was taking responsibility FOR my friend. But it wasn’t that person’s responsibility to take. It would not have been wrong for someone to give my friend a call and ask her how she was doing. That is being responsible TO my friend. See the difference? We are responsible FOR ourselves, and we are responsible TO other people. This is real, unselfish love.

On the other hand, when we give everything away (all our rights, our responsibilities, our gifts, our resources), we are saying, in essence, “I will not be responsible for these things God gave to me. I will give this responsibility to whoever else will have it.” If we let everyone come into our home and do whatever they please, we are no longer wisely stewarding anything. We’re just giving it away. If everyone is living in your home, how will you be able to decide, for example, to host a missionary family on furlough? With everyone else taking over, you would not be in control to make a different choice.

Letting other people run pell-mell over you is not loving at all. It’s not loving them, and it’s not loving you, and it’s not loving the people you ARE called to minister to in that season of your life.

When God does present you with a real opportunity that He has specially designed just for you, will you have the time and ability to grab hold of it and say a resounding “YES”? Being selective and purposed with your life will reap great rewards for you and for those around you.

God made us to be strong, noble queens. We are royal daughters of the King of Kings. Let us take our places by Him and make choices for our lives that are driven by His Word and His direction. And that won’t always be pleasing to those around us. Jesus had a lot of disapproving folks clucking their tongues behind His back. How did He handle that?

He knew who He was and He knew what His mission was. He was focused. He managed His brain space. When someone called Him the son of the devil, He didn’t suddenly have the thought, “What if I AM the son of the devil?” or “Why do they think that of me after all I’ve done for them?” or “Who do they think they are?” or “What did I do to make them say such horrible things?” It didn’t make Him feel guilty or angry or out of control. He felt unconditional love because He knew who He was. That doesn’t mean He hung

out with them. He respected their lack of love for Him and let them go their own way. He didn't chase after them or fawn after them or try to get them to believe Him. He just lived a consistent life of love and belief in Who He was and what His mission was. That's it.

What if we could live that way? Imagine being able to say "no" and having the other person call you a name or whisper behind your back and accuse you of being selfish, and all you felt was unconditional love and understanding for their anxiety and petulance? But you felt zero guilt or shame?

I think that's something we can achieve with a lot of hard work on how we think about ourselves and others and God.

I recently started a new program for women and it's called Flying Higher. In Flying Free we focus on recognizing and healing and responding to abuse. And it's been a game changer for hundreds of women. But Flying Higher is for women who are ready to kick it up a notch and focus on their own personal development outside of abuse. Right now we've got one hundred women going through the beta version of the program, but we'll be opening it up to the public in January 2021, so stay tuned! And if you haven't already gone through Flying Free, I highly encourage you to do so. I work closely with the women in that group every single week to help them get out of the pit they're stuck in because of emotional and spiritual abuse. You can learn more and apply today at joinflyingfree.com.

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