

## FIVE NEW WAYS FOR CHRISTIAN WIVES TO THINK ABOUT THEIR DESTRUCTIVE MARRIAGE

*Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of [Flyingfreenow.com](http://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 72 of the Flying Free Podcast! This is Natalie Hoffman, your host. Today it's just you and me, baby! We had an expert who was going to come in and do an interview with me, and he canceled at the last minute. So since I couldn't find anyone else at the last second, I decided to be the expert today. I thought it might be fun just to hang out and shoot the breeze with you. I have some ideas I want to share with you: the huge paradigm shifts that I had to go through when I was getting free of my destructive relationship. Not just my destructive marriage, but also all the destructive relationships I had in my life. That's one of the things women realize. They look around and survey the landscape of their lives and realize, "Oh my word! I've got a lot of dysfunctional people in my life."

If we are honest, we end up surviving in ways that are dysfunctional, too. We don't want to be that way. It completely goes against our deep values that we have, our core values inside ourselves, and is one of the reasons it is so disconcerting to live in relationships and have relationships with people who are not fully functioning from a place of emotional adulthood. Then we aren't fully functioning from a place of emotional adulthood either when we are in relationships like that.

One of the challenges in getting out is realizing what the patterns are that we see not just in our marriage relationship but in a lot of our other relationships as well. As we all know, we can't change anyone else. We need to accept people just the way they are. A lot of times we try to change them so that we will be happy and can maintain our relationship with them, but that is also not healthy. It is dysfunctional for us to try to change other people. It is just as dysfunctional for us to try to change them as it is for them to try to change us and make us into what they want us to be. We want to get out of that cycle and move into emotional adulthood. That means acknowledging and taking responsibility for ourselves and letting go of everybody else.

Here are some of the big paradigm shifts that I had to experience during my whole process, which took several years. This is not an overnight experience where a woman wakes up one day and knows everything and exactly what to do to get out. It is a long, drawn out, extremely painful process of self-awakening, awakening to your environment, awakening to how you think about things, and awakening to your entire

belief system (which is usually pretty screwed up by that time).

That is the first paradigm shift that I had to realize: that I was an adult and I wasn't a child but that I was still living as an emotional child. I realized that I could make my own decisions and I didn't need the validation or permission of anybody else. I didn't need the permission of my parents. I didn't need the permission of my husband. I didn't need my small group leader's permission or the leader of the ladies' committee at church. I didn't need my pastor's permission or the elders' permission. When I look back on my life back then, I was completely and totally living for the opinions of everybody else. I could not make my own decisions. That is a really debilitating place to be, and it completely abdicates our responsibility as adults when we live like that.

Sadly, instead of some people around us encouraging us to come into adulthood, they encourage us to stay as emotional children. We cannot do that. We don't want our children to grow up and be emotional children, do we? If they grow up to their early twenties and say, "I'm out of here! I'm going to go get my own apartment and live my own life," we should be happy and proud of them for doing that. That's what we want. We want them to be independent adults.

The second big paradigm shift came to me shortly after I read the book "The Verbally Abusive Relationship" by Patricia Evans. When I first read the title I thought, "I'm not in a verbally abusive relationship. My husband doesn't swear." In fact, I was the one swearing by that time. My husband wasn't. He didn't call me names. He didn't cuss me out. He didn't use those kinds of verbal tactics. But when I read that book, I found out there are so many more verbal tactics in a verbally abusive relationship than I ever dreamed. I also discovered that I was living with most of them. That's when I realized I really was in a verbally and emotionally abusive marriage. There was nothing I could do to stop it. It had been the same from before we were married, and it wasn't going to stop because that was who I was married to. He didn't have to change. He is who he is and he gets to make his own choices. He is also a big boy, and he gets to decide how he wants to show up in the relationship.

Once I realized that, I was able to see the patterns more clearly. It became less and less confusing for me. I did go from being confused to being mad, which is one of the phases you go through. I think many women get disturbed by that because they aren't the type of person who wants to be angry all the time, who likes to feel anger, or who is an angry person, contrary to what the people in your religious circle may say as soon as you stand up and say things aren't quite right. They will say, "You are so angry. You are so bitter." I had to get to the place where I could say, "Yeah, I am angry. Bitter, I don't know, but angry, for sure."

If you go through something like this and you aren't angry, you probably don't have a pulse. It's normal to be angry, it's okay to be angry, and it's healthy to be angry about this kind of thing. The great thing about anger is that it can give you the energy and motivation you need to make some changes in your life. When we live in denial and push everything down, we don't make the changes that we need to make. When we rise and say, "This is not right, and I will not do this or put up with this anymore," then we have the impetus to change. That is a good thing.

The third paradigm shift I experienced was when I realized I had spent my entire life throwing someone under the bus in every relationship I had ever been in, and that person was me! I wasn't nice to myself. I just started a group called Flying Higher. I've had the Flying Free group for three years now. But many of those women have been with me for a long, long time. I've done a lot of my own healing during that time. I've done a lot of changing. People have told me, "Natalie, you've changed a lot since you've started Flying Free." Thank goodness! I hope five years from now people will keep saying to me, "You just keep changing." I hope I keep changing until the day I die. We want to keep changing, we want to keep growing, we want to keep going further and deeper into our growth. I want to be able to pass on the things I'm learning since I've been out now for almost three years. I want to be able to pass on some of those things.

I describe when you are first waking up to abuse as if you are a burn victim in a burn unit. You are easily triggered, meaning if someone barely touches you, a burn victim will go through the roof in pain. Yet, they will not be there for their whole lives. They will eventually heal, get out of that hospital bed, and head to the physical therapy room. After that, they will be able to go to the gym and be able to work out. Some may go on to become a marathon runner or weightlifter and do so much more.

When I think about my new group called Flying Higher... It is only available to the beta members right now. We're developing it together. They are my guinea pigs. [Flying Higher is now available to the public! Find out more at [www.joinflyinghigher.com](http://www.joinflyinghigher.com)] We are in the workout room. No longer are we worrying about triggers. We've moved to the place where we are going to do some serious self-development. It will be painful because exercise is painful. But if we want to grow, to build our muscles, stamina, and energy, we need to do that painful work. That is what we are doing in Flying Higher.

If you are listening and you don't know what Flying Free is, you can find out more about it by going to [www.joinflyingfree.com](http://www.joinflyingfree.com). It is all there. You can read reviews, what it is, what it costs each month, and what's involved. It is the best deal out there. I've seen it all. There is nothing that offers as much value, as much bang for your buck, or is as transformational. I'm sorry, I'm partial to Flying Free. I've poured my life, blood, and

sweat into that group. After three years, the result is that hundreds of women have changed their lives.

I get emails from women every day. There are two common things they say. First, they say, "You saved my life." I didn't: they saved their lives and God saved their lives. Second, they say the value they got from one month of Flying Free was more than they got out of years of being in therapy. I'm not saying there isn't a place for therapy. A lot of the women in Flying Free are also in therapy. They are two different things. I was in therapy for many years. Honestly, the things I learned that I put into Flying Free were the things that changed me. I am an avid reader. I take a lot of classes. I am constantly learning. Self-development is my thing. I take what I learn, the most profound and life-changing things from my own life, and that is what I have to offer you in the Flying Free group.

Now Flying Higher is going to take people even further. Flying Free takes the confused caterpillar on the ground that doesn't know what is going on to the chrysalis stage where you turn into total and utter goo. Very painful. Then it takes you through the painful process of getting out of that chrysalis stage, drying your wings, and taking your first flight. Flying Higher is about taking it to the next level: learning how to fly higher, learning how to find other butterflies who are flying higher, learning how to find a new life for yourself. That is kind of a rabbit trail. Flying Higher isn't available to the public yet, but it will be available to the public in January of 2021. [Flying Higher is now available to the public! Find out more at [www.joinflyinghigher.com](http://www.joinflyinghigher.com)]

In the meantime, you can join Flying Free. I suggest you do, because even if you are already divorced and you think you don't need Flying Free, there are a lot of women in Flying Free that came to us as divorced women who have been profoundly changed through their time with us.

The paradigm shift as far as taking care of myself... that is one of the ways you can stop throwing yourself under the bus. You can start taking care of yourself. Start figuring out ways to nurture you, to grow you, to have you get stronger. It is great that you take care of everybody else and you want everyone else to be happy. That is sweet and wonderful. But if we're honest with ourselves, one of the reasons we do that is because we know if everyone else is happy that we will be happy too. At least, that is what we think. But that is simply not true.

Did you know you can have a very peace-filled, joy-filled life even if everybody around you is unhappy and miserable in their lives? If your husband is miserable, you can be happy. If your kids are miserable, you can be happy. How do I know this? I've

experienced this. I have nine children. They aren't all happy. They are all going through their own life journey. Some are making choices that are causing some unrest in their lives. That's part of growing up.

I hear a lot of moms who are miserable because their kids are miserable. It doesn't have to be that way. Does that mean we don't love our kids if we aren't drowning with them? No! But how can we help our kids if we are drowning with them? Our best bet at helping our children is by helping ourselves first, making sure that we are keeping our nose above the water and are breathing in oxygen. Then we can help our children, not by forcing them to get their head above the water, but by modeling what that means and by loving them.

When we're breathing, when we're doing well, when we're healthy, it will spill over into the lives of those around us because we will be filled up, and the unconditional love we have for ourselves will spill over into unconditional love for other people. Have you noticed that the more we judge ourselves then we judge others more? A lot of Christians do a lot of judging. That is because they are very judging of their own selves. They have extremely high expectations of themselves.

That doesn't mean we don't want to have high standards or let everything go to hell in a handbasket. This is a kid thing to do. How many of you have teenagers who have said, "Oh right, mom. You say that, so does that mean you want me to die or something?" You know how exaggerated they can be. Let's not be like that. Our brains just want to go that way, don't they? They want to go the way of the teenage brain. What I'm trying to say is the more that we accept ourselves just the way we are instead of thinking we have to be this perfect, ideal person, that sometimes we are good and sometimes we are not so good, we have good qualities and some not good qualities, we can always learn and grow but we will never be perfect... When we have self-acceptance and aren't throwing ourselves under the bus all the time, then we can fully accept other people just the way they are with their problems, warts, and idiosyncrasies. I think that's important.

Another paradigm shift I experienced was when I realized it was okay for my husband and the church I attended to have their own ideas about what it means to be a Christian. It was okay for them to have their own belief system about who God is, what it means to be a Christian, and who I am and how I fit into all of that. They could have their own belief system about divorce. They could have their own belief system about the role of women in the church, remarriage, submission, and all those controversial things. They got to decide for themselves their rules for their church and their rules for their marriage relationships. They got to decide that for themselves.

But guess what? I get to decide for myself. I thought that I had to believe everything that everyone else believed. How confusing is that, because every individual has a different set of beliefs? Here's how I explain it to the people in my group. We all have this universe between our ears. Everyone has their own universe, and everyone's universe is completely and totally different. It is also managed by one person: the person that the universe belongs to. (This isn't like woo-woo new age stuff. Your universe is your brain. I like the analogy of the universe because it is so complex with all these planets, galaxies, moons, and outer space stuff. All of that is in our brain. All of that is in a single cell. Creation is incredible.)

We must manage our own universe. Even within a single church, every individual has a different set of ideas and beliefs about all the little nuanced things you could possibly come up with, and think about when it comes to all of life. If we think we must believe what everyone else believes, to be a chameleon and mold ourselves...

Have you ever noticed that you act differently in some situations than in others? With your family of origin you go right back to how you were like as a kid and act as you did then. When you go to church you act a different way there. You go to your high school reunion and you act a different way there. Have you ever thought, "Who am I? There are all these different versions of me. Which one is me?" You are all those things, but there also is a core part of you that is consistent. You want to find out who that person is and what that person's core values are.

Wouldn't it be nice if you could live consistently across the board? That may mean to live within your core that when you go to your high school reunion people may think, "It's not the same person that I used to know." Or at church they may say, "That is not the person that I recognize." Or you go to your family of origin for a spaghetti dinner at Thanksgiving, and they say, "Hmm, this is not the person..." Everyone will put pressure on you to go back to being the person they are used to you being. You'll feel that pressure and you'll want to go back to being that person.

One of my goals in life now is that I'm trying to be true to who I am, to who God made me to be. That can be challenging in different situations, but that's who I want to be. That's who I want to show up as. I've noticed that when I show up as that person, there are some people who don't like that person. They want me to switch back to the person that I was before. Those people have discarded me. They don't want to have anything to do with me anymore, and guess what? That is perfectly okay. They don't have to like me. They don't have to want to be with me. They don't have to like what I believe. They don't have to like what I stand for. They don't have to like the decisions that I have made. It's perfectly fine. It's all good. I can still love them from a distance. They won't let



me love them up close, but I can still love them. I can still love myself and I can still have peace and joy in my life even though these people don't want to have anything to do with me anymore.

Isn't that awesome!? That is available to all of us. Does that mean I don't feel sad sometimes when I think about some of those losses? Of course I feel sad. I even cry sometimes. It doesn't mean that my feelings are going to be that "Life is all unicorns and daisies." No, of course not. I'm going to feel sad sometimes when I think about those things. But even in the sadness I do feel peace and I feel at rest. That's available to all of us. That's how I want to live my life. That's how I'm striving to live.

I think the most healing thing I've done in the last few years is to rewire my brain, to rewire the things that I've always believed. As I've written about in my book, "Is It Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage," I believed a lot of propaganda. That propaganda ended up being extremely destructive. As I've taken down all the things I used to believe... It's like a bomb went off in your house, and now you are sifting through the rubble. You are picking up different pieces and trying to figure out if you will keep this or let this go. Pretty soon you find a few pieces out of the rubble that you really feel, "I want to keep this. These are the things I'm going to keep. The rest of it I'm going to let go, and I'm going to start rebuilding with these core things that I'm going to keep."

For me, one of the core things I've decided to keep... This is what's so beautiful about it: it is purposeful. I'm not just doing it because this has been pre-programmed into me by my parents or by my church or by anybody else. It's because I as an adult have purposefully chosen this piece to hang on to. I've purposefully chosen to think thoughts that help me nurture and grow this piece.

The main piece that is my foundation is Jesus Christ. That's my foundation. That's what I have chosen to hang onto. Everything else I have let go of. The Bible says that God is love. The essence of love is God. Jesus Christ, who I believe was the Son and is the Son of God, He was God in the flesh, He is the essence of love. I can look and read about His life. I can read about how He treated different kinds of people, the different things He said, what He taught, His actions, and by that I can extrapolate into my own life how love lives. Then I can say, "That's how I want to live."

You guys, Jesus didn't hang onto everybody. He didn't go chasing after people and begging people to stay with Him. "Oh, don't leave. I love you. I can change your life." No. He just extended warm, loving invitations, and those who came entered into fellowship and relationship with Him. That invitation is extended throughout all of history. I

believe throughout all of eternity. That is an invitation that is extended to the human race. It's a beautiful thing.

I was going to talk a bit about how I met my current husband, but I don't have any time. I would like to tell that story sometime because it's a beautiful story. God did such a beautiful thing. Tom and I have been married for two and a half years now. Is he a perfect person? No. He's not perfect, but he is definitely not abusive. He has never abused me, ever. There were never any red flags when we were dating. He has never done anything to hurt me. He has simply loved me. Tom is authentically real. He is honest. What you see is what you get. I love that man. I'm so glad that God gave him to me. I throw that out there because I'm feeling lots of love for him, and I was looking forward to sharing my story with you. I'll save that for another time.

That's all I have today. I hope it was helpful in some way. Thank you so much for listening to this podcast. I love all of you. I feel like I have a relationship with you even though I haven't seen most of you. But there's a connection between you and me that I believe is spiritual, holy, beautiful, God-given, God-appointed, and life-giving. I want you to know that I feel that. I hope you feel it too. Fly free!