

AM I THE PROBLEM IN MY MARRIAGE?

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 85 of the Flying Free Podcast! Today I have with me Daphne and Becky, and we're going to be talking about what abuse is and what it isn't. I get a lot of questions from women who wonder, "Sometimes I act this way. Is that abusive?" I was listening to someone share their story this last week. She went through a phase where she was hitting her husband. He was actually the abuser in the relationship, but she was exhibiting those kinds of behaviors in response to the abuse.

I think many of us didn't go to that extent, but I know I yelled a lot. On two different occasions I threw pieces of a teacup collection that I had. One was toward the beginning of our marriage and one was toward the end. Both times I ruined a teacup. I ruined those two teacups and put a dent in the wall, and it didn't feel good. It didn't feel good for me to be acting like that, and it wasn't coming from my core values or anything like that. I think this is going to be a good discussion. Welcome, Daphne and Becky. Are you ready to dig into this one?

BECKY: Absolutely.

DAPHNE: Yes.

NATALIE: Do either one of you have some initial thoughts? When I sent you an email saying this was what we would be talking about, what were you thinking?

BECKY: Go ahead, Daphne. I'll wait.

DAPHNE: Well, the first thing I was thinking is that I was wondering, for people going through this situation, when does this question of, "Am I abusive" come up? I feel like in a couple of instances like you mentioned, Natalie, we are observing behaviors in ourselves where we aren't honoring ourselves in how we are reacting to what's happening in our lives. We're not reacting well. That's one situation where this question will come up.

Another situation I think is when someone recognizes that what is happening in their relationship falls into the framework or pattern of abuse, and they take that to the

person abusing them and say, "Hey, you are abusing me. Stop!" Then the person may retort and say, "Actually, you're the one who's abusive." Right? It can become a manipulative definition game. Overall, I don't know that defining those things specifically as abusive is the most helpful thing. We can get into that later, but that is the first thing I thought about, "When would somebody ask this question?"

NATALIE: I love that. Good thoughts.

BECKY: I would say I ask myself this question a lot. I came from a mom who was very abusive, and my abuser would always bring up the fact that, "You are just like your mom." He knew my vulnerabilities. That's what abusers know. They get to know your vulnerabilities so well, and then they exploit them. That's how they keep you in control even if you're a thirty-five year old, grown-up woman. They still have the control because, if you are like me, I grew up in the religious Baptist world that said I had no rights as a woman. I was just there to serve the man.

I remember reading my Bible every morning and journaling and just hating my responses. I thought, "I've got to overcome this sin of yelling. I've got to overcome this sin of losing my temper." Now, years later out of it, I can look back and every single instance... First, I celebrated my four year anniversary with a really good man now. In four years I have never lost my temper once. I've gotten frustrated but never to the point where I couldn't just walk away and say, "I'm dealing with a lot of emotions right now, and I don't want to say the wrong thing. Let's take a ten minute break. I'm going to get some coffee." It's that calm! It's so different.

NATALIE: It is. I think it's different because it's the difference between dealing with a brick wall you know you are banging your head against and hurts like hell and dealing with someone you know has flexibility. You can have a conversation with them later and work it through. It's the difference between playing tennis when the other person is hitting the ball back and playing tennis with someone who never hits the ball back. It is so frustrating.

BECKY: Frustrating. And it builds. So he knew my vulnerabilities. They were that I grew up in a children's home most of my life. I was very afraid of being homeless. I was very afraid of not having food on the table. He refused to work, and I think refusing to work was one of his manipulations because that put us in danger of not having food on the table or a home. So any time I tried to discuss the problems... I could look back and say I never had outbursts of anger, yelling, or screaming unless it was specifically trying to resolve a problem.

But the problem wasn't even him, it was my not realizing I had the power to walk away. I thought I was so stuck that my entire mindset was that I must fix this problem because I have no other options. But I did have other options. I just didn't know it. Now no one can bring me to that level of blowing up because I have the option and the control of my life to walk away from it. I don't have to have that person in my life. I don't have to deal with that kind of behavior or that kind of treatment. I walk away. In fact, there's a relative of mine who was treating me very much like my ex. Because I wanted to keep the relationship, I started realizing I was getting angry. I decided I had to choose my pain. I chose to not have that relationship because I didn't want to be a monster.

NATALIE: Exactly. That reminds me, if anyone wants to learn more about that whole concept, Harriet Learner has a book out called "The Dance of Anger." When I read that, that was my breakthrough. That was when I realized I had a choice, the same exact epiphany that you described. Once I knew I had a choice... My anger had been so ratcheted up, and that book helped dissipate a lot of that anger because it gave me... Again, if you go back to the brick wall thing, I realized that I could go around the brick wall and that I didn't have to go through it any more if I didn't want to.

BECKY: And I don't have to keep locking the cage on myself. I can walk out.

NATALIE: Yes, exactly.

DAPHNE: Yes, with what you are saying about the choice, I wanted to bring up that I think it's important to remember that we have a choice. The thing is that we have a choice whether the behavior "counts" or could be defined as abusive. I think that is one of the hurdles a lot of people struggle with. They are trying to figure out, "Is this abusive? Maybe it is. I don't know."

Ultimately, it doesn't really matter if you can define whatever it is as abusive, because I feel that thinking you must define something as abuse can be harmful because people tend to take it to their partner. Or if they are in a religious environment, they will try to take it to their pastor or biblical counselor and say, "I think this is abuse." Then you can get into these arguments and back and forth about the definition of abuse in trying to figure out if it is abuse or is it not.

Ultimately, that doesn't really matter. You still have the choice. If you are in a relationship and there are patterns of harmful behavior to you, you can decide to do something different, to walk away, whether or not someone else would call what is happening abuse.

NATALIE: That's right.

BECKY: Absolutely.

NATALIE: That's hard for people in this audience to really grasp because we don't see ourselves as adult women with autonomy. We really do see ourselves as children who need to obey people in authority over us and to obey God. But the problem is that we get mixed up in who is God and who are the people in authority over us. It's a little bit fuzzy.

BECKY: What God expects.

NATALIE: Exactly.

DAPHNE: I think one of the things you've written about before, Natalie, is what is our view and picture of God. You wrote that you had this view of God as an abuser, essentially. Somebody who would want you to submit to someone destroying your soul. I think it depends on what your view of God is. I had to embrace the fact that God didn't like what was happening. Once I realized that I saw the pattern of abuse and oppression in scripture, I saw how God would continually rescue people in those situations and honor people in those situations. I saw that God doesn't like this, and He set up ways for people to leave those situations.

So I feel like it really depends on your view of God, too. I can see how that would be hard if you're feeling like God would want you to be enduring that type of treatment. Again, I was definitely there because I got that from these pictures of God and how marriage is painted. It is supposed to be sanctifying, so it is going to be hard. You aren't going to feel good all the time. You're not going to feel happy all the time. So if you don't feel good, then it's okay because you are being sanctified.

BECKY: Like you were saying, Daphne, the word abuse... To try and get that definition if you go to your pastor, they have a different idea of it. Also, I think when you say marriage is supposed to be sanctifying or hard, that might mean something totally different to the average couple that doesn't have abuse in their relationship. "Hard" might be a job loss, but "hard" is not circular reasoning, emotional abuse, or physical or sexual abuse. I think you must make your own decisions.

But again, I was in a Baptist church and then I went to a Presbyterian church before I divorced. Their theology said if you are in an abusive marriage relationship that is because God ordained that. That is the sandpaper in your life to make you more godly.

So it just depends. And I live in the South. It's kind of out-in-the-sticks South, and it's a little crazy religious-wise.

NATALIE: "Crazy" is the word I was just going to say. It's a little crazy out there, isn't it?

BECKY: Not a lot of logic is included. But yes, for sure definitions. I would say I was called an abuser by a counselor. The counselor was not a good counselor, not because she said I was abusive but because she didn't know to go beyond the reactionary behavior. She would listen to my ex say, "She did this, this, and this. She yelled. She screamed." I'm sure I threw something during those twenty-one years. I'm sure I wanted to do way more than I ever did. But he would say all that and she never once asked, "Why did you do that? What was the context that happened then?" Instead she was like, "Do you realize how sinful that behavior is?" It was just adding to that. She was locking the door on the cage for me.

DAPHNE: Was it a biblical counselor?

BECKY: Oh yeah. What is that biblical stuff called?

NATALIE: Nouthetic. Nouthetic counseling. Let's get into what abuse is. I know you had said, Daphne, it's tricky because everyone has a different idea of abuse. Religious communities, for sure, don't really understand what it is and what it isn't. There are two different paths. I think abuse involves both things for sure. But I feel like I hear two different ideas about abuse. First, I hear Bob Hamp and Patrick Doyle talking about how abuse is when someone can't take responsibility for themselves but they put all the responsibility on the other person. That's abuse.

Second, you see the power and control wheel which says abuse is about powering over another human being and controlling them. I think those two definitions go together. I think when you are talking about abuse you will always have both hand-in-hand, dovetailing with one another. Yet there are women who will say, and I'd have to say too when I look on my past behavior in my former marriage, that I was trying to control things and manage things (as you said before we got on here, Becky) to keep the peace. The ways I tried to do that when things started unraveling and falling apart, that's when I would start to fall apart. Did you guys experience that? Talk about that a little bit.

DAPHNE: Yeah. I would say I did experience that. I tend to get these pictures in my mind to describe things. So I'm thinking about this abuse container with different behaviors and tactics and communication. They can all fit in this container or bucket of abuse. But I think if you are looking at individual instances of behavior, I think anybody

can exhibit behaviors or do things to other people that could fit in this abuse container. I think ultimately the distinction is what do you do with that?

I think the pattern is important to distinguish, especially when you are trying to figure out what you are going to do in a relationship. It is one thing to say, "Let me look at my own behavior. Do I really think this is abusive? Let me take accountability for my own behavior and the harm that it has caused." But I also think sometimes it's okay if someone says that something I was doing was abusive but I don't agree.

I think that's one thing that is good to remember, that we all have the right to agree or not agree with someone's assessment of our behavior, and then change it or not. Just like we have that right, our spouses or partners have that right as well. I think it comes back to remembering that you can decide what you want to do.

NATALIE: Right.

BECKY: I was going to say, Natalie, I think it was before we came on and you were describing... When things came up with my ex, I did want to control things. So was I an abuser, then, because I really wanted to control the way? The behavior might have seemed that way, and maybe it is. Maybe I have way more work to do than I think. But what I do know is when I behave the way that was abusive, yelling, screaming, I could always go back to the fact that I was so incredibly afraid. I didn't have the option to get out. I didn't understand I had the option. But I was so afraid, and that's what abusers want. They want you to be afraid.

We have a family member who recently awoke to the fact that she was married to a very abusive man. She's not been married to him very long. To help her get away from the situation (because he could be violent) we bought her a ticket to fly somewhere. She had a place to stay for a few months. She got to the airport and she started throwing up. Here is a woman who skydives. She takes her Jeep and goes down rapid rivers. She is this brave, audacious, amazing woman. But she physically started vomiting because she was so afraid.

Have you ever heard the analogy of the scared dog? They come out at you. When they are afraid, that is when they are the most dangerous. So I would say even how my children watched me growing up, they would say, "Mom, yes. Some of those moments were abusive." And half of my children say, "But I get it because I'm an adult now, and I realize what you were going through." The other half say, "It doesn't matter. It's never okay." So Daphne, you're right. It doesn't matter what people think. It's what you think. It's what you can do with your life.

DAPHNE: And ultimately if you are still alive, you still have the opportunity to redeem that. It's not like you are an abuser and you are condemned forever. It gives you an opportunity. Like you said, you had to look at where it was coming from: "I'm afraid. I feel like I don't have options. What's going on there? Let me look at that. Once I can be accountable for my behavior toward other people and I can see what I can do to not put myself in this situation again..."

That's why I feel it can be harmful to feel like you must define something as abuse because then it can feel like it is irredeemable, which it is not. You can decide to do something different just like a partner who is abusive can decide to do something different. But again, it goes back to your choice. Have you observed them doing things different? Do you see them changing? Do they want to do things different? If not, then you can make your choice on how to interact. But it is not like it is irredeemable. "I was abusive so that's it."

BECKY: Right. I would say too that if I had to compare myself with my abuser, I would have such remorse for losing my temper or for yelling at the kids or for screaming at my ex. I would do everything possible to show that remorse until the cycle would continue, and whether it was three months later or six months later I would blow up again. My abuser really liked keeping me in that cycle because it kept me from getting help because I was ashamed. I had lost my temper. I had said things I shouldn't say. My kids saw me behave in ways they shouldn't see me behave. Now there is no way I can go ask for help.

NATALIE: Right. This is how I try to picture it too using your dog analogy, but I use a cat and a dog. There's a cat in a corner and the dog is guarding the cat. The dog doesn't even have to physically hurt the cat at all. All the dog must do is look back occasionally and give a menacing growl, a menacing bark, or even just a tapping of his tail. But when the cat tries to exert herself or try to protect herself from that, the cat may snarl or reach out and scratch if she thinks the tail is getting too close to her and is going to hit her.

The cat doesn't realize that if she ran fast and hard she might be able to get away, but she thinks she is stuck in the corner. So her only recourse is to snarl back and to try to keep him at a distance. When we say, "Well, the cat is trying to control the dog," or "The cat is trying to be mean to the dog by keeping it from hurting her," is that abusive? I say no, but the religious community might say, "Yes, that's abusive. She has no right to control the dog."

BECKY: Right.

NATALIE: So, I don't know.

BECKY: But then I would also say that my children didn't understand that. So I made sure I did a lot of apologizing. I'm not saying this was behavior on an everyday basis. This was when we got an eviction notice because he wouldn't work, and he stole all the money I made to pay the mortgage, that kind of stress. The we're-going-to-be-homeless kind of stress. And I lost it. My kids understand that now. They so understand that. But I still say that wasn't right. I should have chosen to leave at that point. I didn't know that I could, but now I do. Like I said, in four years they've never seen me lose my temper. I've never even gotten angry. I'm just like, "Phew! Whatever!" because I know it's a whatever! I can walk away.

NATALIE: Right. Now, if you are listening to this and you still have little kids... Becky's kids are older. How old is your youngest?

BECKY: Seventeen. Almost eighteen.

NATALIE: So if you're like me and you still have little kids at home, you still might lose your your-know-what.

BECKY: Right. I don't have little ones to drive me up the wall right now.

NATALIE: Or if you have lots of dogs. I was also going to say, back to the cat analogy and the apologizing, that would be like every time the cat snarled she said, "Oh, I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have snarled. I shouldn't have kept you away. I'm so sorry." I did that too, apologized profusely and begged for forgiveness. Later I would say, "And he would graciously bestow his forgiveness upon me for being the cat in the corner."

That is a completely different scenario from an abusive person who is not usually saying he is sorry because he didn't do anything "wrong." Usually they are not taking responsibility. So if you are a woman who is constantly taking responsibility for your own stuff, for your kids' stuff, for your family of origin's stuff, and for your husband's stuff, that is where you want to start doing the work. Because you can't change your kids, your husband, your family of origin, or anybody else, but you can start doing that inner work inside of your own self. Let them take responsibility for themselves, and you take responsibility for yourself.

I think the key to letting go of the anger is not just understanding that you have choices but also understanding that they have choices. They get to be who they are, and we don't have a right or responsibility to change them and make them into someone that

we think they should be so that we can have a happy marriage and our kids can have a happy home. You cannot control the humans. That was a hard lesson that I had a difficult time wrapping my brain around for a long, long time. I finally had a breakthrough in that, and now I get it. Don't you feel like once you recognize that you are able to experience so much more peace? When people act like assholes it's like, "Oh well, they get to."

BECKY: Right.

DAPHNE: Yeah.

BECKY: I'm going to put a caveat in there, though. I was just thinking that I don't have little children. I own my own business, so I have financial freedom. There's a lot of freedom for me to say, "Whatever," and walk away. I've got a lot of freedom to do that. I could very well be the woman with little children who relies on the husband's income and feel, even though I might know I have a choice, like that choice is so overwhelming that I can't take it. That's when I would lose my temper.

NATALIE: Yes.

BECKY: Early in the marriage, that was very much the case.

DAPHNE: Yeah, I can see that. I don't have kids, so I wasn't in that situation. I think one good thing to remember is that while there is the ultimate choice of leaving the relationship, there are also smaller choices you can make in the relationship on a day-to-day basis that I think can help you to not put yourself in the position where you feel like you are dishonoring yourself. If you know certain types of conversations go a certain way, you can decide to stop engaging. You can decide to make that choice. Those are some of the smaller choices I ended up making even when I was still married. I had to make some of those small choices.

For example, I know we've tried to talk about this before. The conversation didn't go well for whatever reason. I'm going to make an adjustment. For a while I felt like we would have to talk about everything, must agree, and come to a decision. I was still in a position where I wanted to be in a loving, mutual relationship with reciprocity. I wasn't fully embracing that it wasn't going to happen, so I wanted to have conversations and talk about all the things.

Once I realized he didn't have the same goal as me, I thought, "Okay. I'm going to have to do something different. I'm going to have to spend this money without talking. Or I'm

going to have to make this choice to go here, or stay at work late, or do this or that because that's what I know needs to happen and having a conversation about that isn't going to work."

BECKY: Yeah, absolutely.

NATALIE: Right.

DAPHNE: Even if you feel like you can't make the big choice of leaving, there are smaller choices you can make to protect yourself and to stay healthy. But I feel like that starts with acknowledging the reality of the situation.

BECKY: The why behind the response. I know from the time I learned of his unfaithfulness it took me over two years to divorce. But I remember during those two years was when boundaries started to... I didn't even fully have a grasp of those until years after I left the relationship, but I can look back and realize I was starting to put little ones down. Part of that was, "I'm not going to engage in this circular conversation again. We've had this same conversation for twenty-one years. Nothing has ever changed, and I'm always the bad guy no matter what. So I'm not going to engage on this one."

Here's the thing. It kind of throws them for a loop because they are used to a cycle. When you start breaking their cycle, that's when things get dangerous for us, but I don't regret it. You are right, Daphne, making those little decisions.

DAPHNE: In my situation, my ex is the one who ended up leaving and moving out first. I think it was because he was seeing that I wasn't going to continue to engage in those unhealthy ways, and I was letting him be who he was without trying to change him and just accepting it.

Here's an example of something that happened. I'll tell y'all how this played out in my marriage because it's why I know having this abuse definition is not helpful in a lot of ways. When I first discovered or learned that what was happening could qualify as abuse was maybe seven or eight months after we got married. It was shortly after Trump was inaugurated, and I had Facebook friends sharing information on narcissism in relation to him. But I read it and thought this felt like what was happening in my marriage. The first thing I did while still ignorant and learning, thinking that he was a Christian and wanted to honor God, was to show him the information. I said, "I feel like you are abusive." We sat down and had the conversation. He said, "Okay. I want to honor God. We'll work on it." But of course that never really happened. I also took this

to a biblical counselor who said, "Well, it's just sin. How do you treat someone who sins against you?" So it kept me in that cycle.

BECKY: Seventy times seven.

DAPHNE: Turn the other cheek. How do you treat your enemy? I think there's a passage in John that talks about feeding your enemies. It kept me in that cycle.

NATALIE: But you don't marry them. You don't have sex with your enemy. I don't think it says that anywhere in the Bible.

DAPHNE: Right. Exactly. But it just kept me in that cycle. What I ended up finding the most helpful was when I would identify specific behaviors and say, "This thing was hurtful to me." It's funny how they start to use the same language back to you when you get language to describe it. But it helped me get clear on what was happening.

One of the last examples I have of this is that I said, "Hey, this is really hurtful to me." And he said, "Well, that doesn't bother me. I'm okay with that. You're going to have to deal with your own hurt." This was probably a month before he ended up leaving, so I was at the place where I was like, "Okay, cool. You have the right to have that response. I don't have the right to try to control your response, and I don't need to try to make you see how wrong that is." What is my responsibility is to take care of myself and act accordingly. So maybe he wanted that to be a big deal, a big conversation. I don't know. But I just said, "Okay."

NATALIE: Wow! That is emotional adulthood right there, Daphne.

BECKY: Exactly.

DAPHNE: It took time to get there.

NATALIE: I think most survivors who are still in the middle of their relationships, they want that so badly. They want to be an emotional adult and they feel like they are stuck in emotional childhood. If you are listening to this and you feel like that (because I felt like that for years and years), it's only because you don't quite understand... You know how you cannot make these lightbulb moments come? You want them to come, they must happen. But eventually you'll get this lightbulb moment and you will think, "He gets to be that guy. He's that guy and he can be that guy. I'm living with that guy. Now what am I going to do about it? Now I get to do whatever the blankety-blank I want to do with that. I get to choose because I'm an adult."

BECKY: Right.

DAPHNE: And that's one of the ways defining abuse can be helpful. If you have all these behaviors and you're trying to figure out what's happening, it was helpful to have this container to say, "This is abuse," because then I could try to find support. I could figure out what I needed to do for myself in this situation. It was helpful for that. When you are in these communities you all have this shared language. It is helpful for that. It was helpful for me. But it wasn't helpful to try to take that to other people and try to get them to change.

BECKY: Absolutely.

NATALIE: Right.

BECKY: Just talking about this has made me think about how I am in my life today. Would it have to be abuse for me to not put up with it? No, it doesn't. I'm wondering if I was waiting for it to be bad enough for it to be justified, whether that was to God or to other people, the church, whatever. But now I don't have a litmus test that says, "Okay, you can treat me like this, but don't go to this level because then I will have to make a decision." I don't have to identify. I don't have to use the word "abuse." I can just say, "I don't put up with that kind of behavior."

NATALIE: Right. Or, "You get to make your choice about how you want to behave, but I need to let you know that I'm not okay with that. When you do this, I'm not okay with that."

BECKY: Even if no one else understands it. There's that family member that I had to make that decision for. A lot of people looking from the outside could not see what this person was doing because it was very subtle. I knew this was just like my ex. I'm not going to sit around and wait twenty years for everyone to finally say, "Oh. I get it. He's abusive," when he tried to kill us. Before that, no one could see it. Now I don't even need an abuse litmus test. If it's not good for me, it's not good for me, period.

DAPHNE: Yes. Ultimately, abuse is behaviors. It's not a thing by itself. It's made up of different behaviors and different things.

BECKY: And behaviors to one might be received differently than to another.

NATALIE: This is a really good conversation. I think it will be helpful for people. I want to wrap up by saying that this morning I was reading in Mark, one of the later chapters,

because Jesus was just about to be crucified. It's so interesting to read the Bible through a completely different lens than I used to read it through.

One of the things that popped out at me is the fact that they came and arrested Jesus with clubs and swords. He said, "Why are you arresting me with clubs and swords? All I've been doing is just teaching you guys. I'm not a dangerous person or anything." He didn't use those exact words, but the point, what I got out of it, is how many times have survivors been accused of "I have to be careful around you. You are a scary woman"? I was told that in a counseling session because I was trying to explain what was going on and this counselor (a nouthetic, biblical counselor) leaned forward and said, "You are very scary. If I were your husband, I would be running a thousand miles per hour in the other direction right now."

BECKY: Mine said, "I would be living on the rooftop."

NATALIE: Yes, exactly!

DAPHNE: Well, good. That's what you want, right?"

NATALIE: I know. Go there and live there! Run there. When that happened, my body was literally shaking like a leaf and I was sobbing. I grabbed my things and I had to leave the room. Obviously I never went back there. But my point is that it's nice to know Jesus went through all these different kinds of ways we've been treated, including being arrested as a criminal with clubs and swords like He was going to somehow attack them if they came to arrest Him.

BECKY: They had all the flying monkeys.

NATALIE: Exactly. I wanted to share that. Also, before we go, this episode will air a week before we open the Flying Free Sisterhood group again. I want to let you know it's going to be open at the end of September. If you're not part of it, you can go to joinflyingfree.com to apply for the program. Once you apply, you will receive emails that let you know if you've been accepted.

Off the top of my head I don't remember the exact date it's opening, but it's the last week in September that it will open, and I know it will close on October 2nd. We usually have it open for about five days, so it will be like, the 28th. Go to joinflyingfree.com. You can read tons of reviews. I just put up a bunch more reviews from people. You guys are in the group. Do you want to give a quick plug before we close? (I'm putting you on the spot.)

BECKY: Even though I'm about to celebrate the fourth year anniversary with the good husband, I still have a lot to learn. I'm still learning a lot, and that comes through Flying Free. Overcoming not even relationship issues, but issues of learning to be me and how that affects every aspect of my life.

DAPHNE: I would say one of the things we talked about is how you view God and the Bible in your marriage. One encouragement I've found through the group is hearing from people who think differently about God and about the Bible, and it's okay. You see that there are people who think differently and it's okay. I know within certain environments it is really pushed that people who think differently are thinking like the world, they are rebellious, or they don't love God. But there are plenty of people who love God but see things differently. There are plenty of people who love God and think that God doesn't think we should be abused, and it's okay. So the group exposed me to that.

NATALIE: Good. We've designed this group to be a judgment-free zone that is completely and totally safe, because so many survivors have not experienced that in their homes, some in their families of origin, and certainly in many of their religious faith communities. We try to make sure that is in place.

Then there are so many resources in there. There is a vault of past resources. You could literally spend days and days exploring all the resources (which I don't recommend, because it's extremely overwhelming). What we will do if you join is take you by the hand and systematically spoon feed you, which is what I felt I needed at the beginning, just a little bit of truth every three days in a lesson and journal assignment you can do to help you process what you are going through. I've had people say, "At the beginning of this year I felt like I was at the end of what I could handle and I didn't even want to live anymore. At the end of this year I am ready to rock and roll." I was going to say "fly free," but many of them are still in their relationships.

When we say "flying free," I don't mean that we are flying out of our relationships, because many women are staying in their relationships. But as we mentioned earlier in this conversation, it's more about your internal growth that is going to set you free, not always your external circumstances. So that's the first step.

You can do that whether you are in an abusive relationship or you are not in an abusive relationship. Many women I know who are divorced are still doing that hard work. I'm still doing that hard work. I kind of had a melt down right before the podcast came on here with my friends here. We're all in this together and we're all doing this work together. It's going to be a lifelong process, and it's beautiful and it's exciting. We'd love

to have you join us in that process to support you, to encourage you, and to help you grow. That's joinflyingfree.com. Otherwise, we're done for today. Until next time, fly free!