

## WHEN YOUR ABUSIVE HUSBAND IS A PASTOR

*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 86 of the Flying Free Podcast! Today I have with me a friend, Lynn, and she is going to share her fascinating story. It has some interesting little twists and turns to it. I also want to say that I've known Lynn since the beginning of putting together the Flying Free program. She was in the beta program when we were... She was willing to go through all the starts and stops with me and a few other women. She's been a huge friend and supporter of me, of my work, and of many of the women in the Flying Free Sisterhood program. Welcome to the Flying Free Podcast, Lynn.

LYNN: Hi, Natalie. I am so happy to be able to do this. Some of the things are strange and weird, but I still hope to be an encouragement to other women. That is my main goal. I am a charter member of the Flying Free group.

NATALIE: That's right.

LYNN: I couldn't wait to get in. In fact, I think I emailed you five times because I didn't get an answer right away. I wondered if you had really gotten my email.

NATALIE: That is so funny.

LYNN: I needed you desperately at the time.

NATALIE: Maybe you can talk about where that falls when you are telling your story. For those listening, Lynn was ready to go at it again and she joined my beta group for the Flying Higher program, which isn't even released yet. It's coming out in January 2021. [Flying Higher is now available to the public! Apply today at [joinflyinghigher.com](http://joinflyinghigher.com)] But she jumped on board with that too and has been helping me with that as well. Let's get into your story. You might have to give a little background when you answer this first question because this was your second husband.

LYNN: Right.

NATALIE: Tell us how you met your second husband. What happened to your first husband? Also, I'm curious to know if you noticed any red flags.

LYNN: I was widowed for four years. My first husband was a lot older than me. He died of prostate cancer. I really wasn't interested in dating, but I met somebody who had done online dating. In fact, he met his future wife on eHarmony. I thought, "Well, why not try it just for the fun of it?" I think I started with Christian Mingle, so that's where I met him. To put it in perspective, the person I met (I'm trying not to say his name) was and is a pastor, a hospice chaplain, and a former missionary. Being a Christian woman, I was happy to meet somebody like this. The red flags... I could do a whole podcast on red flags, so you'll have to stop me if I get into it too much.

NATALIE: I want to jump in here and make the point that there are a lot of women, survivors, who are married to pastors and missionary types. You do think, if you're going to be in a relationship with someone like that, it is so bizarre that we automatically assume they will be a safe person because they're in the ministry. In reality, the ministry is one of the top occupations that people with personality disorders choose to go into. So you're running a much higher risk by marrying someone who is in ministry than you are by marrying someone who is not. Just a little side note there.

LYNN: Yes, he was a triple threat.

NATALIE: Exactly.

LYNN: On his profile he said he was divorced. Even at the time I thought it was unusual that a pastor would be divorced. But I thought, "Why not. I'll check into it." We started chatting. He eventually had to admit to me that he really wasn't divorced. He was going through a divorce. In the state that he lived, they didn't even have legal separation. So it wasn't even that he was separated. He was going through a divorce and looking for somebody. He said he loved me about three weeks into our chatting on the dating site. It wasn't even meeting face-to-face.

When we did meet (I'm guessing it was about three months after we started chatting), he wanted sex the first day. My mother was alive at the time, and I remember telling my best friend after he left, "I can't go out with this guy. He's too horny!" I didn't understand why a pastor... I mean, he would say... That's also another story about his soon-to-be-ex and how she didn't give him sex, etc. So he talked nasty about his soon-to-be-ex and blamed her for all his woes.

He would say quite often that he lost his family. Of course, we were in our fifties by then and they were all grown. He did have one eighteen year old child who lived with him, but he still lamented that his family was gone and his other grown children had no relationship with him. But it was just one of his woes. (Oh, woe is me!) He also told me

that his first wife had left him four times throughout their thirty-year marriage and how terrible she was for doing this. I was very brave at the beginning and I said, "Well, why did she leave you?" He would get angry at me asking that. He would tell me stories of the first time she left and how he got in front of his congregation and sobbed and sobbed. It was kind of funny at the end of our relationship. I started using the grey rock method.

NATALIE: For those listening, grey rock just means that you make yourself very uninteresting. You say very little. You don't react to their crazy stuff. You don't bring up anything. You try to keep the drama to a total minimum.

LYNN: Yeah, that's what I was doing. I wasn't always the best at it. But one morning he asked me, "Why are you acting like this?" I said, "I'm protecting myself. I'm guarding my heart." He said, "If I'm so terrible, why did my ex-wife stay with me for thirty years?"

NATALIE: They can twist anything. It's like the news media. It's fascinating!

LYNN: It is. And I said, "Why did she leave you four times?" I still wonder that!

NATALIE: Right. He couldn't ever articulate why his ex-wife left him. He was never able to articulate that, correct?

LYNN: No, never. It was always a bad thing to ask, even though he would bring it up again. "Why did she leave you?" But it was always her. That's how he would articulate it. That it was always her. There was another thing. I didn't know what to call it at the time, but he alienated his eighteen year old son against his soon-to-be-ex, his mother. Now I know it is called parental alienation. I saw that before my eyes, and I'm just disturbed that I even tolerated that or put up with that. There are lots of stories about that too, but it could get very long.

Another thing is that he discarded me quickly, but it was after I gave in to him. I gave in to him by having sex. This was before we were married and he was still married to his soon-to-be-ex. I was very confused by this. He pursued me and I gave him what he wanted. I really loved this man. It was strange that after that happened I started pursuing him, because he discarded me. All this is just so twisted. It's so mixed up in your brain when it's happening to you. Another thing he did a lot was make derogatory comments about groups of people or categories of people like women, gays, lesbians. My daughter is a lesbian, and I think he would do it purposefully. Just to give an example, one Easter Sunday a member of his congregation got out of jail. He was in jail for domestic violence.

NATALIE: Interesting.

LYNN: He was from a South American country. On the way home from church, my (he was my boyfriend at the time) boyfriend told me that he counseled this man. The way he counseled him was to tell him he had to be aware that North American men don't have any rights. I said, "Why don't you tell him he's not supposed to be beating his wife?"

NATALIE: Isn't that fascinating that he went... He was identifying with the wife-beater.

LYNN: Yes! I was just flabbergasted by the comment. Then he was angry with me, so I started desperately trying to explain my point of view. I thought, "How could you say that? I have daughters. What if my friends heard that!" Oh my gosh, he got so angry at me. It was Easter Sunday. We watched "The Passion of the Christ." He was so angry at me and he acted like he was angry at the movie too. I was bawling because of the movie and bawling because he was angry with me.

That was one of the times I broke up with him. I said, "I can't live with a man like this." But he drew me back in. It's funny that the only thing he said was that he still loved me. He didn't ask for forgiveness. He didn't say he was wrong. He just said he loved me, and I think I just needed love at that time. That was my struggle, I guess.

I did have a disturbing dream. When I think back on the dream, it was like a satanic dream. I can't describe it any other way, but it was a warning from God not to marry him. I won't go into detail of the dream, but it was very scary. When I woke up from the dream, my chihuahua was sleeping on the bed with me. My heart was pounding so badly. I wondered if the dream was real. I had to look at my chihuahua and he was still sleeping, so I knew it was a dream. That was the only way I knew it was a dream. So those are the red flags. There were others, but that's it in a nutshell.

NATALIE: Okay. So tell me, how long were you married to this person?

LYNN: Five years. I was with him two years. He got a divorce, and then we got married.

NATALIE: Okay. Give us a couple of examples of the ways that he was abusive to you, some of his abuse tactics, and then how you coped as a survivor in the situation.

LYNN: Most of the time it was a total lack of interest in me, not asking questions, or caring anything about me. This is the way it was before we were married, too. But I would be confused because I would see him give attention to members of the

congregation or his family. We also had a female roommate (which is a whole other story) and he would give attention to her. There were a lot of things he said that... I can give an example.

He would tell people, "I should have never gone on the dating site." To me, that meant he was sorry that he met me. When I brought that up to him I would get an angry outburst from him. He would say I was too sensitive. He could talk to other females, his female co-workers, and they wouldn't get upset over that. He could joke with other women, but "I'm just way too sensitive."

He lamented several times that he couldn't get a ministry job. He knew he was called of God to preach, but he couldn't get a ministry job because he was divorced and remarried. Not just that he was divorced, but that he was remarried. I would bring that up to him and say, "It sounds like you are sad or upset that you got remarried to me." Then he would get upset for that. One of his things was the silent treatment. It was a silent treatment for a long time. He would call it "going into his shell." He even said one of the times he came out of the silent treatment that he was "doomed to be married to women who disrespected him."

NATALIE: So by your asking questions or expressing any of your own identity, having your own ideas or thoughts or feelings, that was disrespectful to him? It's disrespectful for a woman to show up as a real person in the relationship with an abuser.

LYNN: Right. Absolutely. I mostly felt very alone. We moved across the country to live in another state for his job as a hospice chaplain. It was away from family and friends. It was also a different culture. It was New Mexico. I really like the state now. I've learned to love it. I don't live there now. But at first it was very lonely. A member of his family moved in with us, and then more conflict came. I just felt alone. That was a lot of it. If I brought anything up, then it would be... I just learned to keep my mouth shut.

NATALIE: What was the turning point for you?

LYNN: I took a course from Leslie Vernick called "Empowered to Change." That was two years into our relationship.

NATALIE: How did you find her? Were you looking for information on what you were going through?

LYNN: Actually, before we were married, I read the Patricia Evans one.

NATALIE: "The Verbally Abusive Relationship"?

LYNN: "The Verbally Abusive Relationship." But it was funny that I could see him easily in this book, but things would get better so I would forget about it. Then I threw some of my journals away that were talking about it because I thought, "Oh, he really does love me." But with Leslie, I read the book "The Emotionally Destructive Marriage." So I took the "Empowered to Change" course.

I even told him about it. I thought it would be good because I was the one who was going to change. There was no pressure on him: "I'm the one that is going to change." I had to write goals. He read my goals. I didn't give them to him. He snuck a look at them and read them. After he read them, he told me he was just devastated and he wanted to learn how to love me. I was like, "Really?" So I was drawn in again. The funny thing is he didn't really want to learn how to love me, and he never even asked.

NATALIE: Yeah. He was probably just in a good mood that night and maybe he wanted some sex.

LYNN: He wanted that quite often. That was part of the problem, yeah.

NATALIE: I'm curious. How did you change?

LYNN: There were a few things that happened. I joined Flying Free. I did join Conquer too. There's nothing against Conquer, but Flying Free was a little bit more validating for me. Friends would call me and talk to me. I had one friend who was in an abusive marriage. She was in two abusive marriages. She's an older lady and she's in a good marriage now. She would call me two or three times a week, and I would lament to her. She would know what I was going through.

One thing she said was, "I know someday you're going to leave him." I didn't believe it at the time. I didn't want to get divorced. I wanted to stay married. I wanted to figure out how to be a good wife to this man. I just couldn't figure it out. So I took "Empowered to Change." I got into Flying Free. I started to understand that it was probably never going to change.

Some of the things I did to cope while I was in New Mexico... I had a job where I could get several days off in a row. I didn't feel loved. I didn't feel cared for. So I would go to my kids' place. I'd take several trips to see them. Also I would go see my friends, and I felt loved by them. I felt loved by my kids. They weren't his kids. I felt loved by my friends. Then I seemed to get recharged and go back to him for more abuse.

NATALIE: Yeah. I'm curious if at any point in your journey you learned the importance of and started working on loving yourself? Taking care of Lynn?

LYNN: That probably didn't happen until after I left him. But I've done several things after I left him. EMDR is one of them. When I was in the marriage I got coaching from you. I do want to mention that, because that was a big turning point. I also got counseling online from two other counselors. The one counselor told me I had magical thinking because I was still at the point where I wanted to be married to him, and this counselor told me he wasn't going to change. He referred me to another counselor who was a female and had been in the same situation. She had been in an emotionally destructive marriage. He wanted me to talk to her to kind of "get it." So it was you, this counselor, and this other female counselor.

I finally got it. That's when I started thinking, "I can't live this way." We also had an argument. It's a long, drawn-out, detailed thing, so I won't go into that. But it was about the female roommate. He told me that she was his only ally. I said, "I've done all these things for you." I was so angry by that time. "I've done all these things. I've moved across the country. I don't live near my family. You have your family here. I do this. I support your ministry. Blah, blah, blah. And you are saying that this roommate is your only ally?" I was so angry, and he was angry because I was angry. So that started the process. He again gave me the silent treatment for several days, but by that time I was glad. I just couldn't talk to him anymore.

NATALIE: You hit the bottom of what you were willing to...

LYNN: I hit the bottom, yes. When he finally came around, he said... Because it used to be me begging him to get out of his shell. But he came to me and said we needed to talk, so I listened. The essence of what he said was that I never let him be who he wants to be. He wants to be able to say derogatory things (he didn't use the word "derogatory") about gays. He wants to say things about liberals. He wants to say things about females, and he wants to be able to be free to do that.

I thought, "Wow! You're absolutely right. You need to be free, and if you can't put up with that, then you can leave." You know, you've said that so many times when you are coaching. Yes! We need to let them be who they are. There was no way I was ever going to change this man. In my trying to control him, I'm almost as bad as he is.

NATALIE: All human beings have a natural propensity for wanting to control our environment so that we can be happy and be comfortable. So we all do that. Some people do it and they use abuse tactics to do it and they are abusive. Other people do it



in other ways that aren't abusive but are normal human ways of doing it. I want to say yes. As women in the group and women that I coach, we often are trying to get our husbands to change, but we are doing it in constructive ways. For example, sitting down and trying to talk to them, trying to get counseling, trying to make it easy for them to fulfill their responsibilities. We are doing things like that, whereas they are manipulating, lying, shaming, criticizing, all those kinds of things. That is the difference between abuse and non-abuse.

But you are right. He is never going to let you be who you are. You are a little Lego character in his universe. So let him be who he is, let him have his own little fantasy world where you are a Lego character, and let him do what he wants to do and be who he wants to be, but then you also give yourself the same freedom. That is going to be your ticket to peace and relief from his little vortex of drama.

LYNN: Right. I left him. I just didn't feel comfortable telling him. I don't recommend this for other women, but I gave him everything. I just wanted out. It was a quick decision for me. But I might be a little bit different because I'm a registered nurse. I knew I could support myself. We had a house together. It was a brand-new house. But I just couldn't do it anymore. It was like a waking-up moment. I agonized over how I was going to tell him. I just decided I couldn't tell him. I had to do it in secret. I started making plans. It was kind of funny. I would take things, like a carload of stuff. I didn't take furniture or anything like that. But I would take, like, my kids' pottery displayed on a shelf. I would take a piece of pottery, pack it up, and then put something else on the shelf. I would take a picture off and put another picture up.

NATALIE: Oh, that is hilarious.

LYNN: I had a friend. She was the only one who knew what was going on, the only one in New Mexico. I would take it to her house so that I was all prepared to leave and ready to go on a Friday morning without him knowing it. Even kissed him goodbye. I was all packed up. The only thing I had to do was put my suitcase in the car and grab my two chihuahuas and go. And he showed up! He showed up in the middle of the morning. I can't tell you how scared I was. One of the reasons I did this in secret was that I had a friend and co-worker who was murdered by her husband, and that was six months before this. He also killed himself. That just threw me for a loop.

NATALIE: That explains a ton! That explains your visceral fear in this situation. For sure!

LYNN: I was fearful of him. He'd never hit me, but I was fearful of the talk. I was fearful to bring anything up. I was just in fear. So when he showed up, I was in a lot more fear,



but I knew I had to face the music. He saw my suitcase and said, "It looks like somebody is taking a trip." I said, "Yep, I am. I am leaving you!" It's funny: another reason I was worried about telling him is because I thought he would say he loved me, don't do it, we'll work it out, or whatever. But none of that happened. It was just a "woe is me."

One big concern was what I was going to tell his denomination elders. He said, "This is your chance to be really mean." I said, "I'm not going to be mean to you. I'm not going to do that." But it's interesting that after I left him, I did want to tell someone. I thought somebody needed to know. I agonized over that. I had to ask several people I know. I even asked you, "Is it going to do any good? Should I tell them?" Everybody said, "No! It will not do a bit of good, and they won't believe you." It's not burning in my heart to do it, and I've done a lot of work on forgiveness, but I still wonder if his superiors should know because he has been a pastor at several places. But I doubt that they are going to understand or even care.

NATALIE: That's something you can always... That door is always open. You can revisit that eventually if you need to. Especially if you heard that something had happened, something else had happened. It is nice to have people come out of the woodwork and confirm your story. So if something else happened to another woman and you came forward and said, "Yes. This is what happened to me too..."

LYNN: Yes. I've thought about that. I've often said, "I wish she could have my phone number." That was one of the things. I reached out to his ex-wife probably three times asking for her side of the story. One time she did want to talk to me, but that day just didn't work out. The other two it was a flat-out "no." I wish I could have had the opportunity, but it probably wouldn't have made a difference. I probably still would have thought, "Well, I can change him." But no, I cannot change him.

NATALIE: Right. So Lynn, as we wrap up here, I'm curious to know where you are at today. Where is your life at today? If you could sit down and talk with these listeners (which I guess we are), what would you say to them as far as a piece of advice that you would have for them? Because so many of them are where you were for so many years just wondering, "Is this abuse? Is this not abuse? Does he love me? Does he not love me?"

I want to reiterate the fact that it does take time to go through the whole process of figuring all of that. It's okay that it takes time. If you are listening to this, don't feel like, "Oh my gosh, I've got to figure this out." You can take all the time you need to figure it out before you make any decisions or do anything. In the meantime, the work that you want to do on yourself is learning how to discover who you are. Rather than being a

Lego character in his world, you are a real flesh and blood person and you get to be your own person. Who are you? Do you like yourself? Do you have your own back? Those are the things you can work on while you are trying to figure out what is going on in your relationship. So Lynn, where are things at with you today, and what would you tell people?

LYNN: I am living in South Carolina and I live with family. They are building me a mother-in-law suite. I'm so excited!

NATALIE: Oh my word! That's awesome!

LYNN: I get to be with family in a nice, cheap apartment, or mother-in-law suite. My goal is to retire. But I work as a home health nurse, and I'm just working weekends. It's only thirty-two hours a week, so I have time during the week. What I want to do is help women. That's one of the things I've done. I took Give Her Wings Academy, and graduation is next Saturday. I'm very happy about that. I'm also going to be a facilitator in your book study and workbook.

NATALIE: I saw that. That's awesome.

LYNN: I'm very excited about that. I don't have any regrets because I never would have learned these things about myself if I hadn't been involved with somebody who was the way he was. What I learned about myself... I'm still working on it. I had to have EMDR and more counseling. I had coaching by Helena Knowlton, too. In fact, I reached out to you one time, and you said you weren't doing it anymore. I thought, "I just need to talk to somebody." So Helena was awesome and she's helped me a lot. But I had to have EMDR too. Helena and you had recommended it. That has really helped a lot.

Learning to love myself... I think you mentioned that. This quote, which I got from Polly Hamp's book, "Cherished": "If we choose to believe that we are unlovable, we will choose relationships in which we are not loved. If we believe we are not worth much, we will treat ourselves that way." I'm learning not to do that. One bit of advice that I would give to women is please do not, if you don't feel comfortable telling your husband, don't tell him you are leaving. I had another instance that was something similar to my co-worker that was murdered. The only thing I can say is please be safe. You may think it's just emotional abuse, but please get a safety plan.

NATALIE: So good! Thank you so much, Lynn, for sharing your story with us here on the Flying Free Podcast. For those of you listening, thank you for joining us today. Until next time, fly free!