

# The Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 330 - Spiritual Abuse, Scapegoating, and the Mask of Virtue

**Heads up, friend:** What you're about to read is a raw, unedited transcript straight from the robots. That means you'll find some weird words, funky punctuation, and moments that make you go, "Huh?" If you want the real experience (and to actually know what's going on), I recommend reading the polished article, listening to the full episode, or watching it on 1.5x speed with captions on. Your brain will thank you.

**Natalie:** Have you ever felt manipulated by someone who seems outwardly virtuous? Wondered how seemingly good people can cause profound harm. In this video, we're gonna dive into M Scott Peck's groundbreaking work called *People of the Lie*, and we'll uncover the hidden faces of evil that lurk behind masks of righteousness.

Stay tuned. What you discover might just change the way you see the world.

Today we're gonna talk about a book that has permanently shifted the way I understand evil, not the kind of evil with Cartoon cha characters and bad guys lurking in the dark. I'm talking about the kind of evil that walks into church every Sunday, serves on the worship team, volunteers at the food boundary, and then goes home and emotionally annihilates their spouse or child.

This book is called *People of the Lie* by m Scott Peck, and it's not just gonna be another book review. This is me handing you a key, a lens through which you may finally understand what you've been living through for years. Let's get into it. Scott Peck says this, the central defective evil is not the sin, but the refusal to acknowledge it.

So let's just think about that for a minute. Evil doesn't necessarily look like criminal behavior. It often can show up in people who don't raise their voice, who don't hit or throw things. In fact, they're often the ones who pride themselves on their self-control and calm demeanor while you are slowly unraveling inside.

Here's what this looks like in real life. A husband who refuses to attend marriage counseling because you are the one who has the problem. He's tried everything and you are just impossible to please. Or what about the church leader who corners you after the service to gently correct your attitude explaining that your concern about emotional abuse in your marriage is actually bitterness or unforgiveness.

Or how about this? A parent insists that they only ever did what was best for you, even as you quietly carried the trauma of years of shame and invalidation. These people might not yell, but they'll twist your words, deny your experience, and watch you melt down. Well, they stand there with a smile, and then they'll say, you are unstable.

Scott Peck spends a good portion of his book explaining how evil people use scapegoating as a way of preserving their image of perfection. Here's a classic example. You confront your husband about something hurtful, he said, and he shifts the blame immediately. Well, I wouldn't have said that or did that if you weren't constantly fill in the blank, or, well, maybe if you didn't push all my buttons, I wouldn't react that way.

How do you like my. My guy imp imitation. It's not very good. But anyway, suddenly you are the problem again. And over time you start to believe it because it's exhausting to live with someone who always finds a way to put the blame back on your shoulders. You just want peace. So you carry the blame and the shame you become the emotional landfill for the entire household.

You know, scapegoating and families is generational. Also, maybe you were always the difficult one. While your golden child sibling could do no wrong, if you expressed emotion, you were labeled dramatic. If you had had any needs that that needed to be met, you were called selfish. If you stood up for yourself, you were rebellious, and all the while your family's dysfunction kept rolling downhill until it landed on you.

Peck writes, this evil has to masquerade continually. It has to wear a mask and pose as good. Now this one hits home for many Christian women because the mask of virtue is often religion itself. This is the emotionally abusive husband who insists that he's the spiritual leader, even as he demeans, isolates and controls his wife behind closed doors.

Or what about the mother who tells you everything I did was out of love while guilting and gaslighting you into obedience your whole life? Or the church elder who tells a woman she's out of line for filing for divorce, even though her

husband has been psychologically tormenting her for years. These people don't need to convince you that they're good.

They need to convince everybody else, and once they've secured their image, then you become the threat. You are now the problem. You are now the one who's disrupting all the peace. So also then when you try to tell your story to these people, you are met with disbelief or they'll minimize what you say or offer you spiritual platitudes or say, well, he seems like such a great guy.

Maybe you just need to pray more. Have you considered your own role in this? Oh, if I had a nickel for every time I heard that one. You are now painted as the sinner for refusing to play along with a lie. This is where Peck takes it deeper. He says, evil is in opposition to life. It is that which opposes the life force.

So what does that mean? It means that evil is antithesis of truth. It chokes life out of your spirit. It makes you doubt what you see, what you feel, what you intrinsically know to be true. It says, well, that never happened when it absolutely did. It says you're overreacting when you're finally standing up for yourself.

It says you're crazy when you've simply reached your breaking point. I remember one sitting in a counselor's office trying to explain why I felt so broken in my marriage and hearing Well, you made a vow as if that promise. That I thought I was making to a very different person than who I actually ended up with, mattered more than me as a human being.

That's the kind of falsehood that evil thrives on when systems and appearances are more sacred and protected than the human soul. Peck also writes the evil, deny the existence of their own sin. Instead of experiencing guilt or shame, they see themselves as completely innocent and are therefore the perpetual victim, oh my word.

This is one of the most maddening dynamics to live with. You'll never gonna get a real apology. You might get fake apologies, but not real ones. If you do get an apology, it's the kind that leaves you feeling more confused than comforted. Well, I'm sorry that you felt that way. Well, I'm sorry, but I was just trying to help.

Well, I guess I can't do anything, right? What's the translation? This is still your fault. And the worst part. They genuinely believe that they are the victim. They'll tell people, I've done everything I can. She just isn't happy. They'll cry. Crocodile tears in front of the pastor while you sit there stunned trying to wrap

your brain around how they have once again managed to come off looking like the humble victim that is.

This is not forgetfulness, you guys. This is not obliviousness. This is evil. It is the refusal to face the truth about oneself, even when confronted with overwhelming evidence. So what do we do with all this? Peck says, we must make judgements if we are to survive and live well. In other words, it's not only okay to discern evil, it's actually necessary.

You don't need to scream from the rooftops or call someone the devil incarnate. You just need to recognize when a person's pattern of behavior is consistently deceptive. Blame shifting and truth twisting, and then you need to act according to that reality. Now this might mean setting firmer boundaries or refusing to engage in circular conversations or documenting interactions to keep your own sanity intact or walking away when the system won't change.

And trust me, the system is not gonna change anytime soon. This also means learning how to trust yourself. Again, you didn't imagine it. You're not crazy. You saw what you saw, you felt what you felt, and you were allowed to protect your peace. Now this book, people of the Lie, it gives language to the experiences many of us could never quite articulate.

It was written a long time ago, but it reads like it was written for women just like you and me today. Women who have spent years trying to be good enough, forgiving enough, wholly enough, and we still came up empty. If you are in the thick of it right now, and if you're tangled up in a relationship where nothing makes sense, where truth feels slippery and your identity feels like it's crumbling, I think this book will help you see, I.

And when you can see clearly, you can begin to reclaim your life. So if this resonates with you, I encourage you to grab a copy of people of the Lie by m Scott Peck, keep a highlighter nearby. Maybe even a notebook, maybe even a glass of wine. You're gonna have moments where you think, oh my word. This is exactly what I've been dealing with.

Listen, you don't have to figure this all out by yourself. Go to join flying free.com if you wanna connect with an entire community of women who get it, who have walked through these fires, who are walking through these fires and are coming out stronger and freer. You are not a person of the lie. You are a truth bearer, and you know what the truth does, right?

The truth sets us free.