

The Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 333 - Legal Separation Vs. Divorce

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: You've been told God hates divorce, that a legal separation is the Godlier option, but what if staying legally married is actually keeping you stuck in abuse? In this episode of Flying Free, we're pulling back the curtain on the difference between legal separation and divorce. Specifically for Christian women navigating emotionally and spiritually abusive marriages.

If you've ever felt torn between your faith and your freedom. This one's for you. Let's talk about what nobody else in the church is saying, but you desperately need to hear.

Today we're diving into a topic that many of you have asked about the difference between legal separation and divorce. We're gonna get into it, but I want you to know that this is just the tip of the iceberg of things you're gonna wanna learn about and understand before you file for divorce. Not after.

If you're thinking you might get a divorce down the road, why not educate yourself on what exactly that's gonna involve? I've got a course inside the Flying Free Kaleidoscope that covers all the bases from understanding biblical perspectives on divorce and remarriage to getting all the pieces in order so that you can stay as safe as possible once you file.

From hiring the right attorney to organizing your documentation, to communicating effectively with someone who doesn't likely wanna play fair. You're also gonna learn how to emotionally prepare for mediation in court, how to handle the grief and the rage that come with betrayal, and how to protect your kids in the middle of the chaos.

We've even included power packed workshops with financial experts and custody attorneys, so you can stop Googling in the middle of the night. Start

making clear, confident decisions. Each lesson is short enough to fit into your busy life, but rich enough to change the way you approach this entire process.

And maybe most importantly, you won't be walking this road alone. You'll hear from women who've lived it, professionals who get it, and a community that you'll have access to that will never judge you for choosing peace over pretending. So if you're ready to move forward with clarity, courage, and compassion for yourself, this course is waiting for you.

And it's just one of dozens of courses and workshops for Christian women navigating destructive marriages in addition to hundreds of coaching sessions and access to a community and several professional coaches, and all of this is available to you for only \$29 a month. Just go to join Flying Free dot com to learn more and sign up.

If you're listening to this, you're likely in a painful place right now. Maybe you're in a destructive marriage and trying to figure out your options, or maybe you've already decided you need to create some distance from your spouse, but you're wrestling with which legal path to take. I. I just wanna acknowledge right up front that this is both a practical and a deeply spiritual decision because let's face it, when you are a woman of faith in a difficult marriage, you're not just dealing with legal questions, you are also navigating what feels like a spiritual minefield.

What does God want? What will your church family think? And what about those passages about God hating divorce? Many of you have been told repeatedly that divorce is simply not an option for Christians. Full stop. Some of your communities might reluctantly accept legal separation as a compromise, suggesting that you can live separately for the rest of your life while technically remaining married.

But is this really what God wants for you is a lifetime of limbo, neither fully married, nor free to move forward the abundant life that Jesus talks about. Today I am gonna walk you through both options, legal, separation, and divorce. We're gonna talk about this with compassion, biblical understanding, and practical wisdom.

My goal is not to tell you what to do, but to give you information so that you can make the best decision for your own unique situation. So let's start with what legal separation actually is. Many people don't realize that legal separation is a formal legal process that's almost as vol involved as divorce.

It's not just moving out and living apart, although that's certainly part of it. A legal separation involves filing court papers, dividing assets and debts, establishing child custody arrangements, setting up support payments, and creating a legal framework for living apart. I. Now the key difference is that at the end of this process, you are still legally married.

You can't remarry. In many cases, you may be able to share health insurance still and in the eyes of your religious community, you have maintained your marital status. So they feel better. Some of you might be thinking, well, that sounds like the perfect solution. I can honor my marriage vows while creating safety for myself and my children, and for some ways women, it might be.

But before you decide, let's look at divorce as well. I. Divorce is the legal dissolution of a marriage. The process involves many of the same steps as legal separation. You file legal papers, you divide property and debts. You establish custody arrangements, and you set up support payments, but the end result is different when a divorce is finalized.

Your marriage. Legally over and you are free to remarry if you choose. Your finances become completely separate and legally speaking, you are no longer connected to your former spouse except through co-parenting responsibilities. If you share children. Now I can almost hear some of you squirming in your seats, but Natalie doesn't God hate divorce.

So let's talk about that because understanding what SCR scripture actually says, and not just what we've been told, it says is crucial to making a decision that you can find peace with. So there's a passage that's often quoted to women who are considering divorce in Malachi two 16, that in some translations, not all, some says God hates divorce.

But did you know that many biblical scholars agree that this is actually a mistranslation of the original Hebrew? More accurate translations say something like the man who hates and divorces his wife, says The Lord does violence to the one he should protect. And that's quite different, isn't it? This passage isn't condemning all divorce, it's condemning men who casually discard their wives out of hatred.

And here's something even more interesting that many Christians overlook in Deuteronomy 24, 1 through four, God actually institutes the certificate of divorce. Why? Not because he loves divorce, but because he loves people, especially vulnerable women. In ancient times, a woman without a certificate of divorce was trapped.

She couldn't remarry. She had no legal protection. She had no way to support herself by requiring men to give their wives certificates of divorce. God was actually protecting women and giving them a chance at a new life. So think about that for a moment. The same God who created marriage also created divorce, not as the ideal, but as a protection for the vulnerable in a fallen world.

Jesus himself acknowledges this in Matthew 19 when he explains that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of hearts. Some have interpreted this as Jesus tightening divorce restrictions, but many scholars see it differently. They see it as Jesus pointing out that divorce exists precisely because some hearts are hard and some marriages become destructive.

I'm not saying God takes divorce lightly. Marriage is meant to be a lifelong covenant, but the Bible shows a God who cares more about people than institutions and who prioritizes safety and wellbeing over rigid rules. So let's move beyond the theological considerations to look at the practical differences between these options.

First of all, financial. With legal separation, you may still be responsible for your spouse's debts. Did you know that? Now you might be able to keep health insurance benefits. Not always, but it depends on the health insurance policy and the company that your husband works for or his own company. And it also depends on the laws in your state tax filing status can become complicated.

Your financial futures do remain somewhat entangled. I. After a, if you decide down the road that you do want to pursue a legal divorce, everything gets back, goes back up for renegotiation. So things that seemed finalized in a, in a separation actually goes back up for renegotiation and things might have changed since then and it could end up going worse for you.

With divorce, there is a clean financial break except for support payments. There is a loss of shared benefits such as health insurance. You do have a clearer tax situation and now you have financial independence to build your own future. What about the emotional and psychological impact? This is what I, this is where I see many women struggle the most in a, with a long-term legal separation.

Research shows. In my own experience working with women bears this out that the limbo state of separation often creates ongoing stress and prevents true healing with a legal separation, you exist in this in-between state that can feel unsettling. There's often an unspoken question of, well will we? Will we not?

Your identity remains tied to your spouse moving forward emotionally can be difficult. With divorce, there is a clearer sense of closure. You can establish your new identity. The path to healing and moving forward is more defined and clear cut. You have the freedom to consider new relationships if you choose.

I have worked with some women who've chosen legal separation, believing that it was the more godly option, only to find themselves stuck in emotional limbo. For years, they couldn't fully grieve, they couldn't fully heal. They were in many ways still defined by a broken, destructive relationship. What about the impact on children, because this is a big concern for most mothers that I work with.

What message does each option send to your kids? I think it's something to consider with legal separation. Children may hold out hope for your reconciliation. There can be confusion about the family status. They witness a marriage that exists on paper, but not actually in reality. With divorce, there is clarity about the family structure.

Children learn that unhealthy relationships. Should end. They see a parent who values themselves enough to make hard choices, and they learn that starting over is possible. They take this with them into their adult lives. These are hard lessons that they learn, but these are important lessons that they'll need to learn eventually.

So I wanna pause here to address something important because many women do stay in unhealthy or even abusive marriages, and their whole reason for staying is for the children. But children are perceptive. They see everything and what they learn from watching and observing your choices in your life matters and will impact them as they grow up into adulthood.

If you stay in limbo indefinitely through legal separation, at least consider what that message may be sent, the message that you may be sending through that, that maybe that women should accept less, that marriage is just something to endure, that it's okay to live half of a life. On the other hand, making the difficult decision to divorce when necessary.

Can teach children about boundaries. Self-respect. The courage to start over. It can show them that God's plan for our lives is not meant to be a life of perpetual suffering, as if that is somehow spiritual or holy. God's plan for our lives is responsibility, adulthood and wholeness. All right. We're going to talk about the church thing now because I know, um, there is a lot of pressure from churches to, uh, not get divorced.

In fact, they'll actually excommunicate women who get divorced and, but, but they will, many of them will reluctantly tolerate women who are legally separated. And this creates a terrible bind because you wanna honor God, you wanna be part of your faith community, but you also feel like you need to protect yourself and your children as you should.

So first let me say this clearly. I believe that a church that accepts an indefinite legal separation, which the Bible AC actually speaks against in Deuteronomy, but they condemn divorce. They are likely more concerned with appearances than with the wellbeing of human lives. They are prioritizing the letter of the law.

Over the spirit, Jesus had strong words for religious leaders who put heavy burdens on people's shoulders without lifting a finger to help them. He consistently sided with the vulnerable over rigid religious rules. If your church is pressuring you to remain in a legal separation indefinitely, rather than pursue divorce and the possibility of a healthy future, you might need to ask yourself, is this truly representing the heart of God for my life?

And how much do we really value true, authentic Christian marriage? If this is what we're promoting, if we're promoting abusive marriages and believing that they should remain intact. So let's look at what research tells us about women who choose legal separation versus divorce after leaving difficult marriages.

Studies consistently show that women who remain in the limbo of long-term legal separation often report higher levels of ongoing stress, difficulty forming a clear identity post-marriage, challenges in establishing healthy boundaries with the ex-spouse, prolonged grief that doesn't fully resolve where.

Whereas in contrast, women who pursue divorce typically report an initial period of intense grief followed by acceptance. Greater clarity about their identity and future healthier boundaries with the ex-spouse, because things are a little more clear and more complete emotional healing over time. Now, this does not mean that divorce is easy.

It is definitely not easy, but from a mental health perspective, long-term, the clarity it provides often does lead to better long-term outcomes. So. As you consider which path is right for you, here are some questions that you can reflect on. What do I truly believe God wants for my life, suffering or healing?

Am I choosing legal separation because I genuinely believe that it's best and it aligns with my core values, or because I'm afraid of what other people are going

to say and how they're going to judge me? And is that a reason that you really want to, you know, make a, a decision based on someone other people's judgment of you?

Do I hope for reconciliation or am I certain that the marriage is over long term? How might each option impact my children's understanding of relationships and their futures? Can I heal and move forward while remaining legally tied to my spouse? Maybe some people can, I think a lot of people can't. And then finally, what would true freedom look like?

In my particular situation, I. Now, again, these aren't easy questions. They require deep reflection, prayer, and possibly the support of a trusted therapist who understands both your faith concerns and the realities of your actual situation. Now, I've walked this road myself. I didn't legally separate, but I physically separated believing that I was honoring God by refusing to divorce, even though my marriage was destructive.

But what I discovered for me in that limbo state was that I couldn't heal. I was not able to move forward. I was living half a life defined by a broken relationship rather than by God's calling on my life. So when I finally made the difficult decision to divorce, I did face judgment from many people in my church.

I was actually excommunicated. I. But I also experienced internally, which was far more important to me, a freedom and clarity that had alluded me really my whole life. I could establish healthy boundaries, finally. I could grieve fully and then heal. And most importantly, I could show my children what it looks like to take responsibility for your own life, value your, and value yourself enough to make hard choices.

Now, this isn't to say that my path should be your path. I think each situation is unique and each person is responsible for their own choice. But I want you to know that God's love for you is not contingent on your marital status. At least understand that his plan for you is for your wholeness and not just for you to like barely survive through your life.

Here's the bottom line. Legal separation can be a good temporary measure. If you're, while you're discerning next steps, if you want to, you will have to go through the, the whole process twice if you decide to do this, um, or especially if there's genuine hope for reconciliation. But as a permanent solution, it often leaves women in limbo, neither fully married in the any meaningful sense of the word, and also not free to move forward.

Now divorce, while difficult and painful does provide clarity and closure, it acknowledges the reality that a covenant has been broken, not by divorce, but by abuse, and it creates space for new beginnings. Whatever you choose, remember this God is for you. I don't care what your church says or what your friends say, or what your Bible study leader says, God is for you the same God.

Who created marriage also allowed for divorce as a protection for the vulnerable. And in Jesus Christ there is grace that covers all of our broken places, including broken marriages. Again, maybe not in your church, but in Jesus Christ, and that's what matters. You are not defined by your marital status.

You are defined by your identity as a beloved daughter of God, and that is never gonna change no matter what anyone says. I hope this has given you some clarity as you navigate this difficult decision. Remember, you don't have to walk this road alone. I have this ridiculously affordable education and support resource that's gonna help you prepare for divorce, give you tools and strategies, and support you emotionally, educationally, and spiritually every single day as you walk that journey.

Just go to join [Flying Free dot com](https://flyingfree.com) to to learn more and to register. Until next time, fly free.