

# The Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 335 - Why Do I Feel Sorry for My Mean Husband?

**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:** What if the reason you keep feeling sorry for him is the very thing keeping you stuck. In this episode of Flying Free, we are unpacking the emotional trap that keeps Christian women in abusive marriages and why your compassion might be pointed in the wrong direction.

Today we're gonna explore something that I think keeps so many Christian women stuck in a crazy cycle of emotional abuse. It's something I struggled with myself for decades and I still hear about it almost daily from women in our community. And here it is, you feel angry or upset when your husband mistreats you.

And in that moment you can see things pretty clearly and even name what's happening sometimes, Hey, this isn't okay, this is abusive. Until he gets nice again, and then suddenly you feel bad. You feel guilty for some reason, not for your about yourself or for yourself, but for him. Does that sound familiar?

I know what this feels like because I lived it. I breathed it for 25 years. This was my reality. Today we're gonna talk about why this happens, what it costs you, and how to flip the script so that you can direct your compassion toward the right person. In this story, I. So first, let's paint the picture of how this typically unfolds.

Maybe you're going about your day folding laundry or helping your son with his homework, or trying to answer an important email. When your toddler's throwing food all over the place and then it happens, your husband says something cruel. Maybe something dismissive. Maybe he ignores you when you're speaking or he gives you a look that makes you feel like you're about two inches tall and you feel that familiar sting of hurt and something inside of you says, this is not right.

I'm not crazy. That was mean, and you get angry. Maybe you even say something to him, and when you do things escalate and there is a conflict, he then turns the tables and blames you for his mean behavior. He ha he had to be mean because of this, that, or the other thing about you. So you argue back, you defend yourself.

Maybe you even do what I did twice in my 25 year marriage. I got so mad. I threw one of my prized collector's teacups against the wall. I lost two teacups doing this. I think I thought I was sending him a message about how important this was to me, that he treat me with some respect and kindness, but the memo never got picked up.

Just the broken pieces of my teacups. But then after a while, things cool off right and suddenly he's sweet again. He tells you. He wants to watch a movie with you or he brings you some flowers or he didn't mean it that way. Maybe he quotes a Bible verse about forgiveness or brings up last Sunday sermon.

He might even shut a tear. And just like that, your righteous anger packs its bags and leaves town. And what moves in its place, guilt, compassion, confusion. You feel bad for him, and this is where it gets wild. You feel bad for him because he hurt you and you called him out on it and he didn't like that. I think we need to think about that and let it sink in.

Why do we do this? Why do victims of emotional and spiritual abuse feel sorry for the very people who hurt them over and over again? Well, for starters, we were taught to do this as Christian women. Many of us were fed a steady diet of spiritual half truths. Like forgive 70 times seven love bears. All things be a Proverbs 31 woman, which I'm convinced has been misinterpreted as code for.

Do everything for everyone. Look perfect while you're doing it and don't you dare complain. We were taught that if we just pray harder, love more deeply, submit more completely, suffer more quietly, that we will be rewarded someday somehow by someone. We were taught that being a good wife means giving the benefit of the doubt until you're dead inside.

It means seeing the potential in your husband, even when decades of evidence point to the contrary. It's no wonder that when he's cruel, we feel hurt, but then when he is nice again, we feel like we were the problem for being upset in the first place. And honestly, that cycle is familiar. It's predictable.

It feels safe to our system in a twisted way because of its familiarity and also because the alternative, if we were to really look at it, is terrifying. Here's what I

mean. If you let yourself feel all the way through your anger without redirecting it back towards yourself, you might bump into something far more painful.

Grief. Grief, that this relationship may never be what you hoped. Grief that you are not actually loved in the way that you deserve grief. That your dream of a beautiful, healthy marriage is dying and you might have to let it go. I don't know about you, but for years I would do almost anything to avoid feeling that pain, to avoid facing that grief.

I stayed in that cycle of feeling sorry for him. Every time I started to feel sorry for myself, because if I stopped feeling compassion for him, I would have to face the black hole of sorrow in my own heart. I would have to reckon with the truth that I was not okay. My marriage was not okay, and no amount of positive thinking Bible verse quoting or sermons on submission was gonna fix that.

The truth is, most women in abusive relationships don't just wake up one day and say, I'm done. No. We wake up a thousand times and say, that hurt, and then we go back to sleep because waking up fully is too painful. And maybe you're thinking, well, Natalie, I hear you, but if I open that door to grief, I don't think I'll ever come back out.

I get it. I really do. Grief can feel like this dark, bottomless pit. Like if you let yourself go there, you'll dissolve, you'll be consumed, you'll fall apart, and there'll be nothing left to put it back together. But here's the truth I've learned from walking this journey myself as well as alongside of thousands of other women.

Grief is not what destroys us. Denial is what destroys us. Grief actually reveals what denial wants to hide. And grief doesn't come to punish you. It comes to set you free, but you have to be willing to walk through it. So what does grief actually look like when you have been emotionally abused? It might look like letting yourself cry without apologizing for your tears.

It looks like telling a trusted friend. This hurts more than I wanna admit. It looks like sitting in the discomfort of what now without rushing to fix it or make excuses, and it doesn't have to happen all at once. You don't have to throw open every door in your heart on the same day. You can crack a window.

You can grieve in layers, you can grieve in waves. One page in your journal, one tear in the shower, one whispered prayer when the house is quiet and you can finally hear yourself think. You don't need to be brave enough to handle the

whole mountain of grief all at once. You just need to take one step and then another, and then another.

Here's the miracle that I want you to know. Grief is not the end. It's actually the beginning. Grief is what love looks like when it's been through war. It's the proof that you cared, that you hoped and that you tried. And when you let yourself grieve what you never had, you make space for what you still can have, like peace within yourself, clarity about what's really happening.

Real love, the kind that doesn't hurt. A relationship with God that doesn't gaslight you. A relationship with yourself deep inside your core, that finally feels safe again. So no, you won't drown in grief. What you'll do is pass through it. And on the other side is you still here still whole and finally free.

One of the turning points for me was when I started writing things down, I couldn't hold it all in my head anymore. My brain was foggy from all the gaslighting, the double talk, the constant walking on eggshells. So I journaled every cruel comment, every manipulative moment, every dismissive attitude. And when I read it back, it was like someone had punched me in the gut.

I couldn't deny it anymore. There it was in black and white, a pattern, a cycle that I could see happening over and over and over again. It was a slow erosion of my soul, and I had to ask myself a hard question if this was happening to one of my daughters. What I tell her, you should feel sorry for him.

Would I tell her to try harder, pray more, submit better? Or would I tell her? She deserves to be treated with respect and kindness always, not just when he feels like it. And that was the moment that something shifted inside of me. That was the moment that I started to feel compassion for me. Not in a self-pitying, wallowing kind of way, but in that, you know, in that compassionate Jesus sits with you in your pain kind of way.

And that was the beginning of my rescue. Not because someone else swooped in to save me, but because I finally started to see myself as worth saving. So let's talk about why we often feel sorry for the very people who hurt us, because I think that there are several powerful forces at work. First of all, have you ever heard of trauma bonding?

It's the emotional attachment that forms when you cycle between abuse and intermittent reinforcement. So when someone hurts you and then is nice to you, your brain gets a rush of relief chemicals that can become addictive. It's like

emotional heroin. You become biologically attached to the very person who's causing you pain.

This isn't weakness, it's just neuroscience. Secondly, for many of us, our faith has been weaponized against us because as we've mentioned, we've been told that good Christian women forgive without limit. They cover a multitude of sins. They endure all things. They're gentle and quiet. They die to themselves.

They submit in all things, but here's what they don't tell us. Jesus never asked women to submit to abuse, and he never glorified suffering for the sake of suffering, and he certainly never told victims to feel sorry for those who harm them. In fact, Jesus spoke quite directly to people who use their religious authority to burden others.

He called 'em names. He called them whitewashed tombs, and a brood of vipers. He was not playing around. Another reason that we feel sorry for our abusers is that we've been trained to minimize harm. Well, it wasn't that bad. I mean, other women have it worse. At least he doesn't hit me. I hear this in the, in our private kaleidoscope forum all the time.

People will come in and they'll be new and they'll be like, oh man, when I read what other people are going through, I just feel like my situation isn't half as bad. Maybe I don't even belong here. And we're like, oh no. Everyone is like, oh no, you belong here. If you stay and you hang out long enough, you will start to see 'cause you will stop minimizing what's happening to you.

Now this minimizing serves two purposes. First of all, it helps us cope with the unbearable reality, and then it also keeps us from having to make hard choices. Because if I can convince myself that his behavior isn't really abuse or it's not really that bad that he's just stressed, or maybe he's wounded or misunderstood, then I don't have to face the grief of acknowledging what's really going on.

Then I don't have to make any difficult decisions that might upset my life and my children's lives, and I get it. I was there for many, many years. I did not wanna go there. Then fourth, many abusers, specifically target empathetic, compassionate women. I've talked about this in one of my articles. Your ability to feel deeply for others and to have empathy is, is beautiful.

It's one of your strengths, but in an abusive relationship, that empathy gets hijacked and used against you. So you become the emotional caretaker, the one who understands when no one else does, the one who sees his potential and his good heart. Beneath all of the hurtful behavior and your capacity for

compassion, that beautiful thing that you have inside of you, it ends up becoming your prison.

When you consistently feel sorry for someone who abuses you, you end up paying an enormous price first, you lose your sense of reality. I. When you're constantly reframing his cruel behavior as something that you should feel compassion for, you start to doubt your own perceptions. Is it really that bad?

Am I overreacting? Maybe I'm the problem. Second, you lose your voice because every time you swallow your anger and replace it with feeling sorry for him, a little piece of your voice dies. You learn over time to silence yourself before he even has to. And then third, you lose yourself. After years of redirecting your compassion away from yourself and toward him.

You forget who you are. You forget that you are a human with needs and desires and gifts and a personhood, and all of those things fade into the background as you focus on centering his story over the top of your own. And finally you lose time. Precious, irreplaceable time that could be spent actually living rather than just surviving.

If you are still stuck in that cycle of feeling sorry for him, while neglecting yourself, let me speak directly to your heart. You're allowed to feel sorry for yourself. You're allowed to grieve what you've endured. You are allowed to be angry that he's hurt you. You're allowed to stop pretending that he didn't mean it, and that that's enough, though, that that belief is enough to erase years of harm.

You are allowed to believe that your pain matters more than his comfort, and if the people in your life don't get that, you can still get that. You can start today. Write it down. Say it out loud. Tell a safe friend. Join a community of women who understand like our Flying Free kaleidoscope community. You can go to [join Flying Free dot com](http://joinFlyingFree.com) to learn more about that you are worthy of your own compassion.

And here's the truth I want you to carry with you from today forward. The moment that you start feeling sorry for you and having compassion on you instead of him. That's the moment that you're gonna start healing. That's the moment that you stop waiting to be rescued by some force out here or some person out here, and you start rescuing yourself.

You are the one. You are the one that God is equipped with the ability to rescue yourself. He wants that for you. Let me offer some practical steps for

redirecting your compassion back to where it belongs to yourself. First of all, you could start a reality journal document what exactly happens in your relationship, not the excuses, not the explanations, or the ways that you deny or justify, or make or make up, you know, reasons why.

But just the facts. Just write down the facts of what happened, the date, the time, what was said or done, and then read it back later at a different time with fresh eyes. Read it back later when he's being nice. Number two, practice self validation. So when something hurts, try looking in the mirror deep into your own eyes and saying to yourself, that hurt.

I didn't deserve that. You could even say it this way. You didn't deserve that while you're looking in the mirror, you didn't deserve that. Your feelings make sense. You don't need anyone else to confirm your reality, but you do need to know for yourself that you've confirmed it. Number three, create a feelings allowed zone.

Maybe it's your car or a specific chair or room in your house. And when you're in that space, give yourself permission to feel everything that's going through your body without judgment. And a fourth idea is to find a safe person. You don't need a crowd. You just need one safe person who's not gonna rush to tell you to forgive, submit more or pray harder.

You need one person who has a capability and the emotional maturity to sit with you in your pain without trying to fix it. Number five, start small with self-care. Self-care isn't selfish. It is stewardship of the one life that God gave you. What's one small thing that you can do today to show compassion to yourself?

We have a whole course among many courses, but one of our courses is about self-care. How do you take care of yourself? And no, it's not bubble baths and bond bonds, it's something far more critical and important than that. And so you can join Flying Free and take that course among others. Um, if you go to join Flying Free dot com and the sixth idea is to examine your theology.

Ask yourself, does my understanding of God right now as I was taught by people when I was growing up, or maybe in my church or books I've read, does that understanding make room for my pain and my reality? Does that understanding of God allow for me to protect myself? If not, if my theology does not allow for that, then it might be time to revisit what you've been taught.

We have a course inside of the Flying Free Kaleidoscope about that as well. Now, I know this journey isn't easy. Some days choosing yourself is gonna feel

like climbing a mountain with weights on your ankles. Some days you are gonna slip back into old patterns of feeling sorry for him. I still do that. I have two exes now, and I still feel sorry for them.

That's okay. Healing isn't linear. It's messy and it's beautiful and hard. And also what I've learned is that I can have compassion on my exes and also hold space and have compassion for me too, and that's also a very beautiful thing. I want you to know that on the other side of redirecting, your compassion is a life that you can't even imagine right now.

A life where you're not constantly managing someone else's emotions, where your own feelings also matter and where you can breathe freely and love genuinely. I know because I'm living it now, and if I could go back and tell my younger self one thing, it would be this. Natalie, you are worth fighting for.

Start with feeling compassion for yourself, not him. The rest will follow. Thank you for listening. If this episode resonated with you, would you consider sharing it with someone who, someone else who might need to hear it? Your share could be the first step in someone else's journey to freedom. Another way of indirectly sharing is by leaving a rating and review on your favorite podcast app, so that the podcast platforms will show or suggest, or recommend this podcast to more women just like you as a recommendation.

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