

HOW DO I KNOW IF DIVORCE IS THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR ME?

NATALIE: In Episode 316 of the Flying Free Podcast, we are going to dive into the question of whether or not divorce is worth it, especially for women who have endured long term emotional and psychological abuse. This episode will cover the emotional, physical, financial, and social disadvantages of staying in an abusive marriage, as well as the extensive challenges encountered during and after the divorce process.

I'm going to give you some thought provoking questions to consider when deciding if divorce is the right choice for you. I want to empower you to make an informed decision about your future.

Welcome to Episode 316 of the Flying Free Podcast. I just want to read you a review that came in and she said this: "I've been in a painful and confusing marriage for 37 years, but after three and a half months here in Flying Free, I am zero confused. The courses are like CPR and intensive care." Okay, so if, if you have been in a painful and confusing marriage for a long time, like this member and like hundreds of our other members.

I feel like Christian women especially just really give their relationships their all. And they are so committed that it often takes decades for them to finally just go, I don't know if I can sustain this anymore. But if that sounds like you, and you need CPR and intensive care, consider joining us. You can go and learn more by going to joinflyingfree.com. All right. Today we're going to be talking about the question that I get a lot in our program, in the Kaleidoscope. The Kaleidoscope is our private forum where we interact with one another. Those are the members and the, the professional coaches that work within my program. And one of the questions that comes up a lot is, is it, is divorce worth it?

You know, I mean, they're in these painful marriages. And they, I remember, this is going to sound terrible, but I've, from what I've, you know, talked to other women about, I think this is actually a common thought. We're trying to figure out how to get out, but divorce is not an option. So what is the logical next choice?

It's death. I used to wish I would die. And sometimes I wished my ex husband would die, which when you think about it, That's so much worse than just getting a divorce, if you stop and think about it. But that is where we go when we have this programming that says that divorce is, you know, the, is the equivalent of basically sending all of your children and yourself to hell.

And I don't believe it means that, and we've talked about that in many other podcast episodes, and I've introduced you to people who have studied this in the Bible and have presented a different way of looking at it. The motivations behind People who try to teach that is basically to keep women in oppressed relationships, where they can be controlled and managed.

And that is something that's been going on throughout all of human history. Unfortunately, you know, I wish that it wasn't part of the Christian mindset, but unfortunately it is. So anyway, we're going to talk today about whether or not divorce is worth it. So first of all, we're going to start by talking about living with abuse.

Is living with abuse worth it? I mean, like, why don't we ask that question? I think we should ask that question first. So here are some disadvantages that a woman has when she's living with abuse. Constant fear, anxiety, and stress. Development of mental health issues like depression. PTSD or low self esteem.

We have a complex post traumatic stress disorder course inside of the Flying Free program. And here's some other ones. Feeling trapped or hopeless due to the manipulation and control, which can actually cause PTSD. Guilt and self blame imposed by the abuser. One of the things we do inside Flying Free is learn how to uh, detach from what the abuser believes about us.

And to build our own view of ourselves based on God's view of us. Emotional isolation. Uh, sometimes the abuser will prevent his victim from forming healthy connections with other people, including sometimes even their own families. They also have some physical disadvantages. Some people are at risk of physical harm or injury from their abuser.

Not just on the outside though. I think the women that I work with are mostly dealing with emotional abuse. And so these women are dealing with long term health issues that are caused by the stress of living in an emotionally abusive relationship long term. Some people have lack of access to medical care due to the abuser's control.

This might seem kind of minor by comparison. I was allowed to go to the doctor and my kids, our kids were allowed to go to the doctor. I don't think my ex husband would have ever prevented that from happening, but I really needed a chiropractor for many years. Because of the years, the, I was on bed rest for almost two years of my life.

And my back and my bones and my butt muscles were atrophied. And so I really could have used some chiropractic care, but I was denied that and told that that was not

necessary for me. So just, you know, it doesn't even have to be major, but it can be things like that. I, I, maybe some people would, maybe I'm minimizing that.

I don't know. But here are some social disadvantages. Um, we had already mentioned the isolation from family or friends or community due to the abuser's tactics. Um, this could even come in the form of, I remember in my past relationship, my ex told me once that other people at church viewed me the same way that he did.

And this caused me to feel so much shame. I wondered if it was true because I. That wasn't who I was, and I didn't think that that, that people were viewing me that way, but how did I know? So he played on some of my deep, dark, internal fears about in social situations and, um, and that caused me to want to back off of relationships because I was afraid of people get to know me, they're going to reject me emotionally the way my husband does.

Um, the stigma or judgment of others if the abuse becomes public knowledge. So even when I would try to get help, I was very, very embarrassed and ashamed to try to get help because I thought if I was a good wife, I would be able to know how to prevent this from happening. My husband wouldn't be treating me this way, or I would know how to manage his behavior towards me.

And then also loss of social support networks due to fear or shame. Even when I did file for divorce, my sister and her husband actually cut me out of their lives. And because that's just not done. You just don't get, you just don't divorce your husband. And then ultimately I ended up losing my whole family around that sort of situation.

What about financial disadvantages of living with an abuser? Abusers often control the economics and limit access to the money or they'll dole it out. Or they will prevent you from getting an education to, you know, to further your career or prevent you from being employed. Sometimes it's the opposite.

I've had friends and people that I've known where their abuser actually says, I'll be the stay at home dad. And they put their wife to work and she's bearing the entire economic burden while he spends all of the money on, on ridiculousness or on fun trips or on. Alcohol or on gambling or on, um, toys for himself, um, loss of financial independence is a big one.

And that makes it hard to leave the relationship then as well when you're financially dependent on someone else. It's also debt or financial instability caused by what the abuser is doing and the decisions that he's making. Also, there are personal and

develop, you know, personal development disadvantages.

You, an, an abuse victim loses their self identity. And it's, it's difficult for them to make progress, forward progress in their personal growth because they're constantly being belittled and controlled by this other person. They're constantly being gaslit. They're being told that they're one thing when they're, and they're actually another.

And so their confidence is constantly being eroded. They also have a reduced ability to pursue their goals or their education or their hobbies that they want to, that would bring them joy. They have difficulty trusting other people and forming healthy future relationships. And by the way, when I'm giving you these, um, these examples, no one person, well, maybe someone has all of these.

But most of the time we have kind of a smorgasbord of these as options. It kind of really depends on, you know, what the personality of the person that we're living with, our partner, depends on our personality. It depends on the dynamics and the circumstances of what works. And, um, and they will figure out, they'll study you and figure out what works to get control over you.

And then they'll use those things against you. And they're usually very positive personality traits that you have that would be very powerful and bring a lot of really amazing things to the table in a, in a healthy relationship. But unfortunately they will exploit those positive, uh, Aspects about you to their advantage to control you.

What about the impact on children if you've got children in the home? Exposure even to emotional abuse can harm children emotionally and psychologically. It increases their risk of normalizing abusive behavior and then eventually becoming victims themselves or becoming a perpetrator themselves. It disrupts their What would be a healthy, normal, stable, and nurturing environment that's necessary for the development of our, of our children.

There are also legal and safety disadvantages to being in any kind of abusive relationship. First of all, we're afraid of retaliation if we try to get help. Some women have to worry about escalated violence if they try to leave. If you leave, now you have to navigate the legal system to get protection or to get help or custody of your children.

There is potential harassment or stalking after separation or even divorce. We've seen that. There's a lack of freedom to be yourself. There's a lack of freedom for you to have your own voice. Victims often question their reality, which can make you feel like you're going crazy in your head. There's a lot of feelings of confusion and self doubt.

There's this feeling that you have to pretend in order to play nice in the relationship and keep things status quo. It's emotionally exhausting to be in a relationship like this. You are bearing the responsibility for the relationship. And often unable to build your own desired relationships with people that are more life giving for you.

You're often unable to live where you want to live or in an environment that is also life giving for you. And you have a lack of agency and autonomy. Now, all of that sounds pretty awful, right? So we might think, Oh, I'll just get a divorce and it will all be better. Actually, some people might tell you that.

They might say, Well, if you would just divorce him, then your life would be so much better. But I think we need to talk about what divorce, what we face when we go through a divorce as well. Here's our, here are some things that you are going to experience during the divorce process. And after we talk about that, I'm going to talk, we're going to talk about like, what you experience even after the divorce is over, okay?

But first, during the divorce process, A victim can be afraid of retaliation. Sometimes the abuser will escalate their threats or their violence, as we mentioned earlier, during the divorce process. They do not like it when their abuse target is trying to swim away because now they don't have control over you and that is very upsetting to them.

There is a lot of emotional trauma during the divorce process. You will sometimes be required to relive painful memories while you're addressing the abuse either in court or in mediation. Or even just writing down your story for, you know, for your attorney. You may experience guilt or shame because there's a social stigma, especially if you are in a Christian, you know, a Christian community, where there's definitely a social stigma around getting a divorce.

And not only getting a divorce, but actually being the one who initiates that divorce process. That is a huge no no in most Christian communities. Um, you also might be blaming yourself because you are the one who made the choice to end the marriage, not understanding or not fully recognizing yet that the marriage was actually over when the abuse started.

That's when the marriage actually ended for all practical purposes. Um, loss of identity. You're going to have difficulty possibly rediscovering yourself after years of control and manipulation. There are also financial challenges when you're going through divorce. You are no longer sharing income or financial support.

You're not probably, some of you will lose financial support. Uh, there are obviously

huge legal costs and expenses related to lawyers, court fees, settlements, the whole nine yards. It's expensive to get a divorce. There are asset division issues that come up. So you might have a hard time getting a fair distribution of your property, especially if the abuser has a business on the side or has assets that you're not aware of.

Now you, there are ways to get help for that. And we do have a Preparing for Divorce course within the Flying Free program, which I highly recommend. you going through if you're considering getting a divorce so that you are prepared in advance and you can overcome some of these hurdles that are naturally going to occur during the divorce process.

And then of course there, there can be lingering effects of financial manipulation during the marriage because there, there could be debt in the marriage because of the financial abuse that might've been happening. Now that all comes to a head in the divorce process because all of that comes to the surface and needs to be addressed.

Um, so finances. Also, what about custodial challenges? You, I know I struggle with this tremendous fear of the abuser gaining custody or visitation rights and exposing children to continued harm. Now, I didn't have a, well, actually, I should be careful because I hate to minimize what I went through, but there was some physical issues going on there, and I was worried about my kids in their dad's care.

Um, there, what about difficulty proving abuse in court, especially if you are in the demographic that I work with, which is women who are dealing mostly with emotional and psychological abuse, um, there's, it's very difficult to prove that in court. And in fact, the court's not really interested in that kind of abuse.

They're so used to seeing, um, You know, gross physical violence and sexual molesting, molestation, and, you know, things like that are, they're, they're already kind of deadened or, um, what's the word I'm looking for? Um, it's like, those things are coming across their desk all the time. So then when someone comes and says, yeah, I'm being emotionally abused, they're just like, they're not even going to blink at that.

And so it's not even something that I recommend that you talk about, um, all the, most of the time in the divorce process, at least not in those terms. I teach you a different way of talking about it, um, in the Preparation for Divorce course that is, uh, that is more palatable in court. But, um, that is something that you, that you face, a challenge that you're going to face during the divorce process.

Also, there's, there can be so many delays. in walking through this process. Usually

delays and obstacles and roadblocks put into place by the abusive individual that you're trying to get divorced from. Um, there's delays in obtaining protective orders if you need those, or even just finalizing the divorce.

And then abusers will use legal tactics that they learn from their attorneys and from websites online to prolong the process or maintain control of the process. And that can be very destabilizing for the victim. You also have safety challenges during the divorce process. As I mentioned earlier, there's an increased risk of stalking, threats or violence during or after the divorce, relocation difficulties.

You might need to move for safety reasons, but you might be constrained from moving because of finances or custody laws, and then fear of repercussions. Concerns that your abuser, and we've seen this even in our forum, concerns that the abuser might be targeting family members or friends or pets in order to take it, get revenge on you.

We see this a lot in our Christian circles, social and relationship challenges when you're going through a divorce. So you may have a lack of support. I know when I filed for divorce, that was when my church said, okay, we're done with you. We wash our hands of you. We are going to excommunicate you. We don't want anything to do with you now because now you're getting a divorce for sure.

You've made that final decision. We're done with you. So you can feel very isolated if your friends or your family or your church are unsupportive. And either unaware of the abuse or not caring about the abuse, most of the time it's just simply, they just simply don't believe you. There is a lot of judgment and there's a stigma, of course.

You're facing criticism for leaving the marriage. Uh, it's not just religious communities that do this. Sometimes it can be cultural communities that will do this as well. And it's going to cause you to have difficulty then trusting yourself and sometimes trusting other people. And so when you move on to form new relationships, after you've experienced this deep type of betrayal and abuse, that can be very challenging.

I know I personally have struck. That's one of the biggest things that I've had to struggle with. I'm seven years out from my divorce, nine years out from filing. And you know, everything that happened with my family of origin and my church is now several years behind me. And yet, I still struggle with trusting people and trusting relationships because I thought that I had good relationships and then found out that they were just, they were not.

Actually solid relationships. They were built on or predicated on my cooperating and

giving something to those relationships rather than being a two way street. There's also the emotional toll on our children. And so we're trying to, we need to try to help our children cope with the divorce, um, and potential separation from one parent that can be very draining for us as mothers.

Sometimes there's difficulty accessing shelters or accessing affordable counseling or legal aid due to the high demand right now and the availability of those resources. There is a bias in the legal system. Judges and mediators can often misunderstand or not be educated or, or realize the huge problem when it comes to the dynamics of abuse.

And, um, prioritizing the safety of the children, um, because there are, again, because of this bias. And then, of course, that the traditional or societal expectations discouraging divorce in the first place. All right. So all of that is, you know, when the divorce is going on, but now what, what about after the divorce is over?

The challenges are not over just because you're divorced. We have women going through the program who will get a divorce and they will share that they've gotten a divorce. And of course we encourage them and we say congratulations and we high five them and they are in a better place, but they still have big challenges.

And here's some of the things that you face after your divorce is over. First of all, healing from the trauma. Processing those emotional scars from the marriage and the divorce process takes time. Loneliness, adjusting to life without a partner, that can feel very isolating and very, um, it can feel very uncomfortable, especially I know a lot of women that I work with, they got married right out of high school or right out of college.

So they're, so they really haven't experienced life yet without a partner. And they're not really sure what that looks like or how they can make that work and find joy and fulfillment and happiness. They've kind of poured their whole lives into this other person and managing this other person. And they're not really sure how to live on their own.

So along with that, then just struggling with who they are, their identity, rediscovering their goals and their individuality after years in a defined role as a wife can be very challenging. And again, they continue to deal with this fear of being judged and criticized by others. For now being a divorcee.

There are also financial challenges when you are divorced, unless you have a lot of

money and money wasn't an issue. Most of the time when you split finances between two adults, it is going to, it's going to, um, create challenges financially for both of those parties. And if you were a stay at home mom, those all those years, maybe even homeschooling, You, maybe you went to school, uh, like I went to school to be a teacher, but then I only taught for one year before I got married and became a stay at home mom.

And I home educated my kids, but other than that, I didn't keep my teaching license. If I wanted to go back to teaching, I would have to go back to school. You know, there's all kinds of, of, uh, career setbacks even that you now face once your divorce is final. There can be a debt burden. Uh, if you had debt or financial responsibilities before the marriage, those don't go away after your marriage is over.

They don't all go to your, uh, You have to share that debt, and so now you're on the hook for probably, possibly, even debt that he actually instigated and initiated. Um, and then we just mentioned, we talked about career, but just entering back into the career force or the workforce can be challenging for people.

Um, and, you know, You may need to start at an entry level position. You haven't been able to build your career or grow it, perhaps, the way that maybe your partner was able to grow his. You might have limited resources. For example, one thing that I struggled with is that I didn't have my own retirement fund.

I had never, I wasn't working, and so, and I didn't have a 401k. So I needed to start one. That was one of my first priorities after my divorce was finalized was to start a 401k. And this is when I'm in my fifties. That was when I had to start over. That can feel very scary because you're really, you know, you're not going to get that much of a return on your investment.

When you're that, well, I guess I'm not that, I'm 58 now. I don't, I actually don't plan to retire, but, but if I did, or if I had to because of physical disability or something, it would be very hard for me because we're, I'm trying to catch up on that. What about parenting challenges? If there's children involved now, you're a single parent, and that's a lot of pressure.

You have to balance work and home responsibilities and child care sometimes by yourself. Also, you're dealing with the emotional impact on your children. Helping children cope with the divorce and any lingering trauma that they're having is also very draining and challenging for you as a mother. And then managing that relationship with your ex partner for the sake of the children, again, very challenging and difficult,

especially if that person is uncooperative and is more interested in getting revenge on you than on making, uh, making it good for your children.

And most of the time that is their focus, just really just revenge on you. Now, you've also lost perhaps your social network, um, you're, you have this difficulty trusting others, you also have limited time for socializing. You don't have a lot of time where you can just go out and hang out with your friends because you're a single parent now.

So trying to figure out where, and you might not even have support. Maybe the people who supported you before are like, they don't want to support you anymore because they're like, well, you made your bed, now you lie in it. I'm not going to help you out. That's, that often happens with women who get divorced.

Uh, housing instability, securing affordable, stable housing, especially if you had to relocate. Uh, again, the legal aftermath can sometimes be challenging, um, sometimes the ex will actually want to keep litigating and going back to court, and that can be expensive and costly and emotionally draining as you enter into that kind of dynamic.

with him. Um, so and again, still continued access to limited access to resources might be an issue for you. And then overwhelming responsibilities. You are now managing all aspects of life, from finances, to your household upkeep, to your parenting. By yourself without support most of the time. So your confidence is going to suffer a huge blow.

One of the things that you're going to want to do or that you're going to have to work on is reclaiming your self worth and believing in your ability to succeed as an independent woman, getting new skills, getting certifications to improve your job prospects, you know, taking joining programs like Flying Free or Flying Higher so that you have the support of a community that's going to come in and encourage you and educate you and train you and help you with the skills that you need in order to go on to the next level version of yourself that you need to be in this next phase of your life.

I am painting a pretty glum picture either way, right? I believe that a woman who is ready and wants to can get to the other side of this and rebuild her life. Why do I believe that? Because I've seen it over and over and over with hundreds of women. That's what I help women do in flying higher, but I'm not going to lie and pretend that it's a road paved with sunshine and daffodils.

What I describe it as a cold, swollen, raging river that you have to cross somehow. If you want to get to the other side where there can be peace and rest. I actually wrote an article many years ago called 10 Steps Out of Relationship Hell. And the steps are

described as like a burning ladder that you have to climb out this.

You're in this deep, dark pit, and it's very icky inside the pit. That's your marriage. And in order to get out of the pit, you have to climb this ladder. And every single rung of that ladder is on fire. It is burning hot, and it is extremely painful. And you have to somehow be willing to suffer the pain of climbing up that ladder if you want to get out.

Otherwise, it's the bottom of the pit. That's what the marriage is. And, and every step makes you want to let go too. You know, you might get halfway up and, and people will let go. We understand why, right? It's very, very difficult to get out. So the original question is, Is divorce worth it? Is all of this pain worth the trouble of going through divorce?

Why not just keep the trouble that you have rather than exchanging it for trouble that you know nothing about would be the argument. At least the trouble you have is trouble that you're familiar with, right? And most of us, that's what we, that's kind of what we default to because that's actually human nature to just be whatever we're familiar with.

We kind of just want to keep things status quo that feels safest to us. The trouble that we don't know about, like this divorce and all the aftermath, that's mysterious trouble. And who knows what that means? It could be so much worse, right? And I think that's why the question of whether or not divorce is worth it is going to be different for everyone.

For some women, it's going to be worth it. And for others, it's not going to be worth it. And there may be all kinds of factors at play as you make your decision. So here's some questions that you can ask yourself in order to figure out if divorce might be worth it for you. Think about the emotional toll that your marriage is taking on your mental health.

Consider where there, whether there's any risk of physical, emotional, or psychological harm being done long term. Assess the availability of your friends, family, or counselors for emotional support. Who is going to be there to help you get through this? And do you have a good support system? Are you prepared for the emotional challenges of starting over and adjusting to life post divorce?

What about financial factors? Here's some things to consider when it comes to your finances. Evaluate your personal income and your ability to support yourself and any dependents. And if you don't feel like you're at that place right now, what are some

ways that you could get yourself to that place? Two, three years down the road.

Understand how property, how your property, your savings and your debts will be divided so that you have in your mind an I an I an accurate idea of what this is going to look like post divorce. Again, if you join Flying Free and take the prepare for divorce course, even if you're not in it, Planning on getting a divorce for a while, it will at least give you some things to think about so that you can make an informed decision.

Consider the possibility and adequacy of the financial support that you're going to get post divorce to support your children. So that would be, you know, your alimony and, or child support. Um, and then also be prepared for the expenses involved in the legal process. Consider how custody of the children would be managed and the potential for disputes.

You will want to take the ages of your children into consideration when you're thinking about this. You will want to understand your rights regarding your property and assets and custody in your jurisdiction. I highly recommend an app. It's a free app called Aimee Says, aimeesays.com

I interviewed the founder of Aimee Says on the Flying Free podcast—I'll put a link in the show notes to that. You can use Aimee Says to ask questions about your jurisdiction, where you live, and what your rights might be. And she can help guide you. This is an AI tool that's specifically for domestic violence victims. She can help guide you to resources that will give you the information that you need.

Um, documentation. Ensure that you have access to necessary records like bank statements, house deeds, uh, and any contracts. And then be aware of how long the legal process may take and its potential challenges. I wouldn't, you know, when I went into my divorce, I thought, oh, we'll be divorced in, you know, three or four months.

Nope. It was almost two years. And I tell people if it's less than two years, great, but kind of plan for about a two year divorce process If you're married to an abusive person. Parenting factors. What is the impact? Consider how the divorce is going to impact the emotional and mental wellbeing of your children at their ages.

Assess the ability to maintain a working relationship with the other parent post divorce. And now you may not, your answer to these might be, well, my kids are really, there's going to be a lot of fallout. And that was my answer. I was like, there's going to be a lot of fallout for some of my kids. And, and maybe less for others, but still going to be a lot of fallout.

And co parenting is not going to be easy. I knew that in advance, but at least you want to go into it. With your eyes wide open about your situation, I actually help you do that, help you make those assessments before you file for divorce in the Preparation for Divorce course. Um, you also might want to think about how living arrangements, school routines, how those things might change.

I actually did some re I actually did this before we went into the divorce process and I stopped homeschooling because I realized I'm not gonna be able to homeschool and be a single parent. So I wanted to make that transition before the whole world blew up around my kids. And I got them into a, a little neighborhood private school that was very affordable.

And, and, uh, I had my own business making soap at the time and I used most of my money for my earnings for their, for that. Went to pain for this little private school for several of my children. And that school ended up being a very good stabilizing force in their lives. As we walked through as everything else in their lives kind of fell apart.

Um, you know, assess or be prepared for potential criticism or lack of understanding from your family or your church or your community. What kind of resources are going to be available to you? Counseling services, support groups. Consider how your relationships, your friendships might shift or even dissolve.

I lost a lot of friends in the fallout of my divorce. Um, think about where you want to live during and after the divorce. Are you going to do an, are you going to be living in the same house as your husband while you are walking through the divorce process? How is the divorce going to affect your job or career prospects?

Are you going to have reliable transportation if you have to move or change locations? And then long term goals. Think about your personal goals and whether staying in the marriage aligns with those goals. I did a thing where I sat down and wrote out what my life would look like five and ten years from now if I stayed in the marriage.

And then I wrote it and I wrote this a story like how it would look. And then I wrote down what my life would look like if I divorced my husband, what my life could look like five and ten years down the road. And I have to say that, um, I'm going into my eighth year post divorce, but I did this exercise almost 10 years ago.

And so I'm almost to that 10 year mark of where, you know, with that exercise and my life looks The way I envisioned it 10 years ago, and I think it's because I had it in my imagination and my brain started solving for that. If you give your brain a vision, your

brain will think of it as a problem to solve.

And our brains, that's where our brains shine. That's where they're brilliant. They'll try to solve that problem and make that vision come true then. And that's what happened to me. It didn't happen overnight. It's taken a long time. But all of the little micro decisions that I made from that point on were slowly in little itty bitty steps moving me in a completely different direction.

And this is what I help you do inside of Flying Free. I even, one of the very first emails you'll get is this idea of a ship, a big huge ship has a tiny little rudder. If you turn that rudder even one inch to the left or to the right, A few hundred miles down the road, down the road, down the ocean, your ship is going to be in a completely different place.

So small tiny little shifts like that can make a huge difference in our lives. You're also going to want to plan for safety, create a safety plan if there's a risk of abuse or violence, and have a contingency plan in case the situation escalates unexpectedly. So you will want to, you know, take the Divorce course, prep for divorce course, possibly consult with an attorney to just understand your rights and options.

I met with an attorney a year before I actually filed, just for my own information and my own education. Seek professional help, either therapy, counseling, a coach, come into the program, and then financial planning. You can work with a financial advisor to prepare for independence. Once I was out of my, once I was divorced, that's what I did.

I found a financial planner and I said, This is my situation, help, because I don't know what, I don't know what to do next and I don't, I've never done this before and I need help and that person has helped me ever since to get back on my feet and to go in a direction that I'm really happy about when it comes to my finances.

So I always say that when the pain, when the pain of staying is worse than the pain of leaving, that may be your indicator that it's time to cut your losses and jump ship. So here are some more questions that you can ask, just overall in general as a summary, do I feel emotionally safe, valued, and respected in this relationship?

Or am I consistently feeling anxious, unhappy, or depressed? Does this relationship help me grow as a person or is it holding me back? Do I feel more relief or dread when I think about the future with my partner than when I think about a future without my partner? Have I lost my sense of self, my identity, or confidence because of this relationship?

Am I or my children in any physical danger staying in this relationship? Do I feel scared to express my thoughts, feelings, and needs to my partner? Is my partner controlling or manipulative in ways that make me feel powerless? Does my partner acknowledge and take responsibility for their harmful behavior?

Are there genuine efforts from my partner to improve and address issues? Or are his promises repeatedly broken? Do I feel heard, understood, and appreciated when I communicate with my partner? Are the patterns of abuse, neglect, or conflict escalating over time? And then are my children exposed to unhealthy behaviors or abuse that could affect their emotional development?

Am I modeling a relationship that I would want my children to emulate in their own lives? Would my children be better off in a peaceful environment, even if it means a single parent household, and even if it means just for part of the time? Do I have a reliable support system of family, friends, or professionals to help me through this?

Am I financially prepared and willing to work toward independence if I leave? Do I believe I deserve happiness, safety, and love even if it means starting over? How would my life look like five years from now if I stay versus if I leave? We mentioned that earlier. Do I see hope for real lasting change in this relationship?

Or am I just holding on to the idea of what I wish it could be? Am I willing to endure the temporary pain of leaving for a chance of a healthier, more fulfilling future? Am I staying because of societal or cultural pressure or because it truly feels right for me to stay? Am I prioritizing the opinions of other people over my own wellbeing and happiness?

What would I advise a close friend or family member to do if they were in my situation? Is staying in this relationship worth the ongoing pain and sacrifice to my well being? What would make me proud of the decision I make? Staying or leaving? Answering these questions honestly can help clarify whether the pain of staying outweighs the potential pain of leaving.

And they can guide you in your decision making process. So again, is divorce worth it? Only you can answer that question for yourself, but whatever you decide, I recommend that you know what your reasons are for your decision, and you can change your mind at any time. Always know that you can pivot at any time, but know what your reasons are.

And like your reasons. Be committed to those reasons. Nobody else has to know your

reasons or like your reasons. Only you. Because at the end of the day, this is your life to live. And you will only get one shot. Before we end, I want to read a review that came in on the Flying Free podcast. As of right now, at this recording, at the very beginning of 2025, I have 998 reviews on the podcast.

That's amazing. I, for some reason, I can't hit the 1000 mark. I keep saying, I will get a tattoo if I hit the 1000 mark and we are so close. So you guys. Let me have my tattoo in 2025, please. All right. Here's the review that came in. I appreciate Natalie's podcast so much. It's a favorite each week. She shares her experience, logic, expertise, and sometimes her developing understanding and ideas with sincerity.

I've learned a lot and it's helped me to think through my own situation with a fresh understanding. Thank you, Natalie. Get that tattoo. Well, fellow INFJ, I would get that, that tattoo, and I really do think I'm, I probably will probably be able to get it before the end of this month, January. So if you leave a rating, here's the amazing thing about leaving a rating and a review, is it lets I'm looking at an Apple podcast review, but whatever podcast app that you're using, they all have algorithms.

And if they see that, Oh, people really like this podcast. Not only because you listen to it, but also because you actually do like it and you give it a 5 star review and you even leave, take the time to leave a few words of why it means something to you and how it's helped you. That all, that's like brownie points that they put towards that podcast and then they're like, well if, These people like it, then more people might like it.

Let's show it to other people. Let's make this podcast a suggestion. Some of you are listening because this podcast came up as a suggestion for you. Oh, you like this podcast over here. You might like this podcast because other people like you like this podcast too. It might be something you're interested in.

And then you found it and then you started listening and here you are and you like it. So pass the love along. This is how you can do it. By leaving a five star review and even, and even better, drop some words. My team and I love these words and I'm going to start sharing some of the things that people, people are saying about the podcast, just because I think it's encouraging.

All right. All right. That's all I have for you today.