

Flying Free Podcast Episode 22

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of 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 22 of the Flying Free podcast. Today I have Rachel with me. Hi, Rachel.

RACHEL: Hi.

NATALIE: We have some great questions from listeners today. We're going to try to answer four of them. Rachel and I were talking before we started recording. We were sharing some different thoughts about these questions, and we are both coming at them from different angles. I think there will be a lot of food for thought on today's podcast episode. So, let's play the first question, and we'll get started.

CALLER 1: Why do I still hope that my abusive husband will have a God moment, have godly sorrow, and call me with a repentant heart, not change heart, so we can restore our marriage? Why do I keep hoping for that when I went through so much abuse? Thank you.

RACHEL: I think that you have to accept the fact that you do love your husband, so that love has inspired all sorts of hope in you. It's possible that maybe there is still some grief that needs to be processed over the loss of that hope and the fact that perhaps this is never going to happen. He may not ever choose to repent, and then it won't be possible for the marriage to be restored. I want to encourage you to ask God to put a new hope in your heart, and to grieve that dream of how things could have been and that image that you had that sustained you for all those years. It sounds like it still is sort of sustaining you, and you are hoping on that. Grief is such an important process and one that I think we avoid to our own detriment because it is so painful.

NATALIE: Yeah, I would add to that. I'm in the middle (actually I'm done reading) this book called [Brain Talk](#) by David Schnark. I think I might have mentioned it in one of my other podcast episodes. I think too that it is hard for us to disconnect our emotions from an abusive spouse if we still believe deep down inside that they are who they say they are. If we still believe they've got all this potential, that at the end of the day we really could have a meeting of the minds if we could just figure out the right way to approach the subject or the right way to help the light bulbs to go on. We think that they are kind of stuck in their bodies and they just can't, there's just no way that they can ... We believe that they actually can get better – that they can actually change. But here's what I learned from reading this book, *Brain Talk*. He teaches you the fact that people have mind mapping ability. Everybody has mind mapping ability. Animals have mind mapping ability. The only people that don't ... How you can tell that someone doesn't have any mind mapping ability is that they don't pick up on social cues. They get into other people's space. They don't have any concept ... They would not have ... If you tried to explain what mind mapping was to them, they would have no idea what you're talking about because there are no categories in their mind for that. They are literally unable to understand life from another person's perspective. You might see people this way who are on the very extreme spectrum – autism spectrum perhaps - or people who have had brain damage or severe emotional issues. But I have a son who is on the autism spectrum, and he has great mind mapping abilities. The fact is if you recognize that your spouse actually does have mind mapping ability, that means that when he is doing something that is hurtful to you, he's actually watching your responses to him. He knows what you're going through. A lot of times we think that empathy is just something good. When you have empathy for someone it means that you put on their shoes, you understand where they're coming from, and you empathize with them. But there is actually something called anti-social empathy. It's where you put yourself in their shoes, and you can see by the way they are talking, their reactions, and body language that they are having a visceral reaction to what you are doing – and you can empathize with that, but you actually enjoy causing that visceral reaction in them.

RACHEL: I think this is really hard for people like us to wrap our minds around. We cannot envision how someone can live like this.

NATALIE: Right. That is how we project our true empathy on others. We project that on an abusive spouse, and we believe that because we have feelings ... I have had people in my family of origin who have done really mean things to me, and I can still see their perspective, I can still see where that might have come from, and I can actually (even though I am super hurt) still feel bad for them because of my empathy. But my whole life I have believed that they have the same feelings towards me. It's been this eye-opening, painful shock to realize that not everyone has that. Some people actually get pleasure from hurting you, and they don't have any kind of true empathy whatsoever. One of the ways you can deal with this hurtful "spaghetti brain" (as Schnark calls it) that you get when someone you care about and think you can trust is doing these things that are hurtful – like making sideways comments or doing hurtful things you can't wrap your brain around – "Why would they do that if they love me?" – you can try to look at an interaction between you and that person from a third person perspective. So go back (you can do this in a journal or in your imagination) and imagine that situation again, but pretend that you are a bug on the wall watching you and this person interaction. See if you can mind map this other person more accurately because you think that you've mind mapped him accurately, but you haven't. (Actually you have. Deep down inside, your brain is incredible. It's an incredible instrument. You actually are mind mapping him correctly, and that's why you have all of these crazy hurtful feelings.) But your other part of your brain, your rational brain, is kicking in and thinking, "Well, no. He couldn't mean it that way. No, he must have a reason for saying that. He's had a bad day at work." We make excuses and justify it. We go into play and justify and minimize – the whole nine yards. Once you can see the person for who they really are ... This is exactly what happened to me and Rachel you can tell me if you can relate to this. Once I started mind mapping out my ex-husband more accurately (and I didn't even know it was called mind mapping; I just started doing this) and looking at the painful hard truth of who he really was and what he was actually doing to me, then I could see it happening in real time over and over again. (I was kind of testing him and trying things out, so I could see it in real time.) Once I realized it for absolute sure, all the pieces fell into place and I was able to disconnect emotionally from him and move on. But I couldn't do that until I could see him for who he really was. That's my only suggestion. Rachel, what do you think about that? Does that make sense?

RACHEL: Absolutely. You must start with the truth, and the truth is incredibly painful, but it's the only thing that is going to set you free from this hope that you are living off of that he is going to change. Who knows? Maybe he could. But you can't live there. You've got to accept the truth of where he is right now, and then respond according to that.

NATALIE: Right. I don't know if this particular person, or anyone else who is listening, is on the edge of wondering, "Should I pull the plug? Should I file for divorce or should I not?" When you are at that place, I always tell people to make sure that they know for sure before they do it. Don't pressure yourself. You will know when you are ready. But even if he did change after you got divorced ... Let's say you got divorced – that he gave you an amazing divorce. (They never do that by the way, but let's say that he did.) During the divorce process, he repents, he gives you an amazing divorce, and he lets you have your freedom. Then you can see that he has really changed, and things have completely done a one-eighty. He's amazing to your children and he doesn't launch a smear campaign. Instead, he goes around and repents to everyone and explains what he has done. (By the way, I've never seen this, but it could happen.) Then, you could always get remarried. People have done that. So all is not lost just because you pull the plug. The only time it is completely lost is if someone is actually dead. Then it's over. But until then, there's always hope. But I really don't think, like Rachel said earlier, I don't think that hoping in this should be where we put all our eggs. We should not put all our eggs in this basket because this basket has way too many holes in it. The basket of Jesus Christ is complete and whole. You can put all your eggs in that basket and be guaranteed that you will be loved, that He will be faithful, that He will never leave you, and that you will be safe. That's the basket that we all need to stick our eggs in.

RACHEL: Absolutely. You can never go wrong putting your eggs in Jesus's basket. There's a song I want to recommend, my favorite Third Day song, called ["My Hope is In You."](#) Listen to that, say it over and over again. "My Hope is in You" – it's a beautiful song.

NATALIE: Yes, it is. I know that one. Okay, let's listen to the next question. Here we go.

CALLER 2: My husband asked for some book suggestions to read. Should I suggest [Boundaries in Marriage](#) by Cloud and Townsend?

NATALIE: Okay, Rachel. Do you have any ideas for this woman? The book *Boundaries in Marriage*.

RACHEL: Well, I want to say some things outright without talking specifically about books - some general principles about giving narcissists information. It opens vulnerability to you, which can be really tricky because you want to help them, right? We spent our entire marriages helping them, trying to make them see things, etc. It seems like a good idea to give him all the information that we are discovering about the things that are finally making sense, right?

NATALIE: Yeah.

RACHEL: But unfortunately because of the pathology of narcissism, they use information like a weapon – and oftentimes, most of the time, against you. What happens a lot of times if you give them books that talk about what narcissists do or anything like that, they will start using that language against you, and it will make your life even more confusing because they've got the language but not the heart change. It just makes things so much more complicated. But I love the motivation here. You're trying to see what you can do for your husband. I think *Boundaries in Marriage* is a really good book. I actually have it here with me. It helped me a lot. I would encourage you to make sure that you have good boundaries and a full understanding of the truth about the way narcissists look and what an unrepentant heart looks like so that you can discern if he is using information against you.

NATALIE: Yeah, that is so good. Those are good points. If I were to recommend books, I would not recommend that you ever give a husband like this general "Christianese" books on marriage because it's going to talk about your role, and he will pick up on all of that and use it against you. Even books about emotional abuse, I would never, ever give an abusive spouse books about emotional abuse. Just don't. You'll be in so much big trouble. Hide any books that you have about that. Ask me how I know. That's a whole other podcast.

RACHEL: Me too!

NATALIE: But here are some good books that might be helpful if you have a husband who is really interested in reading some good books on marriage and wants to learn how to have a more mutual marriage instead of a power over marriage. One would be [The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work](#) by John Gottman.

RACHEL: It's so good.

NATALIE: Yeah. Another one is [Mutual By Design: A Better Model of Christian Marriage](#) by Elizabeth Beyers. There's another one that I haven't read yet but is by the same author of this *Brain Talk* book, Dr. David Schnark. I guess he's mostly well-known for being a sex therapist and helping people with that kind of stuff. I have it but haven't read it yet. I'm looking forward to it. It's called [Passionate Marriage](#). I think that would probably be another really good tool for you if you think that your husband is open to that and wanting to learn. Good luck to you with that.

RACHEL: Again, make sure you've got good boundaries, and you understand that. I just want to re-emphasize that.

NATALIE: Yes. Okay, let's listen to the third question.

CALLER 3: We live in an age where individualism reigns supreme. As home educating moms, we've pushed against that and laid down our lives for our families. We've looked at the scriptures which exhort us to take up our cross daily. We're confident God hears us and sees us, and He is sovereign. Then we find our life is unraveling. Our adult children ignore or despise us, and we suffer with insomnia and even wonder who on earth we are. Then we find that, as we've had a habit of appeasement for years, we have disappeared - been erased. At that point we really begin our education. One thing I'd like to have clear in my mind is where does the line fall between laying down our lives and taking up our cross daily and stepping out of the line of fire. How do we find that line? Is there a passage of Scripture which sheds light on it, or how does the character of God shine light on this issue?

NATALIE: Rachel, you shared some good things before this podcast started that addressed this question. Can you tell us what you were thinking?

RACHEL: This topic of suffering is so confusing because suffering is a reality in life, and it is reality in a Christian walk. God never promises that it's going to be all gravy and it's going to be all good. No. That's later on. In these earthly tents, we will have suffering. What is the suffering that we are called to? We are called to godly suffering. How is that different from ungodly suffering? That is so confusing, and a lot of people get tripped up in this way I think. Suffering just for the sake of suffering, as though it would somehow make us more pious or more redeemed – that is ungodly suffering. Godly suffering looks like speaking the truth as it talks about in Ephesians 5 starting in verse 6 - shining the light, exposing the deeds of darkness. If you do that, you are going to suffer because evil doesn't like that. Evil doesn't like the light. I want to point out that Jesus didn't suffer for a lie. He suffered because of lies. He suffered because people had the wrong idea about who He was. He did try to correct them, but at the end He didn't. He just took up His cross and suffered and laid down His own life because He came to redeem us from our own suffering and to show the truth of who God is to the world. He didn't do it so that we could keep on suffering. He didn't do that so that we could keep on sinning. He didn't do that so He would enable us to sin as though nothing had changed so that we could continue to live under our own power. Okay, so let's think about that in the context of marriage. Is our husband wanting us to suffer so that he can continue to sin and so that he can continue to live under his own power in an unsundered state to God? We are not to suffer for that. We are to suffer for the truth, to stand up for the fact that he needs to repent of his pride and his sin and his arrogance and making himself into a god in this life. You are going to suffer. I think we need to forget this picture of the godly wife who just basically puts up with whatever the heck her husband does to her, and that it is somehow what God calls us to. I don't believe that. God calls us to suffer for the truth and not to allow and tolerate someone to continue to exist in an unrepentant state and to continue to – almost as if we're taking joy in that. We're saying it's okay for them to continue to live under their own power, unrepentant, and in sin.

NATALIE: Right. Which is not love, by the way.

RACHEL: No, that's not love! One more thing I do want to say, back to when Jesus suffered. He had His eye on what was coming after that suffering, as it says in Hebrews 12:2. "For the joy that lay before Him, and during the cross, despising the shame, sitting down now at the right hand of God." He was looking at what was beyond. So look at what is beyond if you continue to suffer in your marriage. Is it just going to continue like this? Nothing is ever going to change? Or we could be called to suffer along with a repentant spouse – like someone who had an affair but is completely and undeniably repentant. You are both going to suffer there, but what's the end result? Redemption, right, and maybe a restored relationship? That's godly suffering. But ungodly suffering looks like nothing ever changes. This is just a hardened, unrepentant person being allowed to continue in that way. That is not what God calls us to.

NATALIE: Right. When you think about taking up your cross, that doesn't mean that you literally are going to your own crucifixion or even any parallel idea of that. People say you have to die to yourself, and we've talked about that in another episode, but that doesn't mean that you never take care of yourself. That doesn't mean that you never try to get out of destructive situations. What they are saying ... It's just a metaphor for ... For example, say that you are a mother and you have children, you are laying down your life for those kids. Maybe you have a newborn and you aren't able to travel because you're going to stay home with your newborn and take care of your child. That is laying down your life - laying down what you would rather do in order to take care of somebody else. As far as the escaping destructive things, there are so many examples of where godly people in the Bible – not perfect people but people who served God – choose to get out of dangerous situations. David with Saul, that's an obvious one. When Jesus was a baby, but even when Jesus was an adult and they were trying to kill Him – they wanted to throw Him over the cliff – He walked through the crowd and got away. Before He was crucified, He actually hid out for a while in the suburbs of Jerusalem. He was hiding because at that point they were livid with rage and they wanted to kill Him on the spot. They just wanted to grab Him and kill Him. He hid. He didn't just expose Himself because there was a right time and a right place. Think about Peter and Andrew who were in the jail singing ... Was it Peter and Andrew? Paul and Silas, that's who I'm thinking of.

RACHEL: Well, Peter also escaped from jail.

NATALIE: Yes, he did! An angel came and saved him. He didn't say, "Well, you know what, I really want to pick up my cross and suffer for Christ. So, thank you very much for the ticket out, but I'm going to stay." He didn't do that! Paul and Silas were singing in prison and when the whole thing fell apart, they didn't stay ... Well, actually they did stay, but it was ... now I'm shooting myself in the foot here. They saw what the outcome would be. They saw the salvation of the people around them if they stayed and didn't run away from their situation. I guess what it boils down to is applying the law of wisdom to your situation. Every situation is going to be different, and even the timing of every situation is going to be different depending on how old your kids are, what your ability is ... Maybe you believe that God really does want you to be free eventually, but you're not quite set up for that. So you're going to work for a while to get yourself to a place where you can extract yourself from that situation in the best way for yourself and any children that you have. Again, that's going to be different for every person. I think it's really, really important that all of us as survivors, as well as anyone else who is listening, give each other the chance to make our own wise decisions for our own lives without judging. "Well you didn't do it my way. If you would have done it my way, then this would have gone better for you." No, no, no. That is absolutely ridiculous! We need to stop doing that to each other and give each other the freedom to decide for ourselves. You know, listener, what is best for your life. Believe it or not, God has put inside of you wisdom that comes from Him. It is given as common grace to everyone for what to do with your life. You need to listen to His Holy Spirit. Listen to what He is speaking to you inside of your life. Don't listen to the voices of other people.

RACHEL: Yes. Agree.

NATALIE: I mean, yes. There will be other wise people who come into your life to speak into your life. But a lot of the people that speak into our lives are really not very wise, and they don't really know our situation. You don't need to pay attention to them.

RACHEL: Agree. Yes, we have to respect the presence of the Holy Spirit in the other person and realize that they are accountable to God. We're not accountable for their soul. I think that is such a thing that is lacking in the church. But I digress. She also wanted some Scripture to go steady, and I want to make sure to give her a couple things to think about. Proverbs 19:19 talks about how a hot-tempered man should suffer or have his own consequences because if you take away those consequences you're going to suffer again. He's going to do it again. Study that verse. Think about what that means. Then also I think a lot of the confusion about this idea of suffering comes from a passage in 1 Peter 2 starting in verse 18. I just want to encourage you to go look at that passage and look at what it says about suffering for good. Think about and ask God to give you insight into what "good" means. It is not to empower slander and malice. In fact, Peter had actually just condemned that type of activity earlier in the book about how to have nothing to do with those kinds of things. So, ask God for wisdom about what suffering for wisdom looks like and how it should reveal His truth, and He will give you wisdom.

NATALIE: Yeah, that's so good. Okay, let's listen to the last question.

CALLER 4: Hi. I have been married to a man that is a Christian for seventeen years. In fact, he was a part of my coming to the LORD. I thought he was mistreating me because I wasn't spiritual enough at the beginning of our marriage, but it has gotten worse. He has a lot of good qualities, but I'm seventy-years-old and I have so much fear. I don't understand the sadness because when he is kind, he is very kind. But I just have this cloud of sadness over me constantly like I don't want him to never be in my life again. Please help me understand these feelings.

NATALIE: This question makes me really sad, Rachel.

RACHEL: Me too. I just want to say to this woman, wherever you are, that you are loved by an unsurpassingly amazing big God. I think there are two things I want to share with you. It sounds like you are suffering from some really profound trauma bonds. Trauma bonds are what happens when someone in your life is a source of the pain and also is a source of or a solution to that same pain. What happens is that it is an addictive cycle where someone puts you in pain and then they give you the pleasure of making things right again or accepting you again. It is over and over and over again. I have suffered from these in my own life, and I can tell you that there is freedom from that. But you have to understand what it is first. If you can read up about trauma bonds, I think that can help you. The second thing I want to say is that this

man, your husband, it sounds like he was the person who showed you about God, who led you to God. There's a possibility that you may be associating his voice with the voice of God in your life. That might be where the fear is coming from. In order to ... The thought of cutting off your husband from your life also means like the voice of God is cut off in your life. I actually lived like that. I had put my husband in the place of God in my life. I felt like as long as I did whatever he said that I was safe, and things were going to be fine. That's not true because he was not in connection with God. His heart is closed off very hard towards God. I think it is really, really important for you to get to know God on your own. Get to know God on your own terms. Try to block out the voice of your husband and what he's told you about yourself in ways that he may have been condemning you. Approach God like an innocent child does to their very loving Father and start to get to know Him. Natalie and I talk about how the Gospels, especially the book of John, have been so powerful in our lives. Just really getting to know who Jesus is and His unsurpassing love for you, His acceptance of you, and His understanding. The Bible talks about how God knows we are made of flesh. He sees our frailties. He sees our fears, and His love is the solution for all those things. The thing is that His love is around us, but we have to step into it. We have to realize it's always been there, but if we don't open ourselves up to it and allow it to penetrate to the very deepest recesses of our being, it doesn't do anything for us. It doesn't change us. It doesn't drive out that fear that you are experiencing. Allow God's love to penetrate to who you are at the core of your being. You can only do that by getting to know Him on your own terms. There's a book I want to recommend by an author whom I have previously recommended, David Benner. I'm reading his book, [Surrender to Love](#), right now, and I can tell you it is life-changing for me. It is teaching me how to know God's love not just as a belief. We all understand it intellectually. We've been taught that since we were kids and singing "Jesus Loves Me." But knowing it as an experience is something completely different. That is what has the power to change us and the power to drive out that fear that is so crippling. Get to know Jesus. Get to know Him and how He thinks of you, and that fear is going to go away. I promise you. You are so loved.

NATALIE: I would add to get to know yourself and try to separate yourself from him if you can. You may not feel that this is a point in your life where you want to actually pursue a divorce. A divorce is a lengthy process. It never leaves you financially more stable; it always leaves you financially less stable at first. But what I'm going to say next is not just for you, but it is for any listener who feels like they really don't want to get a divorce. How can you deal with this destructive relationship and stay married? My advice would be to learn how to live parallel with someone. Learn how to be detached from that person and have your own life, your own thought patterns, and get your own healing. Once you see that other person for who they really are, as we talked about earlier in this podcast, you can start detaching from them and seeing yourself as a completely different person. So when you look at them and they are doing harmful things to you or defining you in certain ways, it doesn't affect you anymore because you can objectively say, "Well, that's their opinion. They are kind of dysfunctional. They've got a weird way of looking at life. That's the way they are, but I am not that way. When they say things like that, it doesn't tell me who I am, but it tells me who they are." Then you are able to move forward separately from them even though you aren't divorced. Yes, you are still going to be re-triggered. It's not the ideal situation, but sometimes for those who aren't able to get a divorce or who don't want to get a divorce, this is really the only other alternative. That's what I recommend. Also, I do have a support group that helps people do what I just told you about. Whether you are going to get a divorce, or you are going to stay – it doesn't matter – this will help you to heal. This support group offers courses every month. It offers a secret Facebook group so you have community with other women who are just like you, who are going through the same things, so you have camaraderie and companionship and a non-judgmental environment to express what is happening in your life, and to pray for you. There are also expert workshops. You get access to all the workshops that have already been done, and you get access to a brand-new workshop every month. You get access to Butterfly Stories. Those are stories of other women just like you who have gone from crawling to flying. There's a new one every month, but you also have full access to all the past ones. You get a live Q&A every month. You get a live coffee chat every month with the other women in the group. So there is a lot of value to this group. It only opens up every four months. I'm opening up a little bit early again this next time, so it's going to be opening up again at the end of this month. It's June 1st today; by the end of this month it will be opening up again. If you want to join you need to get on the waiting list. To do that, go to my website, [Flyingfreenow.com](#), and click on the side bar ... Click on any article and on the [sidebar](#) there will be a couple of different places where you can sign up to get on the waiting list for that.

RACHEL: I wanted to say to the podcast listeners who may not know that is how I know Natalie. I was in that support group. I was in the first group that she ever established, and it was instrumental in helping me on my journey. I can't recommend it enough. If this is something that you are struggling with in your life, you have got to have support. These people know exactly what your life is because they lived it too. So I can't endorse enough.

NATALIE: We offer education. We want to educate you, we want to empower you, and we also want to support you. So the winner of my book, [*Is it Me, Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage*](#), is ... And by the way, you get entered into a drawing for every - it used to be every ten reviews, but I think I'm going to do every twenty because now we are getting more reviews in. But if you put in a review, you get entered into a drawing for a free copy of my book, [*Is it Me, Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage*](#). And the winner this time is Linda C. I won't expose who she really is, but I will be sending you an email and getting your address so I can ship you a copy of my book. To leave a review, go to my website, Flyingfreenow.com. Up in the menu bar it says podcast; click on that. Open up any podcast and it will give you the instruction for how to leave a review. Otherwise if you are a savvy iTunes person, you just open it up on your app and that's where you leave a review – on iTunes. No place else. iTunes is the only place where the reviews actually matter, so leave a review over there. We'd love to hear from you. I mean to read a couple reviews each time, but I forget. Finally, if you have a question that you'd like to submit for a future podcast episode, you can do that by again going to my website, click on the podcast menu bar, open up a podcast and there will be a link in there to the question app. It's a little recording app and you can press the record button, and it actually records your voice so your voice can be on the podcast like these other ladies. You don't need to leave your name; in fact, if you leave your name, I will leave it out because we don't want you to be exposed to anyone. It is all anonymous. You can ask whatever question you want, and Rachel and I will try to tackle your questions. That's it for now. Fly free!