

WHAT IF MY ABUSIVE HUSBAND HAS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES?

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 310 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today, I'm going to answer two listener questions related to husbands who have mental health issues. Let's listen to the first question.

LISTENER: Hello, Natalie. I'm just so thankful for your podcast. It has helped me so much to feel like I'm not going insane and that my life is worthwhile and that I'm worthy and loved. And I just wanted to tell you something in my story, get your feedback, or a podcast perhaps.

I'm separated from my husband since September 2023. He was emotionally, verbally abusive, and some physical abuse was done toward me over sixteen years. After we separated, my old church remained involved in his life and has provided him all kinds of help and connected him with all kinds of resources. But still, he went into a downward spiral and he lost his job. He got mental evaluation, paid for in part by the church and everything, and he ended up in a mental hospital for two stays at separate times. And in the last stay, he was referred to an agency, Adult Protective Services.

And this is really throwing me off for a tailspin because they're providing him with a social worker, he has this agency involved that's investigating, and it's supposedly for abused and neglected adults. And meanwhile, when I was the abused and neglected one in our marriage, and now I'm having to navigate this and figure out how to move forward towards a divorce, hopefully. But meanwhile, he has tons of help and it's all free, and I might be investigated for being a part of his neglect. And it just all feels so painful and so hard to deal with, and I don't even know where to begin.

I'm struggling through because I can't really afford a top-notch lawyer or anything. I've been researching some, but anyway, long story short, I'm very much still feeling kind of alone and out there trying to figure out what to do and just how to get through this and the pain of it, of knowing he's got all these processes and these people trying to help him, and I'm feeling very vulnerable.

So if you could speak to this and how I'm supposed to feel right now, because the old part of me feels like it's my fault and like, "Oh, did I do something wrong, and now he's suffering?" So anyway, I appreciate your thoughts on this. Thank you so much.

NATALIE: First of all, I just want to express how sorry I am that you are experiencing

such egregious abuse at the hands of not only your husband, but of the institutions that are protecting him for whatever reason. It will never cease to amaze me how women can be abused for decades, and these kinds of agencies and religious institutions will not provide support or help for them even when her entire life unravels and she's barely able to get up in the morning. But if a man's life unravels because his wife finally leaves him due to his mistreatment, then everyone comes out of the woodwork and tries to support him, and turns away from the woman as if she did something wrong.

And here's the thing: In this wackadoo world, you did do something wrong. In their wackadoo world, it's your job to make sure that the person with the penis feels happy. You are responsible for his mental health and wellbeing, even though he's a grown ass man. And for some reason, we still live in a culture that puts that responsibility on the woman.

I'm speaking in generalizations, but this is a reality in the culture that we live in. And when you try to step out of that insanity, they're going to point their fingers at you and try to frame you for neglecting your duties as a woman. They're going to make it about you and your problem, and not about this man and his dysfunction.

So again, yes, you actually did do something wrong in their world, in the universe that they live in, which is a far cry from the universe that we live in. So the question to ask yourself is which world do you want to live in? That insane, idiotic universe, or the real world God created, where adult men and adult women are created equal and have equal rights to honor, respect, and personal responsibility for their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors?

As adults who live in a sane world, we take responsibility for our own behaviors and the results of those behaviors, but we do not take responsibility for the behaviors of others or the results of their behaviors. Now, yes, we can, and I believe we ought to have compassion on other people when they make poor choices—or sometimes people make good choices and still end up with bad outcomes. That happens because we live in this chaotic world. But that doesn't mean that we need to manage their emotions or their lives. But we absolutely must learn how to manage our own.

So many cultures have this all mixed up. Everyone is all up in everyone else's business, kind of like a bunch of teenagers who haven't learned about adult boundaries yet. So I'm sorry that your life, sadly, has bumped up against this insane universe with these types of religious institutions and even secular agencies at times. They do not represent Jesus Christ in any way, shape, or form. They do not represent the truth. They do not

represent sanity.

You accidentally married someone and you didn't know... Or maybe you had some hints, but you weren't really sure. I mean, we only know what we know, right? And hindsight is always 20/20. You accidentally married someone who had some mental health issues, which is sad, but this person is unable to manage his own life, and the problem is not that he has mental health issues, but that he takes it out on you.

So he was hoping that you would manage it for him, and then when you showed up as a normal human being, unable to manage his life as well as your own, he fell apart mentally and emotionally. He blamed you, shamed you, hurt you emotionally and spiritually, and it sounds like physically as well, and when you finally decided after almost two decades to extract yourself from that situation and take care of yourself, then he got even worse. And he reached out to people who live in his universe, and they all got together to come after you.

And that's what you're facing right now. You're not just facing an abusive husband. You're facing an abusive church institution. You mentioned that you feel hurt and vulnerable, and you asked if that's how you're supposed to feel, or if you're supposed to feel guilty, like you did something wrong because all of these people are coming after you.

I think anyone in your shoes would feel absolutely devastated, terrified, and yes, extremely vulnerable to attack because you are being attacked and you do need support. You need people who believe you and who will walk through this with you. You need to be in a sane world with sane people who care.

Several years ago, a bunch of women and I got together and created a little world of sanity, a little pocket of freedom and hope. We used to call it the Sisterhood, and we are still sisters, but we've recently changed it to the Kaleidoscope, because a kaleidoscope is a flock of butterflies. And that's what we are. We are this flock of beautiful butterflies learning how to fly free into our future lives, lives that we were created to live, lives of autonomy and love and freedom. We are children of God deserving of honor, not abuse.

Your husband isn't just looking for help for himself. He's looking for revenge. He is motivated by what these institutions around him have programmed him with and have encouraged him to embroil himself in, which is disrespect for himself, quite honestly, because when we don't encourage others to take personal responsibility, we're teaching them to disrespect themselves, as well as disrespect for you as a child of God,

as well as disrespect for God who created both of you, disrespect for the freedoms of others and the rights to autonomy of other people, and personal attack on the wife that he promised at one point to love and cherish for the rest of his life.

Now, if this was just about his mental health issues, that would be different. I know many people who struggle with mental health issues who are not disrespectful and hateful towards other people. They don't gather people around them and go after their loved ones to attack them. So this is not about his mental illness, although his mental illness may be playing a role in all of this, but ultimately this is about his heart. His heart, right now, at least in his life, is hard and cold, and that is making his mental illness even worse than it needs to be.

And sadly, I mean, really, quite tragically, the people that he is surrounded by are actually participating in his emotional and mental and spiritual demise. Not just yours—they're participating in his as well. And that, to me, I find that to be very reprehensible, and why I call out spiritual abuse so often in this podcast and in the things that I teach.

What would be more healing for him would be to move toward love and forgiveness for himself and for you. But then you would be seeing a very different outcome here if that were the case. So I always say we can't do anything about what the other person does. People living in this upside down, Alice in Wonderland, wackadoo universe are going to be exactly who they are. They're going to show up in certain ways, certain predictable ways, and do those things very predictably. Your challenge is just to remember that you don't live in that world. You live in your own universe—at least, you have the opportunity to—and you get to decide how you want to live your life.

In the Flying Free Kaleidoscope, I have a “Preparation for Divorce” course that I think would be extremely helpful for you. It would teach you how to respectfully stand up for yourself and be the mature adult that you are in how you show up for your divorce. It will teach you how to be strategic in the way that you communicate with your attorney and with the court.

When you go to joinflyingfree.com and complete your registration there, you will have immediate access to the “Preparation for Divorce” course, along with many other foundational courses and workshops that will change your life. You will also have access to hundreds of hours of coaching archives that you can listen to on our private podcast.

And finally, you will be home. You will be in a safe place where people will listen and understand what you're going through. You will not be alone anymore. I highly

recommend that you join us. It's very affordable at only \$29 a month. We have not raised prices in several years, even while other support groups like ours have. And although we have talked about raising prices at the end of this year, 2024, we have decided that in light of the economy, we're going to hold steady at \$29 a month at least for a while longer.

LISTENER: Hi, I've been a part of the Kaleidoscope for just over two years, and my life has been completely transformed. I've jumped into the process and done the work and continue doing the work, but one of the most beneficial components of the Kaleidoscope program are the coaching calls.

I love playing the coaching replays while I'm commuting, while I'm walking, doing chores around the house, and I've gleaned so much beneficial information. One of my favorite things to do is to, while the person is speaking, I'll think, "If I were coaching this person, what would I say?" And it's exciting because the coaches and what I'm coming up with are now becoming similar things because I'm now a healthy, attuned adult who can see the world differently than I once did just over two years ago. It's amazing.

So I liken coaching calls to a masterclass. I'm a musician, and I've participated in several masterclasses throughout my educational career. If you've ever been a part of one, you have people on the stage—you have the instructor giving the information, and then you have people in the audience watching like they're a fly on the wall. And it's so cool because every single person in that room leaves with new information. It's a growth opportunity for every single person.

So if you have not listened to the coaching calls, whether it's live or it's the replay, I highly recommend it. You glean so much fantastic information and insight, but it's also nice to know that you're not alone.

NATALIE: Thank you so much for sharing that. Because of our demographic, our members, they're members on the sly. They can't go around on social media and advertise that they're a member of the Flying Free Kaleidoscope program. So I always appreciate it when people leave anonymous recordings like that, when members do this, to share some of their wins and some of the ways that their lives have been transformed and how the Kaleidoscope has helped them. So I really appreciate that.

If you're a member listening and you want to do that, you can do that by going to the "Drop Your Wins and Successes" space in our private forum, and there's a little record button there if you want to leave a recording and leave your own testimony. I just recommend that you don't give your name or any other identifying things about

yourself. But if you have experienced any changes in your own life that you want to share with the people on our public Flying Free Podcast, we would love to hear them.

They're very encouraging for people, even for people who can't join. It's just encouraging to know the transformation. Sometimes we just need to know it's possible. It's a possibility. Our brains maybe can't take in much more than that, especially if we are under extreme trauma and dealing with a lot of overwhelm. But sometimes just hearing that it's even possible at some point in our future is just enough hope to help us get through the day. Our next question is also related to a husband with mental health issues.

LISTENER: I started listening to this podcast after a friend shared an episode from October 2024 with Bob, and after listening to a handful more episodes, I decided to start with Episode One, which, to my surprise, was with Bob again. And I so value the conversation between the two of you and appreciate everything that I've been learning and the sense of peace that's growing inside of me as I feel like I'm healing slowly while I remain in my relationship.

My question is—and Bob kind of touched on personality disorder—but my question is, I am married to somebody who is bipolar and being treated for that, and ADHD, being treated for that. Anxiety and depression meds are involved as well, which kind of go along with those. And oftentimes, there does appear to be a genuine sense of repentance, at least emotionally, from my husband, and in many cases, a general acceptance of who I am and who I want to be from him.

The, what I would call abuse, comes into play when it appears that he is very emotionally unbalanced. And I'm being accused of having something going on with somebody else and all kinds of inappropriate things like that. But there's also been a lot of lying, a lot of hiding on his end, knowing I wouldn't agree with the way he spends money. I'm really the provider of the house.

And so I guess I'm just curious how I know, is this just illness-oriented, and the Bible says, "in sickness and in health," is this just illness oriented? Because I'm really the one that remains angry. I'm the one that gets very critical. Or is it all abuse? And I definitely know there's abuse throughout. And then if it is illness, is that, because of the "in sickness and in health," justification for the fact that I should be staying, because I do hear all of those things from him, like, "God hates divorce. You're trying to make a plan, aren't you?" and lots of critical things from that regard. I don't know if I was clear enough, but I appreciate any input.

NATALIE: I think you were very clear, and I'm really glad you asked this question. One of the things I noticed right off the bat is that you talk about how you're angry and critical as if that somehow could be a reason why this abuse is happening or why you're having marriage problems. It's kind of like there's this part of you that's saying, "You're just an angry, critical person because you're angry and critical towards your poor, bipolar, ADHD, anxiety ridden, depressed husband."

I'm wondering what you believe about anger and why people get angry. You didn't mention whether or not you have kids, so let's just say that there's a little girl in your neighborhood that you see riding her bike past your house every day. And let's say that you see a bully teasing her sometimes when you look out your window. And sometimes he will even throw a stick in front of her bike so that she falls down.

How would you feel if you saw that happening on a regular basis? Would that make you angry or would you just kind of be like, "Oh well, whatever," and just feel neutral about it? And if you felt angry about that, which, I'm going to guess that you're going to feel upset about that, would you think of yourself as being a bad, angry woman because you were upset about that?

If you saw another adult walking past the little girl, you saw this other adult, this other adult saw what happened and then just kind of walked past the little girl while she's laying on the ground with a bruised knee or a bloody elbow, and that adult just looked at her and then walked on, would you think, "Oh man, that adult is a lot nicer person than I am because after all, that adult's not experiencing the emotion of anger. But I am an angry, bad woman because I'm feeling upset that that little girl got hurt. But that adult, she's just a neutral adult who sees injustice and unkindness and feels very neutral about it. She's a better person than I am."

I'm throwing these rhetorical questions out there just to get your mind thinking a little bit differently about this, okay? You also mentioned that you are critical, or you said that you believe you're critical, as if being critical is a bad thing. But have you ever read Matthew chapter 23? I've already read that chapter a few times on this podcast. I'm not going to do it today.

But I highly recommend that you go and read Matthew chapter 23 and ask yourself whether or not Jesus was being critical. And then ask yourself if you think He's a bad person for being critical and why or why not? This is something that'd be really helpful to stick in your journal.

Your abusive husband has projected his own anger and self-loathing and criticism onto

you. This is what I believe. And in doing so, he has disrespected and wounded you in very deep ways. And so this has caused you to react in a way that causes you to feel this keen sense of injustice. And because you are a normal, average person, human being, and you're not a psychopath, you actually experience an emotion about that, the emotion of anger, when you sense that injustice and that pain.

And it also causes something inside of you to think critically about what is happening to you. You are examining the factual behaviors of someone that you're living with and then thinking critically about what those behaviors mean for your particular life.

When people accuse me of being angry or critical, I totally agree with them. There will always be things in this world that are happening that I will choose to be angry about because of my core values. Now, if I did not have the core value of connection, for example, and relationship and truth telling and honor and respect, then I wouldn't care if others treated me or themselves or anyone else with disregard, unkindness, lies, and shallowness.

But I love that my core values cause me to experience the emotion of anger about certain behaviors. And I love that my core values cause me to be critical of certain behaviors that destroy other human beings, including myself sometimes. And this anger and this critical thinking on my part caused me to show up for my own life and the lives of other disenfranchised people in more powerful ways that I think are changing my little corner of the world. So, hey, I'm all in. Call me an angry, critical woman. That doesn't shame me at all. I'm unhooked from those kinds of accusations because I'm just like, "Yeah, I am."

Now, those kinds of accusations used to really impact me, though. I used to be full of shame because my programming back in the day was that to be angry or critical was like the epitome of evil. And if someone called me an angry, critical woman, that would be the worst. That must mean I am a terrible person, and I don't want to be a terrible person.

I used to buy into this wackadoo universe that other people had who didn't share my core values. People who are not only not angry about injustice and unkindness and disrespect, but they're actually all about it. And the only way to keep that wicked cycle going is to shame people who point it out. And when they're successful and they can see that we are shamed by these kinds of tactics, that empowers them and then they continue to do it.

But I noticed that when I had this shift inside of my own being and was no longer

hooked into their tactics because I just was like, "Yeah, I agree with you. I'm an angry and critical person. I really am," they had no power over me anymore. They just started to walk away from me because instead of getting me to bow my head in shame so they could feel like they were maybe better than me or more godly than me or whatever it was, I just lifted my head up and smiled a little smile, and they didn't like that. They could not get me on their hook cause I was too slippery.

This is actually one of the things that I love helping women work on inside of the Kaleidoscope community. I help them unhook from these kinds of tactics, and it happens inside of our own brain. I help them learn how to live in their own universe and to stop giving so much credibility to these weird universes of disrespectful people.

Now, of course, your husband is going to throw out Bible verses that have been mistranslated or taken out of context or twisted to serve misogynistic agendas. Of course he is. We should expect that. He is swimming in a poisoned pond, and those are the kinds of things that get passed around over and over again like a bunch of clichés until everyone has heard them so many millions of times that they're all brainwashed with them, and they're all walking around like little robots saying the same things over and over and over again. And some of them don't even really know what it means anymore.

But again, just because he is swimming in that pond doesn't mean you have to. Come and learn what those verses actually are saying. This is not information that's not available or that's hard to get a hold of. There are bazillions of articles out there and YouTube videos and pastors and Bible scholars teaching completely different things, writing books, writing articles, scholarly articles, doing videos, trying to get the word out, trying to teach things that are much more in alignment with what the rest of the Bible teaches and more in alignment with the character and nature of God as we are taught about in scripture.

Don't expect that an abusive husband who's immersed in that kind of culture is going to be able to get out of that pond. But do expect yourself to get out. Do work at extracting yourself from those types of environments. Just because he doesn't want to learn anything new doesn't mean that you can't learn.

So let's talk about that verse, "in sickness and in health," just for an example. That verse is not referring to abusive situations. There are many people with mental health issues—I just mentioned this earlier—who do not abuse the people around them. Just because someone has mental health issues does not mean that they have a right or get a pass to hurt other people.

No, I'm not referring to a situation where you have had a loving husband for several decades and then he gets Alzheimer's or dementia or something like that and then their personality changes. I've seen that happen. But I've also seen in situations like that where the spouse or the adult kids or whoever, people who love the person, need to take steps to create boundaries and get that person in a safe environment where they can't hurt themselves or other people, as well as to get their own self as a caretaker into a safe environment where they have their own boundaries.

So maybe a spouse might not have a reason to divorce in a situation like that, if you wanted to follow that verse, "in sickness and in health," but they would definitely have a reason to not live with someone like that full time if they're endangering themselves or those around them. So I hope that makes sense.

You mentioned something also about wondering whether or not it was all abuse or maybe just some abuse, and then some mental health issues, and how do you parse out the difference? But I personally think that focusing on all of that and figuring all of that is not really the issue and not helpful.

Trying to figure out the exact percentages at any given time of whether or not what someone said or did is abuse and what percentage was just his mental health issues, it's like, let's dig into our belly button. It's called navel gazing. I just think it's a waste of time and it doesn't even matter. It's irrelevant.

What is relevant is whether or not you are being harmed in this situation. What is relevant is the impact that that person's behavior is having on you and your mental health. Is your mental health suffering because of the intermittent abuse that you're experiencing? And if so, since it is your responsibility to take care of your own mental health, what are your intentions related to that?

You're not accountable to your husband or your church or your pastor or your family or your friends, and all of their opinions. However, you are accountable to yourself because God gave you stewardship over your own brain and body, and therefore, accountable to your Creator. So how are you stewarding your mental, physical, and spiritual health? Are you happy with the job that you're doing as far as your stewardship of yourself?

When you join the Flying Free Kaleidoscope by going to joinflyingfree.com, you're going to have access to courses that are going to help you learn how to do this in ways that will completely rock your world and change your life. And when you start doing that, you will find yourself thinking and feeling and behaving very differently than the ways

you are probably showing up right now in your life.

I want to close by saying that something I hear periodically is that women who are listening to this podcast believe that if they join the Kaleidoscope, they aren't going to get much more than what they're getting for free from this podcast. But everyone who has actually joined knows that this is a far cry from the truth.

Where do I hear these things? I hear these things from people who joined, who tell me that that's what they were thinking before when they were listening to the podcast for a year, two years, however long. They thought, "Yeah, I don't really need to join because she gives so much good stuff in the podcast." And then they join and realize, "Oh, wow, it's like a whole world."

So it's like, this podcast is like a little cherry on top of a sundae, a delicious chocolate, strawberry, caramel sundae. Would you just order a sundae from Bridgeman's... Do they even have Bridgeman's anymore? I used to work at a Bridgeman's, an ice cream shop. Would you ever order a sundae from Bridgeman's and then just eat the cherry on top, and then say to the server, "Well, I'm done now. I don't need any more. It looks like a delicious chocolate, strawberry, caramel sundae, but I only wanted that cherry." I don't think so.

If you like the cherry on top, I want to invite you to come into the Kaleidoscope and experience the ooey, gooey ice cream and toppings that are waiting for you on the inside. Don't get me wrong. I'm glad that you've been able to make some changes based on the things you've learned from this podcast. That's why I do it every week. That's why I show up every single week consistently and have for the past six years and hope to do it for six years more. I want to help as many women as I possibly can. But I can only help you so much in a podcast like this where I just blab at you or where I have conversations with people.

I can help you so much better when you come into my little world, my little Kaleidoscope world. There's me and a whole bunch of other women. We're on the inside. I feel like we're on the inside of this beautiful little world waving at you guys, and we're trying to tell you what it's like when you come inside and join us, but you're never going to really quite know unless you try it.

So come on in and give it a try. Again, it's only \$29 for a month. And if after your first month you've not created at least one or two shifts in your thinking, you can always cancel. It's a whole lot cheaper than other types of resources that you may have tried that have ended up being a waste of your time.

But I do promise this: If you join and do your work that first month... And that's the key. You can join and do nothing with it and it's not going to change anything. I mean, don't throw your \$29 down the toilet. Please don't do that. But if you join and do your work, it's not going to be a waste of your time. You are going to change. So I hope to see you on the inside soon. Just go to joinflyingfree.com to learn more and sign up.