

THE ONE THING EVERY HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP MUST HAVE (AND WHY!)

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 7 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today it's just you and me. I'm really looking forward to being with you today. We're going to be talking about the key to a healthy marriage. This episode is based on an article I wrote for another blog. That article will not be published for another month. When it is published, I'll put a link underneath this podcast to this post so you can read it. This podcast is going to be a little more involved because it's going to be me talking. I'm going to go through the points that I wrote in that article, but I'll probably say a few more things too. I think this is a really important subject because many times women who've been in dysfunctional relationships for so long don't really know what is healthy and what isn't. They've been told, "All guys do that, and all marriages have problems." Some of that is true. Marriages are not all easy. I'm remarried. My new marriage is healthy, but I can't say that it hasn't had its challenges. It has normal challenges though. There's a big difference between the challenges (I wouldn't even call them challenges but difficulties) I'm having in a normal, healthy relationship and the challenges and the walls that I kept running into in my prior marriage, which was very dysfunctional. The key to a healthy marriage... This is the bedrock of a truly Christ-centered marriage. It's one word, and that word is mutuality. John 17:22-23 says this: "I gave them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one, with me in them and you in me, may they be so perfected in unity (that's mutuality) that the world will recognize that it was you who sent me, and that you have loved them as you have loved me." Do you see that the actual success of the gospel of Jesus Christ depends on this mutuality, this working together to bring honor and glory to God and to bring the gospel to the world?

Let's talk about what the opposite of mutuality is first. The opposite of mutuality is power over. You have mutuality, which is God's original design for humanity, and then you have power over, which was the enemy's design that was intended to bring a lot of chaos into the world—a lot of hatred, infighting, racism, prejudice against others based on their socio-economic status, and of course gender issues. Power over is where one person in the relationship believes, for various reasons—and these reasons, if you are a person of faith who lives, breathes, and has your being in religious circles you may have noticed some of these are religious reasons—believes that they are entitled to be in a position of power over another person for some reason or another. But power over was

one judgment that God passed down on humans as a result of sin. You see this in Genesis 3:16. The Bible, as well as all of history, is full of stories that bear witness to the destructive force of man's lust for power over, even and especially in the marriage relationship—a relationship that God had originally designed to reflect the unity of Christ and the church. But we're going to get practical here. I'm going to give you ten reasons why a mutuality model of marriage trumps a power over model of human relationships. Backing up a bit, that verse I just read to you in John is not just talking to Christians in general outside of marriage. It's talking to all Christians regardless of whether they are single or married. We don't throw out this idea of mutuality when we get married and then adopt a power over model just because we are married. That's not what God teaches. As you know, those of you who've been living in destructive relationships where there is a power over model in place, you can see how it just doesn't work. It doesn't reflect Jesus Christ and the church.

The first reason mutuality trumps power over is that mutuality is an expression of the humility of Jesus Christ in laying down His life for the well-being of others. Satan was the first one who attempted to take power over God. He wanted to be God. Then when he was given the boot, he kept going down that track by tempting Adam and Eve with the same ambition to be like God, having the power of knowing good and evil, and then using that power to power over other people. Every expression of human desire to power over another human is an expression of the enemy's lust for power. But Jesus Christ modeled something radically different for His followers. Philippians 2:7 says, "Of His own free will He gave up all He had and took the nature of a servant." Is Christ's example only for certain categories of humans? Is it only for one partner? Or is it for any and all who follow in His footsteps? Where you see both partners mutually looking for ways to lay down their rights to serve the other partner, you are going to see a healthy marriage. But when only one person is doing this regularly what you really have is a parasitic relationship in which one person is giving and the other person is taking. Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty pride, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves."

Number two, mutuality is an expression of authentic love for one another. All human relationships are governed by the law of love. The Bible says it best in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. "If I speak the tongues of men or of angels but do not have love, I am just a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." That means you can be a great preacher, but if you don't have love, if you're not able to love the people that are sitting in those pews, then your love is nothing. "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains..." This is impressive. But you know what? "... If I don't have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor

and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but I don't have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." I noticed here that it doesn't say that it covers up the truth. It rejoices with the truth, and it always tells the truth. Sometimes when we live in denial or when we enable others to live in denial because that is more comfortable, that's not love. "Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." In Romans 12: 9-10 it says, "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love..." One another—notice this is not a one-way street. "... and honor one another above yourselves." Does that sound like power over to you? Does that sound like one person, whether it's a male in a patriarchal setting or a female in a matriarchal setting or a rich person...? That doesn't sound like power over.

Also note that all Christians are called to both love and respect. Love and respect are not gender distinctive requirements. They are requirements for people who are followers of Jesus Christ—all followers of Jesus Christ. I'm speaking to women of faith who have perhaps been told, "Yes, you need to do all these things even if your partner doesn't." Is that true? Yes, it's true. But here is what you are not being told. This is what you need to remind yourself of. Just because you do these things doesn't mean that you have a healthy marriage. It means that you are a healthy person, but it doesn't mean that your marriage is healthy. Your marriage can still be extremely dysfunctional and abusive, even if you are doing all these things. It's not your fault that your marriage is dysfunctional and abusive if you are living with a dysfunctional or abusive individual. They are choosing not to behave in a Christlike manner. Mark 12:29-30 says, "'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this.'" He's talking about the most important commandment. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And the second is this, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." Then in Romans 13:8 it says, "Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another. For whoever loves others has fulfilled the law." Do you see anything in those verses (and there are many, many more verses that talk about love) that indicate that love is something that is only required by one partner? I've heard that taught from the pulpit, that only one partner needs to be loving for the relationship to work. But that is half true, half lie. Whenever you have a glass full of lemonade (that's the truth) with a little rabbit turd at the bottom (that's the little lie), it's not very tasty. Nobody wants to drink that. Here's the true part—only one partner needs to be loving. That's right! There are gazillions of Christian marriages in which only one partner is loving and doing all they can to make that marriage work. But here's the

false part—for the relationship to work. That depends on how you define a working relationship. If you say that a working relationship is surviving with broken vows, then okay. But if a working relationship means healthy, Christ-centered relationship, then no. That kind of relationship takes two partners living out those verses mutually. Power over is an expression of self-love and a grasping of power over another soul. I don't care how you dress it up. I don't care scripture verses you slap on it to make it sound like it is holy and spiritual. It is self-seeking, dishonoring, and evil, regardless of any flowery spiritual words used to say otherwise. Always remember the enemy's most prolific tactic of deception is to present his lies in a lovely and spiritual light. Lies don't look bad; they look amazeballs! (Always remember that. It will help you unscramble a lot of things going on in your life.)

The third reason is that mutuality is an expression of noble honor toward another human, regardless of race, gender, or social status. All throughout history, mankind has marginalized and taken power over other people based on their race, gender, or social status. But Christ came to usher in the kingdom of God in which "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus," Galatians 3:28. Is that verse saying there is no such thing as Jew or Gentile, and there are no differences between Jews and Gentiles? No, it's not saying that. Is that verse saying there is no such thing as slave people or free people? (Slaves have been eradicated in most parts of the world, but back then there were slaves.) Was that verse saying that now we have no more slaves or free people? No. Paul was not delusional. There were still slaves, and there will still free people, and there was a difference. Was Paul saying in that verse that there is no male and female anymore; nobody has anything hanging between their legs anymore? No, he wasn't saying that. He knows; he's a smart guy. He knows there are still men and women, and there are differences. What Paul is saying is that those differences make no difference anymore when it comes to our standing before God and our standing before one another or when it comes to our responsibility to love and protect—not to power over. Men are not the only ones that must love and protect. Women need to do that too. Women are responsible for that as well. We are responsible to love and protect our husbands, our children, and ourselves. We're responsible to love and protect God's reputation.

Here are some more verses that talk about this as well. Romans 12:10 "Honor one another above yourselves." 1 Peter 3:7 "In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives." (Nobody ever talks about that verse.) 1 Corinthians 13:4 "Love does not dishonor others." 1 Peter 2:17 "Treat everyone with high regard." Personally, I think the Bible is pretty crystal clear for those who have ears to hear about the fact that Christ's followers will both love and honor one another whether we are married or single. Mutual

love and honor should be part of all relationships and certainly a marriage relationship.

The fourth reason that mutuality trumps power over is that mutuality expresses a mature shouldering of personal responsibility by both partners—not just one—both. This is really about boundaries. Both partners own their own behavior and take wise stewardship of what belongs to them. You each take responsibility for your own words, actions, schedules, jobs, volunteer work, parenting, choices, and behaviors. You each wisely steward what belongs to you. This includes your mind, your body, time, emotional health, spiritual health, opportunities, and finances. Galatians 6:5 says, “For each will have to bear his own load. One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up.” In a dysfunctional relationship, one or both partners are not taking personal responsibility. They are either putting the responsibility on the other person which looks like shame, blame shifting, denying, minimizing, excusing, justifying, controlling, and accusing; or, they are taking all the responsibility on themselves, which looks like placating, appeasing, covering up, pretending, and overlooking. In a healthy relationship, both partners can safely and freely offer feedback to the other one. That feedback is heard, respected, and responded to. You can see Proverbs 15:31. Personal responsibility is just being an adult. A healthy relationship requires two of those to work.

The fifth reason that mutuality trumps power over is that mutuality is an expression of faith in God and trust that His ways are higher than man’s ways. It is human nature to grasp for power. This is not God. We want to control people and situations because it makes us feel secure. This is where both patriarchy and matriarchy come from. But this is putting our trust in ourselves and our own ideas of what works rather than God’s. It’s really a lack of trusting God and a grasping for control because we’re afraid and insecure in ourselves. Satan grabs for power and deceives people into believing that this is God’s ideal way of reaching the world for Christ in religious circles. Why does Satan do this? Because he hates God and he hates people, and power grabbing is the opposite way of reaching the world. Jesus modeled God’s way by using His power to empower others, not to power over them. When you see a man in a marriage empowering his wife, you see Jesus at work. When you see a woman empowering her husband, you see Jesus at work. Letting go of our desire to control other people requires maturity and trust in God and in the other person. When both partners are mutually pursuing God’s ways, you are going to have a healthy relationship.

The sixth reason that mutuality trumps power over is that it engenders a confident trust in both partners toward one another. The pathway to confident trust in any relationship is a history, a long history, of mutual honesty and integrity. If one partner is committed to honesty while the other one is withholding information or twisting the truth or causing confusion and anxiety in the relationship, then it's going to be a broken and dysfunctional relationship, no matter how hard the honest partner is trying. It takes two to create healthy trust.

The seventh reason that mutuality trumps power over in relationships is that mutuality takes the entire scope of scripture into consideration regarding human relationships and God's heart for humanity. Did you know there are only five to six passages of scripture that have been historically used to make a case that it is God's will for men to power over women? Did you know that these verses taken in their historical context and analyzed in their original languages are all difficult passages that have been debated by bible scholars over the centuries? You may have been raised or taught in a certain religious tradition to read these passages with a specific bias or slant. It is very difficult to read them otherwise when this has been wired into you from a very young age or even for most of your Christian life if you became a Christian as an older person. But we are responsible for doing our own studying now that we are adults and we have resources to do this, especially in our technological age. There is a plethora of information out there that we have access to. A great resource that I recommend is *How to Read the Bible for all Its Worth* by Gordon Fee. The fact is, when so much is at stake regarding the gospel, authentic love, honor, and safety we are wise to consider God's overarching message of scripture for humanity and see how that message stands up to the biased interpretations of a handful of verses that appear to contradict that overarching message. So what is God's heart for both men and women and for a marriage relationship? We see over and over in scripture that God cares more about human lives than he does about keeping laws and making sacrifices. He looks at the heart of the matter rather than the letter of the law. If you read the book of John, you will see over and over where Jesus breaks religious laws that oppress people to set men and women free. One example is Mark 3:1-6. This means that we can either fight to make a case for power over in the Bible because it suits our human power-hungry agenda, or we can embrace the heart of God and stand ready to lay down our power in order to spread the gospel and empower other people. If we cannot do this in our most intimate of human relationships, which is the marriage, how in the world can we expect to spread this kind of message anywhere else.

The eighth reason the mutuality trumps power over is that it takes into account and finds expression for the God-given gifts, personalities, and talents of all humans, not just

some. We are released to use the gifts that God gave us to spread the gospel and do His work regardless of gender. God did not give the gifts of His Spirit only to certain types of people. When both partners recognize this and encourage and build one another up in their gifts, they exponentially create forward momentum for the gospel. On the other hand, when one partner is criticizing, hindering, or discouraging the other one from using their gifts, they are literally hindering the gospel on so many levels. We are all created to fulfill a purpose in life, to experience meaning in who God made us to be. A healthy relationship will foster an environment that makes that possible for both partners.

The ninth reason that mutuality trumps power over in relationships is that mutuality is an expression of vulnerability and intimacy. When only one partner will show up and be seen while the other one is exploiting that vulnerability, you have a war zone, not a marriage. A healthy relationship is a safe relationship. Both partners trust that as they open up and share their intimate selves, the other one will safely care for them and not expose them to shame. This mutual vulnerability opens the door to deep intimacy in a relationship.

The tenth reason that mutuality trumps power over is that mutuality can only be a reality when both partners are submitting to one another in love. Christ's sacrifice has permitted the Holy Spirit's power in our lives to overcome the judgment of power over in relationships and to usher in the unity and oneness of Jesus Christ. No more hierarchy. No more patriarchy. No more matriarchy. We now rule as heirs together. 1 Peter 3:7 "Husbands likewise submit by living with your wife in ways that honor her, knowing that she is the weaker partner, honor her all the more as she is also a co-heir of the gracious care of life. Do this so that your prayers won't be hindered." Ephesians 5:21 "Submit to each other out of respect for Christ." We are not showing respect for Jesus when we don't submit to one another. Again, it must go both ways. Submission can never be coerced. It must be voluntary on the part of both partners. It is this grace-filled mutuality of that submission that lays the foundation upon which a couple can build their Christ-focused marriage.

If you think that your marriage may be unhealthy or even destructive, I encourage you to check out my book, *Is it Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage: The Christian Woman's Guide to Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*. You can get it on Amazon in both Kindle and paperback formats. If you want the first three chapters free, I'll send them to you if you sign up on my mailing list at the top of my website, which is flyingfreenow.com. I think that's it. I hope you have a wonderful rest of your day and fly free!