

## WHY ARE YOU HANGING ON?

*Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of [FlyingFreeNow.com](http://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 129 of the Flying Free Podcast. It's story time. That's right. I'm going to read you a story today. This story is taken from a book called Friedman's Fables, and it's the very first story in the book called "The Bridge." Here we go:

There was a man who had given much thought to what he wanted from life. He had experienced many moods and trials. He had experimented with different ways of living, and he had had his share of both success and failure. At last, he began to see clearly where he wanted to go.

Diligently, he searched for the right opportunity. Sometimes he came close, only to be pushed away. Often he applied all his strength and imagination, only to find the path hopelessly blocked. And then at last it came. But the opportunity would not wait. It would be made available only for a short time. If it were seen that he was not committed, the opportunity would not come again.

Eager to arrive, he started on his journey. With each step, he wanted to move faster; with each thought about his goal, his heart beat quicker; with each vision of what lay ahead, he found renewed vigor. Strength that had left him since his early youth returned, and desires, all kinds of desires, reawakened from their long-dormant positions.

Hurrying along, he came upon a bridge that crossed through the middle of a town. It had been built high above a river in order to protect it from the floods of spring. He started across. Then he noticed someone coming from the opposite direction. As they moved closer, it seemed as though the other were coming to greet him. He could see clearly, however, that he did not know this other, who was dressed similarly except for something tied around his waist.

When they were within hailing distance, he could see that what the other had about his waist was a rope. It was wrapped around him many times and probably, if extended, would reach a length of 30 feet.

The other began to uncurl the rope, and, just as they were coming close, the stranger said, "Pardon me, would you be so kind as to hold the end a moment?" Surprised by this politely phrased but curious request, he agreed without a thought, reached out, and took it.

"Thank you," said the other, who then added, "two hands now, and remember, hold tight." Whereupon, the other jumped off the bridge.

Quickly, the free-falling body hurtled the distance of the rope's length, and from the bridge the man abruptly felt the pull. Instinctively, he held tight and was almost dragged over the side. He managed to brace himself against the edge, however, and after having caught his breath, looked down at the other dangling, close to oblivion.

"What are you trying to do?" he yelled.

"Just hold tight," said the other.

"This is ridiculous," the man thought and began trying to haul the other in. He could not get the leverage, however. It was as though the weight of the other person and the length of the rope had been carefully calculated in advance so that together they created a counterweight just beyond his strength to bring the other back to safety.

"Why did you do this?" the man called out.

"Remember," said the other, "if you let go, I will be lost."

"But I cannot pull you up," the man cried.

"I am your responsibility," said the other.

"Well, I did not ask for it," the man said.

"If you let go, I am lost," repeated the other.

He began to look around for help. But there was no one. How long would he have to wait? Why did this happen to befall him now, just as he was on the verge of true success? He examined the side, searching for a place to tie the rope. Some protrusion, perhaps, or maybe a hole in the boards. But the railing was unusually uniform in shape; there were no spaces between the boards. There was no way to get rid of this

newfound burden, even temporarily.

"What do you want?" he asked the other hanging below.

"Just your help," the other answered.

"How can I help? I cannot pull you in, and there is no place to tie the rope so that I can go and find someone to help me help you."

"I know that. Just hang on; that will be enough. Tie the rope around your waist; it will be easier."

Fearing that his arms could not hold out much longer, he tied the rope around his waist.

"Why did you do this?" he asked again. "Don't you see what you have done? What possible purpose could you have had in mind?"

"Just remember," said the other, "my life is in your hands."

What should he do? "If I let go, all my life I will know that I let this other die. If I stay, I risk losing my momentum toward my own long-sought-after salvation. Either way this will haunt me forever." With ironic humor he thought to die himself, instantly, to jump off the bridge while still holding on. "That would teach this fool." But he wanted to live and to live life fully. "What a choice I have to make; how shall I ever decide?"

As time went by, still no one came. The critical moment of decision was drawing near. To show his commitment to his own goals, he would have to continue on his journey now. It was already almost too late to arrive in time. But what a terrible choice to have to make.

A new thought occurred to him. While he could not pull this other up solely by his own efforts, if the other would shorten the rope from his end by curling it around his waist again and again, together they could do it. Actually, the other could do it by himself, so long as he, standing on the bridge, kept it still and steady.

"Now listen," he shouted down. "I think I know how to save you." And he explained his plan.

But the other wasn't interested.

"You mean you won't help? But I told you I cannot pull you up myself, and I don't think I can hang on much longer either."

"You must try," the other shouted back in tears. "If you fail, I die."

The point of decision arrived. What should he do? "My life or this other's?" And then a new idea. A revelation. So new, in fact, it seemed heretical, so alien was it to his traditional way of thinking.

"I want you to listen carefully," he said, "because I mean what I am about to say. I will not accept the position of choice for your life, only for my own; the position of choice for your own life I hereby give back to you."

"What do you mean?" the other asked, afraid.

"I mean, simply, it's up to you. You decide which way this ends. I will become the counterweight. You do the pulling and bring yourself up. I will even tug a little from here." He began unwinding the rope from around his waist and braced himself anew against the side.

"You cannot mean what you say," the other shrieked. "You would not be so selfish. I am your responsibility. What could be so important that you would let someone die? Do not do this to me."

He waited a moment. There was no change in the tension of the rope.

"I accept your choice," he said, at last, and freed his hands.

The End.\*

The man in the story is you. When you were young, with your whole life ahead of you, you thought about what you wanted. You experienced some success and some failure, and you searched for your opportunities to make your life meaningful and happy. Perhaps you had a goal in view, and you worked hard to achieve that goal. Then you came to a bridge, and you saw a man walking toward you. He was polite and interested in you. He asked you to hold one end of a rope that was tied around and around his own waist. You were a Christian woman. It would be impolite to refuse his request. It was simple enough, and he had been polite. It never crossed your mind what he would do next. But just like the man in this story, your man jumped off the bridge.

You thought, "Is he insane?" But he seemed sincere and normal. You were confused, startled, and scared. What was he doing? Now you were, in a sense, tied to another human being's destiny, and it didn't look too good. The man wasn't going anywhere. You, on the other hand, were eager to go somewhere to make a life for yourself, but you certainly couldn't do that as long as you held one end of this man's rope while he dangled over the raging river. You cared a lot. You didn't want him to get hurt, and you also wanted to be on your way. It was a predicament, but you are good at solving problems. So while he dangled there doing nothing but yelling at you to continue your job of hanging on, you thought of potential solutions. You tried to reason with him. "If you exert yourself, you can get up here, and we can travel together and be partners. That would be so much nicer than dangling." You knew he could do it if he would try. You offered various ideas for how the both of you could work together to get him back up on the bridge to safety and sanity. But he just continued to yell at you, insisting the only thing necessary was for you to hang on to his rope. Just don't let him fall. His life is in your hands. You are the one who is responsible for him. If you let go, he will die, and it will be all your fault.

You also think about what others would say about you. "Oh! She's the woman who let the man die. She could have hung on and saved him, but no! She has no heart. I don't even think she's a Christian." Facing this kind of criticism and rejection was almost as unthinkable as letting go of the rope and letting the man fall. But as the minutes turned to hours, the hours turned to days, the days turned to weeks, the weeks turned to months, and the months turned to years, your brain turns to mush and your body stiffens and atrophies, and still the man below relentlessly screams at you to hang on, reminding you what a selfish wretch you are if you let go. Several folks pass by throughout the course of time and pity the dangling man while praising you for hanging on. They tell you, "This is God's will for you to spend your life tethered to a man who refuses to choose his own life but only wants to swallow up yours." What is the solution to this dilemma?

The solution is to allow each individual to take responsibility for only one person—themselves. This doesn't mean you don't help a man out if the man chooses to accept the help. But if the man makes a personal choice to dangle and wants you to take responsibility for his life, your life will no longer belong to you or to God. Instead, it will belong to a man who wants to consume you until time has run out and your life has gone. The Bible says that the enemy comes to kill, steal, and destroy, but Jesus came to give us life, and not just life, but abundant life. In Genesis, when God announced the consequences of sin, He said that for Eve, her desire would be for her husband. It would be misplaced. Instead of desiring the approval of God and seeking Him first, she would

now desire the approval of her husband and would be tied into her husband's universe. As Christian women who desire to align ourselves with Jesus Christ in reversing this consequence of sin, we need to shake off our focus on the dangling man. We need to allow the man to make his own choice for his life. This is his God-given right and freedom—to choose his own life or to choose a living death for himself and to trust that God's heart is big enough to take care of him should he choose that living death.

But God gave you responsibility for you. How are you stewarding your life? Have you allowed yourself to become unwittingly tethered to a man or a church leader or a doctrine or a movement that is now holding you in one spot and refusing to budge? This is not God's design for human life. This is the enemy's way of neutralizing and thwarting God's ultimate design. Who are we aligning ourselves with? Men or God? Are we willing to let go of the rope after giving the dangling man his own choice? You will be vilified for letting go. The Christian culture we live in today is one of shaming, judgment, and power and control. The current Christian culture in general is anxious, avoidant, blaming, and hiding. Will we be part of that problem, or will we be part of the solution? The beautiful thing is that our part of the solution has nothing to do with anyone else but ourselves. There is no other burden but to take up our own responsibility for ourselves and our own lives and stay focused on the God of love and freedom, to let go of dogma and beliefs and to practice true faith, which means there are more questions than answers and more curiosity than sureness.

If you have been hanging on to the other end of the rope of a dangling man, consider letting go and committing him to God. Then commit your life to that same God and go live it to the full. That's all I have for you today. Until next time, fly free!

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