

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

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 145 of the Flying Free Podcast. I want to thank you for listening and a special thanks to those who have left a raving review. There are so many wonderful reviews, and they're gratifying to read. Here's one from sheebeck. She says,

REVIEW: "Natalie, thank you so much. I hate to admit this, but I almost didn't click on this podcast because it said 'Christian Women,' and I was afraid I would get the typical 'Be submissive, as he is the head of the home.' After thirty years of an abusive marriage and several attempts to leave, I needed something more and different. I cannot stop listening. Finally, someone actually teaching the love of Jesus and giving us tools to use to come out and learn our purpose and how to fly free."

NATALIE: Thank you, sheebeck. I'm glad that you decided to take a chance on this podcast, and I'm also glad that it's been a source of help and support for your life. Here's another review from Sheri, and she says,

REVIEW: "This wonderful podcast has been a conduit of God's healing and love for me. When you're in a destructive marriage, you feel like you're constantly walking through a fog of confusion. Natalie uses this platform to provide guidance, clarity, and hope to women seeking understanding. She's a gifted communicator expressing care, compassion, and authenticity. She has walked the walk. She is passionate about helping women feel empowered, pointing to Jesus as the healer and restorer of our souls. I feel like she walks alongside me as a trusted friend. After listening to this podcast for over a year, I decided to join the Flying Free Sisterhood program. That has been a game changer as I walk this path. If you are in need of ongoing support, education, and coaching, I highly recommend checking it out."

NATALIE: I really appreciate that feedback, Sheri, and I also want to thank you for joining our community and also for recommending it to the others who are listeners of this podcast.

If you're listening and you're newer and wondering what Sheri is referring to, I have an education and coaching program for women of faith in emotionally and spiritually destructive relationships and communities. It's called Flying Free. That program offers

courses, workshops, live events, weekly coaching, a private forum, and more. It's all served up on a silver platter for only \$29 a month or \$290 for a year. We have hundreds of Christian women in our community. They're all learning and growing together. My goal is to help Christian women let go of responsibility that does not belong to them and take back their power and control of the things that they can control. I've watched so many women become powerhouses in their homes and communities because of the work that they have done in Flying Free. It is super exciting. It is the most exciting thing that I have ever done in my entire life. I wake up energized every morning. If you're interested in learning more, you can go to joinflyingfree.com.

Okay, let's get into our topic for today. If you are in America, you know that Thanksgiving is right around the corner and after that comes Christmas for most of us all over the world if we are of the Christian faith. You all know what that means. It means good food. Lots of good food. It also means lots of work buying and preparing the good food. It means decorating the house a bit differently, first in oranges and browns, and then reds and greens. It means bringing out the candles and the hot apple cider. It means Christmas music. For those of us in the North, it also means cold weather and snow. It means shopping for gifts for loved ones. It means getting together with the people we love the most and laughing and reconnecting and building new memories. There are so many good things that we can think of when it comes to the holiday season, and when we think of those things we feel nostalgic, we feel warm and fuzzy inside, we feel excited and happy, and we feel a lot of love. But, there are also many hard things we can think of when we think of the holidays.

The holidays mean remembering the loved one or the loved ones who have died, who are no longer celebrating with us. Holidays can mean worrying about finances and whether or not we're going to be able to pay our bills, or even afford the gifts and the extra food we'd like to buy. It also means having to get together with people who don't agree with us on politics and religion and vaccines and masks. People who have strong opinions. People who share those opinions and get angry and upset when everyone else doesn't agree. People who gossip and complain about other people. People who get drunk and mean. People who get passive aggressive. And when we think about those things and anticipate those kinds of gatherings, we may feel insecure, afraid, out of control, and overwhelmed. Maybe a sense of dread. Is anyone listening right now who feels that way about the next few weeks coming up here? What do you look forward to? What do you dread?

I think one of the reasons it's so hard to get together with difficult people is because we want to just be happy and have everyone else be happy too, and when others are unhappy or disgruntled or angry or anxious, that makes us unhappy, disgruntled,

angry, and anxious. Actually, it doesn't. Actually, those difficult people don't have that kind of power over us. They can't make us unhappy, disgruntled, angry, and anxious, because our emotions don't come from other people and what they do or don't do, say or don't say. The emotions we experience in our bodies like fear and anger and anxiety or joy all come from the thoughts in our brains. Some of those thoughts are conscious thoughts, but most of them are non-conscious thoughts in our brains. Our emotions come from the ways that we filter our circumstances through our belief system or the grid that we think of everything through, through our manual for life, which is what we make everything outside of ourselves mean. Now this is really, really, really good news, because it means that you have more control than you think you have over how you're going to feel this holiday season and how we feel our emotions drive everything we do. Our emotions dictate how we show up for ourselves and how we show up for our kids and our loved ones. Our emotions drive how we show up around people who are difficult and ornery and cranky.

Let me give you an example. Let's say that you are getting together with Great Aunt Matilda for Thanksgiving dinner, and you know her from past experience to be opinionated and prejudiced. She makes negative comments about how people from another country are moving into her neighborhood and taking over and how everyone who doesn't go to her church is going straight to hell, and good riddance! And how the turkey is not the way she used to cook it. And where is the green bean casserole anyway? Doesn't everyone know that it isn't a Thanksgiving meal without green bean casserole, for the love of Squanto?! Now, there are many people sitting around the table listening to Great Aunt Matilda wax and wane about life according to Great Aunt Matilda, and one of those people is Harold. Harold is having these thoughts: "She is such an asshole. Who invites her every year anyway? I can't stand another minute of this. She's so out of touch with reality. I wanna smear the cranberry sauce all over her face. She's so mean. She shouldn't be allowed to talk. Why isn't she dead yet? She's gotta be 99 years old. I'm never coming here again." And Harold would be experiencing anger, resentment, frustration, and anxiety in his body not because of Great Aunt Matilda, but because of Harold's thoughts about Great Aunt Matilda and what the things she was saying mean for him.

Now, when Harold is feeling all of those things in his body, those emotions drive his actions, and we see him doing things like this: he's muttering under his breath, scowling, he picks at his food, he argues, and then he slinks off to a corner to nurse a beer as soon as dinner is over. He even declines the pumpkin pie. He is so beside himself with irritation. What is the result for Harold? Well, he's kind of being an asshole, right? He's out of touch with the reality of his family members and even himself. Maybe he's being mean. Notice how his results reflect his thoughts about Great Aunt Matilda?

He is, in some ways, similar to her in the way he shows up when he has the belief that she should be different from who she actually is.

Now, there is another person sitting there at the dinner table, and her name is Gretchen. Let's see what Gretchen is thinking, because she's listening to the same stuff, but she's thinking very differently from Harold. Gretchen is thinking this: "Oh my, there goes Great Aunt Matilda again, doing what she does, showing up as herself in full color. She never was able to hold her tongue or her opinions, poor thing. This turkey is delicious. I hate green bean casserole anyway, so I'm glad someone brought ants-in-the-jungle salad instead. I love this meal! I'm so happy to be with all these amazing, quirky, funny relatives. They are adorable. I enjoy their eccentricities."

Now, when Gretchen is thinking these thoughts, her body is releasing totally different chemicals and hormones into her system. Whereas Harold's cortisol levels were rising, Gretchen's body released some dopamine and serotonin and she experienced a sense of well-being, peace, and joy. These emotions drove her to relax, enjoy her food, laugh at her ornery great aunt, and converse naturally with the others at the table. She was even able to gracefully navigate changing a tricky subject at one point much to the relief of the others at the table, and the result for her was an enjoyable, memorable day with her loved ones.

Do you know what the key difference is between Harold and Gretchen? Harold has just as big of a manual for everyone at that table as Great Aunt Matilda. In his manual, great aunts should not be prejudiced. They should love all the food, should always be in a good mood, and they should be emotionally intelligent and kind. And his happiness and well-being are totally dependent on whether or not his great aunt lives according to his manual. In other words, he has given all of his power to feel amazing and to have a great time to his Great Aunt Matilda, and that's kind of sad. Gretchen, on the other hand, has no manual for great aunts. In her belief system, great aunts get to be exactly who they are, even if that means they're kind of an asshole at Thanksgiving dinner. Gretchen is not interested in fighting reality. She's interested in having a great time. Her happiness and well-being do not depend on how Great Aunt Matilda is behaving or what she is saying. This means that Gretchen gets to choose what she thinks and how she feels, and she is in control of herself, and she chooses joy and love.

Now, I realize that some of you listening right now are living with a man who is cruel, and he makes Great Aunt Matilda look like Barney. I'm not saying that you have to feel good when your husband or your abusive mother-in-law or your abusive brother or sister say cruel things to you or treat you disrespectfully. I don't want to feel good when people treat me that way. I want to feel sad about that. I want to not like that. But I do

want to challenge all of us that it is possible to get to a place where what they say only gives us information about that person and not about us. This is going to help. Think about it.

Let's say you've got a husband named Nable. Nable says to you, "Your Christmas cookies suck and you're a lazy, whiney, no good woman. You're a drain on my checking account and my life." Your brain may make that mean that you are all of those things and when you think that you will feel shame and fear and sadness. Or, your brain could make that mean that you are married to a wicked man who has no idea who he's married to because he's lost in his delusional, messed up, selfish, entitled universe. And then you will still probably feel sadness and maybe some fear, but at least you won't feel that shame, which is debilitating.

Do you see how what you believe either eases the emotions a bit or makes them worse? You see, we all have a manual for the people in our lives. Our manual tells us what everyone needs to do or say or how they need to show up in order for us to feel good about ourselves. But there are two huge problems with this.

Number one, when we hold tight to our manual, we are putting all of the control of our lives and how we feel in the hands of other people. And then we have to control them if we want to feel good, right? This is really sad because there are very few people who will be able to live according to our manual. This means that we're going to be unhappy most of the time and we're going to feel bad about ourselves most of the time.

The other problem with having a manual (I just touched on it a second ago) is that we end up trying to control other people. We want Great Aunt Matilda to be different so we can be happy. So we will argue with her, or we'll defend ourselves to her, or we'll try to see things our way because our sense of well-being depends on her. Fighting the reality of who Great Aunt Matilda is just increases our emotional pain. We call this "dirty pain." Now, it's one thing to be sad because she's unkind to people who are not like her, but it's quite another thing to be resentful because she won't change so that we can feel better. We can feel better even if Great Aunt Matilda isn't feeling very good and isn't happy. Her thoughts and opinions are creating emotions in her body only. She's the only one who can feel those emotions, and they're driving her to take action and show up in her life in ways that are creating negative results for her, not you. Think about it. Does Matilda have a lot of friends? Thanksgiving dinner is probably the only time anyone puts up with her. So we can drop into compassion for how stuck she is in her universe, but we don't have to allow her behavior to mean anything about us and who we are and our identity.

Now I want you to imagine with me for a minute how the next few weeks of your life could be different if you were able to leave your manual for everyone in your life on a shelf just for the next few weeks, just until January 1st, 2022. On January 1st, you can take your manual down again, brush it off, and use it if you want to. But I think that if you try leaving it on the shelf for a few weeks, you're going to discover that life is so much better without it. When our kids complain about our meatloaf, what do we do? We pick up our manual, which says, "Kids should never complain." It says this on page 4,378, and then we think, "Ugh. It's not fair. I worked hard to make that meatloaf, and all they do is complain. I try and try and never measure up." And we feel angry mixed with a little bit of shame, which drives us to snip and snap and creates the result of us complaining. But, if we have our manual up on the shelf and we decide that we're not going to take it down for a few weeks and the kids complain about the meatloaf, we might be able to think, "Hmm. Kids complain. That's what they do. But I am loving this meatloaf — yum!" Then we feel happy, we cheerfully remind the kids that they can totally complain but they just won't get ice cream if they do, and we have the result of being the mom we want to be.

Now, I want to wrap this up by saying whether you are married to a Great Aunt Matilda or a Nable, I can help you with this process of disconnecting others from your manual and disconnecting yourself from their manual so you can be free and in control of your personal mind-space. This is one of the most important things that we work on in Flying Free. Let me give you an example that one member gave in our private forum of this metamorphosis that she's been discovering in herself. Here's what she says: "Does anyone find that they don't have the desire to argue with anyone anymore? I had to deliver some hard news to a family member and they essentially said that I was believing a lie and blowing things out of proportion. I guess I'm just feeling like there's no point in trying to defend myself to this person. What I feel is not quite defeat, more like resignation. I resign to their right to believe whatever they want, and it doesn't change what I believe nor does it make me wish I had done anything differently. The situation will likely change my relationship with that family member. Even still, I think I've just accepted that the majority of people in my life right now do not understand me nor will they ever (or at least for a long time) and I'm okay with that. It hurts, but it's clean hurt. It's just sad, but I'm not fighting it. I used to be the person who never stopped fighting until I felt heard and understood, and now I'm okay with being misunderstood."

What do you guys think? I thought that was amazing. I want to let you know that I am doing a live workshop in the Flying Free program on December 5th where I'm going to expand on this whole topic of dealing with difficult relationships during the holidays. So if you join Flying Free before that time, you will be able to get in on that workshop, as

well as dozens of other workshops, as well as courses, as well as weekly coaching, as well as a live forum, as well as Butterfly Stories. There are so many good things in this program. If this is work that you want to do, I encourage you to find out all of the things by going to joinflyingfree.com. We would love to have you join us in time for the holidays.

And that's all I have for you today! Until next time, fly free.