

## WHY BEING REJECTED BY YOUR CHURCH AND FAMILY HURTS SO BAD

*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 186 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today, we're going to be talking about the overwhelming pain of rejection and loss of relationships that comes when we begin to wake up to abuse and stand up for ourselves. The people around us aren't used to us showing up in this way, and many times, they will reject us if we don't lay back down and just go back to taking responsibility for everything and everyone. Our topic today has a listener question, and then I'm going to give you some things to consider and think about when it comes to this kind of pain. So let's listen to the question first.

**LISTENER:** Hi Natalie. This is my question — reckoning with the loss, such a great loss, of family and community. It just seems insurmountable. You know, I've been divorced now for two years and separated for seven. This came as a shock to me. I had no idea I was in store for losing everything — all of my community. It's almost like standing on a Star Wars ship as an alien and a visitor on the ship and watching your whole planet blow up, and you're the last survivor. And I really don't know how to do that. We're made for community. God created us for community — for family, for relationships — and when every relationship is destroyed... There's nothing like being with family. As much as I love community with people, friends that are going through the same thing, it's not the same. And I don't know — maybe you could speak to that. I just don't understand how we can say, "Yes, we're created for community..." And yes, I know we have to survive. I know that. But finding a way to do that with such great loss is sometimes insurmountable. Thanks.

**NATALIE:** Okay, so first of all, I want to acknowledge this painful reality. I think she described it beautifully with her analogy of being on a spaceship and watching her planet blow up. That was a good word picture. It's devastating; it's horrifying; it's so many things. I also want to say that I have experienced this myself. I lost my mother, both of my sisters — none of those people have talked to me for three years. They disrespected me at my daughter's wedding; they haven't invited me to my nephew's wedding or my niece's wedding. They didn't include me in my dad's funeral. They have spread lies about me to my relatives. I've spent the last three years thinking, crying, hoping, mentally preparing for unexpected encounters, unsure of how I would respond or react to different things they might say to me in my imagination. I've also

been intentional about working on healing and so forth, but honestly, it's been emotionally exhausting.

I also have lost my church family and people that I had known and loved and built into those relationships for over two decades. They also publicly spoke lies about me out loud to hundreds of people, many of whom didn't even know me, and then those same people took a vote in public to kick me out of their church. And then they chased me down to the next church I was taking my kids to and warned the elders there about how rebellious and dangerous I was. They said that I was a liar, that I had borderline personality disorder, that I was abusive to my ex, that I had had an affair, the whole nine yards.

All of these were lies that my ex had told them that they had chosen to believe and spread, in spite of the fact that I had been the one who for years had been begging them at different times for help while my husband had not done anything and dragged his feet to counseling and never took responsibility for anything. What's crazy is that every time I would ask for help, I was very discreet, and I did what I could to minimize who knew about it and what they knew in order to protect my husband's reputation, and even so, I was told that I was airing dirty laundry and being disrespectful to him by talking about his issues and getting help.

But interestingly enough, nobody said anything to him about the lies he spread about me with the help of several other men in leadership at that church. Nobody told these pastors and elders or my husband that they were airing out dirty laundry or disrespecting a woman and ruining her reputation. There were no lectures for these men — only for me and other women at this church who dared to raise our heads from the dirt and whimper. It was so surreal.

So to take that planet-blowing-up analogy story that she said a step further, it was like the entire planet hunted me down, grabbed me, and then exiled me to outer space where I would have to die alone. So the reason that I'm saying all of this, I'm prefacing what I'm going to say next, okay? Because I don't want anyone to think that what I'm going to say next is because I'm callous, hardened, I don't understand, I don't have compassion, I don't get this kind of excruciating pain — I do. I get it. I get it more than you probably realize. It is mind-numbing pain. I've lost entire nights of sleep swimming in this pain.

But here are some questions that I've asked myself and that I ask the women in my programs when they bring this subject up, and we talk about it. And we do talk about it quite a bit in my programs. So here are some questions. First of all, "Why are we

choosing to tell the story this way when it causes so much intense pain?" Now, the analogies that have been given by this listener (amazing analogies) and the one that I gave you are really good ways of describing the pain for sure. But they are just optional ways of telling the story. They're not true, right? They're analogies. I've not been hunted down and exiled to outer space, and nobody's blown up a planet and we're the last living human being in the world. There are still over eight billion people on the planet, and we're still living here. But we're telling the story that way, and really, we don't have to. It's actually optional.

When we make a choice to think about our story in that way, it might be helpful for a little bit in order to communicate the depth of the pain, but ultimately, I think we're creating a lot of extra pain for ourselves that I think is unnecessary. I mean, it's bad enough what happened, right? There is the clean pain of acknowledging the reality of what happened. So what are the facts about what happened, though? Our families and friends don't talk to us anymore. That's it. That's the facts, okay? Now what we make that mean about ourselves or what we make that mean about our life and our future, that story is what is going to create how we feel. It's actually going to end up creating our results too.

So follow with me here now. When I think the thought — take all these things that happened, okay? — when I think the thought, "Man, those guys are a bunch of asshole losers, haters, cheaters, and liars," which, I have thought that, how do I feel in my body? I feel angry and justified in my anger. When I think the thought, "I am an unlovable woman, and there must be something wrong with me," I feel shame. When I think, "I need community desperately, and I'm never going to have it again," or if I think the thought, "I have no friends and family and I never will," I feel despair in my body. When I think this thought, "This problem is insurmountable and cannot be healed," I feel overwhelmed and hopeless. When I think, "I don't know how to do this," I feel confused. When I think, "I have to understand this," I feel desperate and panicked.

Do you see how all of these emotions that I have in my body are created by what I'm choosing to believe about the fact that my family of origin and some people from a church in the Twin Cities of Minnesota voted me out? The most important thing I want you to understand here is that these beliefs and thoughts are creating my emotions in my body, not what happened. What happened was many years ago. But what I'm making it mean today is what creates my feelings and emotions, okay? I can keep all of that if I want to, and I have — I've kept a lot of it. But we all need to acknowledge that this is the reality of the situation.

I want you to think about this, okay? Jesus actually went through the exact same things

and then some. I mean, so far nobody's killed you or me, right? When Judas betrayed Him or when Peter denied Him or when the crowds chased Him to a cliff and wanted to throw Him over or when His disciples all ran away when He was arrested or when the Romans were spitting on Him and mocking Him, did Jesus choose to think, "They're a bunch of asshole losers, haters, cheaters, and liars," or "I'm unlovable and there's something wrong with me," or "I need community and I'm never going to have it again," or "This problem is insurmountable and cannot be healed," or "I don't know how to do this," or "I have to understand this"? Nope.

Now, before we talk about what Jesus actually did believe in spite of all the same things happening to Him, let's talk about what our feelings of anger or desperation or confusion or overwhelm or despair or hopelessness, what those feelings are causing us to do in our lives. How are all these emotions that we're creating with our chosen thoughts motivating us to show up for our lives? Because everything we do in our lives is driven by how we feel. Our feelings are the fuel that drive our actions.

So when I think, "They're a bunch of asshole losers, haters, cheaters, and liars," and I feel angry and justified in my body, what do I do? How do I show up in my life? I become irritable and distracted. I don't listen very well, I get impatient, I get snippy with my kids, I ruminate, I have a hard time concentrating on my work helping Christian women heal, I buffer with overeating (Pirate's Booty is my snack of choice — oh, and chips and cheese), I shut down and watch Netflix and scroll Facebook in a desperate effort to think about something else. And when I do all of these things, what is the result for me and my life? Well, I'm kind of behaving like an asshole to myself and my family. Fascinating, right? My belief creates my result for me.

Let's do another one. When I think, "I'm an unlovable woman, and there must be something wrong with me," and I feel shame in my body, what do I do? How do I show up in my life? Well, I can't focus and I want to sleep. I'm unmotivated to go grocery shopping and plan the meals for the week. I'm too ashamed to make an Instagram reel that will help others or to write a podcast episode, because who am I to try to help others when I'm such a wretched human being and there's something wrong with me? And when I do all of these things, what is the result for me and my life? I am not loving myself, and I'm doing my life the wrong way.

Do you see how my belief creates my result? This is so important, because if you look at the results in your life, like, look around you and assess where you're at in your life right now. You're going to discover by looking at your life and what you're creating, you're going to discover what you believe. You're going to be able to see your default beliefs lived out in your lived life. And vice versa, if you write down all of your beliefs and

thoughts on a piece of paper, you're going to actually be able to see your life on paper. That's just how it works, my friends.

Alright, let's do another one. When I think, "I need community, and I'll never have it again," or I think, "I have no friends and family, and I never will," I feel despair in my body. And when I feel despair in my body, what do I do? How do I show up in my life? Well, I stay home and overeat. More Pirate's Booty, please. I don't initiate spending any time with anyone. I hole up by myself. I don't go anywhere unless it's absolutely necessary. I don't reach out. I don't take risks to help anyone or make myself open and vulnerable to new relationships. And what is the result of all these actions and behaviors? Well, I don't enter into community with anyone, and I don't connect with my own internal family of parts who need me to be there for them to understand and listen and hold space for them so they can heal and be brave again.

Let's do another one. When I think, "This problem is insurmountable and cannot be healed," I feel overwhelmed in my body. How do I show up in my life when I feel overwhelmed? I don't. It's too overwhelming. I shut down and hide. I play small. I don't try. I give up. And guess what the result is? I live my life unhealed.

I hope you're getting the picture here. Now, if we believe that all of these results that we don't like and we don't want are because our family rejected us and our church kicked us out and our child won't talk to us, then we are victims indeed. We really don't have any hope at all, because our well-being and joy completely depend on whether or not our family and church and child like us. We can try to make them like us by fawning and agreeing with them and apologizing to them for existing and having a human opinion, or we could decide that if they don't like us, it's the same thing as watching a planet blow up, and they are everyone on the planet and it's all over, and we might as well give up.

But do you see how both of those responses give our God-given power away to other people and circumstances? Why would we do that? How in the world does that make life better? I mean, seriously, life already sucks because these people did this. Let's just be honest about it, okay? And now we're just going to make it suck even more by resisting this reality or making it mean that our life is meaningless and every person on the planet is just like our ex or our family or our church? This is the difference between clean pain, which we acknowledge because of the hard facts of life like people dying or betraying us or losing our health or losing a job. Clean pain sucks, but we can learn to process through it, grieve, make friends with it, heal, and move forward in spite of it.

Or we can decide to layer onto the clean pain a big huge helping of dirty pain, the pain

that comes from resisting reality or saying “It shouldn't be this way” or saying that “Life is meaningless now” or deciding that everything will now suck forever and ever amen. That is dirty pain. Dirty pain is like a cactus. You can hang onto your cactus if you want to. You can hug it close to your body. You don't have to let your dirty pain go if you don't want to. But it's hurting you. Or you can let go of your cactus and just sit with the clean pain. It still hurts, but not as much. And when you learn how to allow the clean pain, you realize that it actually comes and goes like a wave. You actually can manage it.

So here are some questions that we can ask our brains. I love these questions, and I ask myself these questions on a regular basis: “What if you're wrong, and you can handle this?” “What if these people who rejected you aren't assholes, but are simply like small children in big bodies who are projecting their own unhealed trauma and emotional childhood onto you, and it actually has nothing to do with you?” “What if you are lovable just the way you are, and there's nothing wrong with you at all?” “What if you're a normal human being having a normal human experience?” “What if community actually is available to you 24/7 within yourself and outside of yourself, and you've never actually been disconnected from it at all?” “What if there isn't actually a problem here, just an opportunity to learn from and transform through?” “What if you do know how to do this?” “What if you're actually doing it right now?” “What if you don't have to understand it — you only need to accept it and breathe through it?”

Okay, I said we would come back to talking about how Jesus thought about this same problem, because I'm pretty sure He didn't frame it like this: “I'm in a spaceship, and the planet just exploded with all my people on it.” Think about it though: If anyone on this earth could say that, He might be the one who might actually have that kind of big-picture perspective, right? But is that how He viewed His rejection and crucifixion by the people on this earth? No, that's not how He viewed it, and I'm glad He didn't, because if He had, we would not be able to know God the way that we can know Him now.

So we're going to look at some Bible verses and find out some ways... We're going to just sit in the book of John for a little bit here, and we're going to look at some ways that Jesus thought about His life when some similar things happened. So we'll start with chapter two. In John chapter two, Jesus is doing some miracles, and some people really like it, but then it says in verse twenty-four, you know what it says? It says, “But Jesus didn't trust them, because He knew all about people. No one needed to tell Him about human nature, for He knew what was in each person's heart.” Interesting, huh? So His thought was something along the lines of, “I love these people, and I will help them. But I will not trust them. I know human nature, and I know they are fickle. But my love for them is not dependent on my being able to trust them. I trust me, and I will love them. I will not trust them.”

Alright, now let's go to John chapter five. In this chapter, some of the religious rulers are withholding their approval from Jesus. Sound familiar? In John 5:41, He says to the religious rulers, "Your approval means nothing to me, because I know you don't have God's love within you." So His thought was something along the lines of, "I do not need the approval of men who do not know me or have God's love in them."

In John chapter 6, His disciples were whining and complaining, and then it says this: "At this point, many of his disciples turned away and deserted Him." These aren't the twelve — these are just other disciples, okay? And then in verse sixty-seven it says, "Then Jesus turned to the twelve and asked, 'Are you also going to leave?'" So here, His thought is some version of, "These people are free to leave whenever they wish. I will not force them to stay with me. I want them to be free to make their own choice."

In John chapter seven, Jesus says to a crowd of people, "'You are trying to kill me.' And the crowd replied, 'You're demon possessed. Who's trying to kill you?'" Basically gaslighting him, right? "And Jesus said, 'Why should you be angry with me for healing a man on the Sabbath? Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly.'" So His thought here is something along the lines of, "These men are angry and trying to kill me because they are not aligned with God and are not able to love. But I am aligned with God, and I love this man, and I will heal him regardless of what day of the week it is. It's okay if people are mad at me for that. I'm still going to be me, and I'm still going to do what I'm here to do."

In John chapter eight, the people retorted, "'You Samaritan devil! Didn't we say all along that you are possessed by a demon?' 'No,' Jesus said, 'I have no demon in me, for I honor my Father, and you dishonor me.'" So His thought here was something along the lines of, "I will honor my Father. These people believe that to honor God means I'm possessed, so I'll point that out to them and then just let them believe as they wish."

In John sixteen, Jesus says this: "The time is coming when those who kill you" (he's talking to the disciples) "will think that they're doing a holy service for God. This is because they have never known the Father or me." Now in this verse we see that Jesus is trying to pass along His thoughts to His disciples. He's saying, "Hey. Do you see how these people who are not aligned with the heart of God are treating me? They're going to do the same thing to you, and they are 100% going to believe that they're doing God a favor. They will think that their persecution of you is actually glorifying God, but just so you know, their behavior has nothing to do with you or God. They act that way and reject you because they don't know God and they don't know me. That's it. It's not about you. It's about them."

Now later on in John sixteen, the Bible says this. This is after Jesus is arrested, and the high priest is talking to Him: "The high priest began asking Jesus about His followers and what He had been teaching them. Jesus replied, 'Everyone knows what I teach. I've preached regularly in the synagogues and the temple where the people gather. I've not spoken in secret. Why are you asking me this question? Ask those who heard me. They know what I said.' Then one of the temple guards standing nearby slapped Jesus across the face. 'Is that the way to answer the high priest?' he demanded. Jesus replied, 'If I said anything wrong, you must prove it. But if I'm speaking the truth, why are you beating me?'"

Has that ever happened to you, where you call someone out and they say, "You're being mean. Is that the way we talk? You're being rebellious." That's what they were doing to Jesus, and Jesus is like, "Prove it. But if I'm speaking the truth, why are you beating me?" In other words, is Jesus fawning and apologizing for upsetting these great religious leaders? Is He trying to explain Himself? No. Why not? Because He already knows who He is, period.

Now I don't see any version of these thoughts in any of these scripture passages, nor do I see them at all in the gospels. Let's go over the thoughts that you and I struggle with: "They're a bunch of asshole losers, haters, cheaters, and liars." "I'm unlovable and there's something wrong with me." "I need community and I'll never have it again." "This problem is insurmountable and cannot be healed." "I don't know how to do this." "I have to understand this." Thank goodness Jesus wasn't thinking those things. I mean, if Jesus was thinking those things, He would have felt so disempowered, and probably would have shut down and never been able to bring so much love and healing into the world in spite of how horrible the world treated Him. In other words, the world treated Him the way the world treats us. But Jesus thought differently about it. He made it mean something different than what we are making it mean.

Here's what Jesus made it mean, just as a recap: "I love these people, but I know what they are made of, and so I don't trust them." "I do not need the approval of men." "I want people to be free to make their own choice because I love them, and I will let them go if they do not want to associate with me." "I will make my own choices about who and when I heal people." "I will speak the truth and allow others to be uncomfortable and even angry with that truth." "I know who I am, and the choices of others or the accusations of others do not define me."

So I get that we're human. We're not God. We have these knee-jerk, default thoughts that make everything worse than it already is. But as Christians, we believe that Jesus came to this earth as a human with all the same human experiences and emotions, and



He did this in order to show us what is possible, not just for Him, but for our lives. We can, just like Jesus, live above the petty haters and accusers and liars and those who would try to define us or reject us based on their own personal shame and need to be better than everyone else. We can live into our own identity in spite of how others choose to identify us and pretend things about who we are.

True Christianity is not what it looks like in the United States today where I'm from, okay? That is not true Christianity. True Christianity is when we follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, for whom the word "Christianity" was named after, and we allow others and we give them space to be assholes if they insist upon it. And we go where there are humans who want to connect with us. Now I know some of you may not know who those people are yet, but I promise you they are out there. There are eight billion hurting people in this world, and they are all seeking love and acceptance and relationship and connection, because that is the human predicament. And I promise, some of those eight billion people are living in your town and in your neighborhood and in your apartment building and are drinking coffee in your local coffee shop.

Now, there are two things that have helped me when it comes to my need for relationships. One is that I've decided to create my own relationships, ones that I choose to nurture and feed and grow. This puts the power of my relationships back in my control, okay? And I've chosen to limit those relationships to just a very few. But I've just decided that it's my job to grow that part of the garden of my life. I'm not going to leave that to chance; I'm not going to leave it to someone else; I'm not going to leave it up to my church to put me in a random small group and hope that I meet someone that I can connect with. So first of all, once we've accepted that we have lost a handful of humans, really, when you think about it — it's a drop in the bucket of how many humans are on this planet — once we've accepted that we've lost a few of them when we woke up to abuse and took a stand, which is actually very common and to be expected, we then decide when and who to allow into our lives from now on, okay? That's the first thing.

Secondly, I've decided that the most important relationship for me to work on is not my relationship with other people. It's not my relationship with Tom, my second husband. It's not even my relationship with God. I'm good with God — He's got me. Our relationship with God is always perfect and amazing, not because of us, but because of Him. He's got us — He loves us. We're there. Now we can have thoughts about our relationship with Him that are completely not true that will create negative feelings in us, and then we're not going to be able to feel that relationship with Him, but that relationship, the reality of it is that it's always intact.

No. The most important relationship for me to work on is the relationship that I have with myself. That's the relationship that has suffered my entire life. That's the relationship that must be nurtured before we can even be a good friend or have a healthy relationship with anyone else other than God. We have that relationship with God and it's always amazing, because again, it has nothing to do with us and our shame or anything.

Now when everyone began backing away from me because I was taking a stand against the abuse in my life, I decided that I was going to make friends with a woman. Her name was Natalie. I took her out to eat; I took her to a chiropractor; I took her to a massage therapist; I bought her favorite treat when I went grocery shopping; I bought her a birthday present and a Christmas present; I made her birthday special; I exercised and took walks and ate healthier, and I have continued to internally work on this relationship.

Even more recently, I have been getting to know myself even better by doing some Internal Family Systems work with an IFS coach. IFS is a way of thinking about yourself that includes getting to know all of the different parts that live inside of you. So for example, I have this little nervous part that tries to keep me safe from taking risks. I also have this little girl part that hides from conflict, and she's terrified of disapproval. But as I get to know all of these different parts and hear what they have to say and offer them compassion and love, I become less triggered. I become more emotionally stable and confident. I'm able to bounce back when bad things happen. My boundaries have become clearer and healthier, and I am a better mother, I'm a better wife, I'm a better friend.

I took a good two years, you guys, and I did not look for any relationships. I didn't. I lost everyone. But instead of looking to replace those relationships, I focused on this one relationship with this one person named Natalie. And that focus and intentionality has done more for my healing than I think anything else I've ever tried. Now following that time period, I met Tom, who is now my husband. We're going to celebrate five years of marriage this fall. And I was actually ready for that healthy relationship because of the work that I had put into getting to know Natalie. It was more than worth it.

Maybe you could make a commitment to just taking one to two years of your life, the next one to two years, and just focusing on that relationship with yourself. God gave you that relationship. It really is the most important human relationship that you'll have. And all of your other relationships will flow from that relationship. So ask yourself, "How well have I nurtured and stewarded this relationship with myself?" Maybe this is the year to start doing that. I promise you it will pay off. When we plant a

garden, it takes a lot of nurturing before we see the fruit, but when we do, it's usually exponential. If we sow seeds of a good relationship with ourselves, we're going to reap a good relationship with ourselves. If we sow those seeds today, guess when we're going to reap that good relationship with ourselves? Not today — it takes time. But possibly a year from now we're going to start reaping the benefits of that. And if we sow those seeds, we're going to reap far more than what we sowed.

If you want to do this kind of work within a community of women just like you, I encourage you to join Flying Free, and I will help you with all of this. Plus, you will be able to connect with other women, actually, in our forum anytime you want to. You can learn more by going to [joinflyingfree.com](http://joinflyingfree.com).

And if you benefit from this podcast, I'd be so grateful if you left a rating and review so that other women just like you can discover how they can also find hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse. Thank you in advance for helping to spread this podcast in that way. That's all I have for you today. Until next time, fly free.