

WILL DIVORCE RUIN MY KIDS AND THEIR OPPORTUNITIES IN LIFE?

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 187 of the Flying Free Podcast. I want to thank you for listening. Thank you to our regular listeners who've been around for a long time. And I want to welcome those of you who are brand new listeners who are just trying to figure out who in the world this person is and what this podcast is about. I love doing this. I love connecting with each one of you with podcasts. Sometimes I pinch myself, and I'm like, "How awesome is this?" I'm kind of an introvert. Not kind of — I am an introvert. But I really love helping people. I and other people like me can actually help other people all by ourselves from the safety of our little cocoon office, and I just think it's incredible. God put me in just the right time and space in the universe to do what I just love doing. But of course, we couldn't do this work if we weren't doing it together. We're not in a vacuum. We are connected in so many different ways that we don't even understand, but podcasting is just one way that we can connect, and I love it so, so much.

Okay, today I'm going to answer two listener questions. And by the way, if you are a listener, which you are, if you have a question that you would like to get answered, if you go to my website, and you can go to any of the podcast episodes on there, and there will actually be a little "record" button, and all you have to do is press the "record" button and record your question. If you wanted to go to this episode's page where the show notes are, you would just go to flyingfreenow.com/187. And you can actually go to any of the podcast episodes with that URL. Just flyingfreenow.com/3. /32. Whatever episode you want to go to, you can do that. Sometimes it's easy, especially if you hear me say, "Oh, I talked about this in Episode 33," it's easier to find the episodes that way than it is probably on your podcast app, because some of the podcast apps don't put the numbers on there — they just put the title of the podcast. So anyway, just a little tip and trick.

Alright, let's listen to our first question.

LISTENER: So my kids are teenagers now, and although I'm divorced, we are still in a very conservative kind of community, and it just occurred to me to worry about whether my marital status as a divorced person is going to harm them in their social opportunities in the future. I rationalize that it's still better that they have a mom than

if, you know, obviously, I hadn't survived the situation that I was in before, but it is concerning to think that this is going to have a negative effect on them in the future if my daughter likes a boy and his parents are like, "Ooo — she comes from a divorced family." So navigating that and how it could affect them in those ways and how to deal with that.

NATALIE: Our brains love to worry about stuff. We don't have enough to deal with in our day-to-day challenges — we need to go into the future and borrow trouble from there, most of which will never happen, by the way. And then we need to bring that trouble into our lives today and layer it on top of today's challenges. Do you know why the human brain likes to do this? It's actually just protecting us from stepping out and taking any risks, from making decisions for ourselves that might change things and upset what feels normal to us.

So borrowing future trouble comes from a place of love and protection in a lot of ways. We've got this little voice, this little part inside of us saying, "Be careful! If you worry about this today, you might be able to avoid some pitfalls tomorrow!" Do you see that? And sometimes this actually makes sense. I mean, think about as parents, if we're at the Grand Canyon with our toddlers, we want to think ahead to how things could go badly if we're not planning for how to keep our child close to us and avoid a tragedy. Now, our brains are mostly pretty good at this. I think some of us have or had husbands whose brains didn't quite work this way. But that's a podcast episode for another day.

Here's why borrowing future trouble isn't always helpful. As I said, most of the things we worry about never actually happen. That's not to say that they couldn't happen. I mean, it is possible that your daughter might meet a boy whose parents are so judgmental of the lives of others and so fearful for the future and so controlling of their children that they won't let their son date your daughter. It's possible. That could happen. But it's also equally as possible that your daughter won't meet a boy with parents like that. It's also equally possible that your daughter will meet a boy with abusive parents, and maybe we should add that to our list of things to worry about. Or maybe she'll date a man who isn't a virgin or who tried a drug once. Maybe we should worry about that. Because if we think about it enough and stay up into the wee hours of the morning fretting about it, we might be able to dodge that bullet, and then our daughter can be happy all the time and always have everything go great. Maybe if we worry enough, she won't have a human experience like everyone else on planet earth. She will have a perfect experience.

But wait a minute. Do we really want that for our kids? No hard things? That would also

mean no self-development, no growth in wisdom, no development as far as the depth of their character, no maturity, nothing really to give to anyone, because our kids wouldn't then be able to relate to anyone else on earth. Yeah, I don't think we really want that for our kids. Do you see how problematic this is? First of all, our precious and adorable and actually well-functioning brain actually thinks we can avoid trouble if we worry about it. And secondly, this amazing brain of ours actually thinks that it's a good idea for our kids to have a perfect life with no problems. And to top it off, our fabulous and wonderful brain (and I'm being serious when I say that — I'm not being facetious or exaggerating. Our brains are incredible) — these brains believe that it's actually possible for us to control all the things and all the people so that we can give all of these good things to our children on a silver platter, and if we don't do that, that we have failed them as a parent.

Really, this is why I think we believe that God is a certain way, why we put God in a certain box. Think about it: Many of us believe that God is our heavenly parent who is supposed to help us avoid all of the troubles and control all the people around us and give us happiness and smooth sailing all the time. I mean, if He was a good God, that's what He'd do, right? And if He doesn't come through for us, then 1. He either doesn't exist, or 2. He doesn't love us, or 3. maybe He just doesn't have the balls to show up.

Do you see how we put the Creator of the universe in this itty-bitty box that looks just like a human being, and then we stick ourselves in that same box, and it doesn't really serve anyone? So I believe God created us to have a human experience on planet Earth that is both miraculous at times and challenging at times. It is both full of ecstasy and it also is full of sorrow. He never promised us the Garden of Eden here on Earth. He never promised us that we would be perfectly happy and totally safe and surrounded by amazing people who just love and support us and are all in on us. If we had that, actually, if we had that, we would probably be an asshole and no good to anyone. What He promised is to be with us no matter what. That's it. He promised His presence in our earthly existence, to walk with us through the good and the bad things that happen to us, through the good choices we make as well as the problematic choices we make that bring consequences into our lives, and He promised that He would be with us to cheer us on, to be our advocate, to be always present with us. And guess what? He promises that for our kids too.

So if you're worried that your kids are going to miss out on social opportunities because their mother is divorced, let's just go there. Let's say that that happens. Do you know what that means? That means that your kids are in for a human experience. They are going to discover what it means to hold space for others and what it means to be an asshat. And hopefully one of the things they will learn is that it is more fulfilling and

meaningful and transcendent and you get a richer experience of life when you come to the table with love than if you come to the table with judgment and hatred.

As a mom, you can choose to feel like you have failed your kids for getting a divorce — which, by the way, half the world has also experienced, and if you're in a community that is that out of touch with humanity, maybe it's time for a move — or you can choose to believe that you are fulfilling your destiny as a mom by providing your children with some amazing, profound, deep human experiences that so many millions of people have also experienced that are going to increase their capacity to love and will serve them into their golden years. I really like that second option.

Alright, before we go to the next question, I want to share a little clip from a meeting that I had with... I get together with the women in the Flying Free program and the Flying Higher program every week, and this particular one was a meeting with the Flying Higher ladies, and one of the women shared something that I thought was super encouraging, and I asked her if I could share the recording of this clip with you guys. And so let's listen to it right now.

FLYING HIGHER MEMBER: I have a strange thing that's going on. I came into Flying Free quite a while ago. I don't know quite how long ago, but I came into Flying Free and then moved to Flying Higher. And now, for whatever reason, I don't have big, huge, overwhelming feelings anymore. My life is like, very level. And it's really strange, like, if I don't have a coaching thing I need. It's just strange. I'm going to enjoy it. But every now and then I'm like, "Well, where's my drama? I don't have any drama. I don't have any crap going on. I don't know what to do with myself."

NATALIE: How do you feel about that? Do you like it, or...?

FLYING HIGHER MEMBER: I adore it. It's my favorite thing.

NATALIE: Okay.

FLYING HIGHER MEMBER: Yeah, it's my favorite thing, because it's given me energy to move into other things like helping other people and starting a program at my church with abused women, and just, you know, moving that same energy that used to be bound up in all the drama and chaos that was my life, and then I just have... The energy's there, so I'm like, "Yeah, I could do that." If somebody's like, "Hey, can you do this?" "Sure, I've got time. I've got bandwidth." Whereas before, I'm like, "I can't do anything. All I can do is breathe," you know?

NATALIE: Oh my gosh, that is so good. Wasn't that fabulous? I love that testimony, and she's not the only one who has said similar things to that. What she's trying to communicate there is that... Because I can relate, and I'm sure many of you can relate to just constantly going from big, huge swinging emotions. Mostly because, how I think about it now is that there's all these parts inside of us that are activated by trauma, past trauma in our life that comes up whenever we experience what we call a trigger-event: Something someone says or something someone does or something that we see triggers a memory that's stored in our body from past trauma, and then we have an immediate reaction, a visceral reaction, and those parts inside of us are activated.

And oftentimes because of that, we're unable to... Well, we self-sabotage. We do things that we look back on, and we're like, "Oh, why did I do that? I wish I hadn't done that," you know? It's a feeling of being out of control and dysregulated on a regular basis. And one of the things that I love about the work that we do in Flying Free and Flying Higher is that we learn how to listen to those parts and love those parts and heal those parts so that they are not activated by trauma anymore. Those parts are you — those are the different parts of you inside, and when those parts feel seen and heard and understood and deeply loved and connected to, they calm down. They're like little children who just need to know that their mommy and daddy love them and are there for them and are there to keep them safe. The core you, the part of you that is whole and complete and aligned with the Holy Spirit, that's the part of you that has this beautiful opportunity to be the leader of all these other parts that are feeling so dysregulated because of trauma.

So anyway, that's the work we do. I would love to have all of you who aren't already in the program join us in the programs to do this work. Flying Free is for women who are still married or are separated or are in the divorce process. And then Flying Higher is strictly for women who are already divorced — they are on the other side of divorce. They are no longer going through the divorce process — they're done, and they're rebuilding. We do different kinds of work over there. We do a lot of the same work in both groups, but it's a different kind of practical work over in Flying Higher than it is in Flying Free. So you can learn more about each program and apply for those programs by going to joinflyingfree.com or joinflyinghigher.com. Made it super easy.

Okay, let's listen to the next question.

LISTENER: Hello. I am currently separated from my husband and have been for about ten weeks. Sadly, in our marriage there has been many different kinds of abuse and sexual assault, and I keep hearing from elders and older, wiser people in my congregation that forgiveness would eventually involve reconciliation if he shows fruit

of repentance. Is this true? Is it possible that he could show fruit of repentance and that it is still okay for me to remember what he has done and choose a different path other than a reconciled marriage? Thank you for your time.

NATALIE: 100%. It's absolutely normal and healthy to forgive and also to have healthy boundaries around your life, which may mean not allowing your abuser back into your life in that kind of intimate way. Forgiveness does not automatically mean reconciliation, even if your abuser supposedly repents. Which is often questionable, by the way, since the vast majority of abusers, one of their MO is that they pretend to repent. It's part of the abuse cycle. So all of these older and "wiser" folks, they may be older, but when it comes to understanding the nuances of abuse, they are not wiser than you. You are the one God is giving wisdom to for your own life. I promise this is true.

In the Flying Free program, I'm in the community forum every day answering questions and interacting with women, and one of the discussion threads recently was on this exact topic, and here's one of the things that I wrote: "Forgiveness is simply giving up your right to have revenge on that person and what they did to you and handing that person over to God. It's trusting that God will make everything right one day so we don't have to. Forgiveness brings us inner acceptance and peace, not the person we are forgiving. Forgiveness doesn't always fix problems or make reconciliation possible. You can forgive and love someone and also choose to love yourself enough to leave them if they are destroying you."

That's what I wrote, and then someone else in the forum wrote this: "Ten years ago when my husband and I were in biblical marriage counseling, the counselor taught that forgiveness meant making three promises." Hang on to your little horsies here now. "1. I will never bring this up to you again, 2. I will never bring this up to others again, 3. I will never bring this up to myself again." I'm trying hard to breathe right now. "So he had free rein to dump whatever garbage and abuse upon me that he wanted. All he had to do is say, 'Please forgive me,' and I was silenced forevermore, or else I was being unforgiving, and therefore, God would not then forgive me for my sins. I was traumatized for years by this teaching."

Yeah, right? Basically this counselor was teaching this woman to gaslight herself and stuff unprocessed trauma under the rug, which, of course, you know what that does? It increases the trauma exponentially. Now, I wrote an article about forgiveness on my website a few years ago, and I'm going to read the last part of it on this podcast episode, but I'll link to it in the show notes so you can read the whole thing if you want later. And by the way, I'm not the last word on forgiveness. There's a lot of people who

have written about forgiveness out there, both really good things as well as really destructive things about forgiveness, so you kind of have to be careful.

In my program, one of the resources that I have — it's just kind of a random, bonus resource — is a page full of what I consider to be the cream of the crop of amazing articles online. It has to be an amazing article to get on this list, but there's a list of a whole bunch of them. And there are several of them about the subject of forgiveness that are just really, really excellent. But anyway, this is the one I wrote, so I'll just read part of it:

"So what does the process of forgiveness look like? How many of you were told you were unforgiving? Bitter? Angry? What does it mean to forgive? The fact that forgiveness is needed implies that something has been taken from someone. When you are an abuse target, you've had many things taken from you. Your voice. Your personhood. Your dignity. Your respect. Your money. Your safety. Your freedom. Your opportunity to be loved. Your career. Your truth. Your past. Your emotions. Your ability to think clearly. Your dreams. And many other opportunities, both tangible and intangible.

Forgiveness is letting go of your right to 'make things right' and letting the other guy off the hook. He doesn't owe you anything anymore. You forgive his debt to you for taking all of those things away. So you can actually forgive without the other person ever acknowledging that they took anything from you at all. The fact is, your abuser, or whoever did this to you, owes you, big time. The other fact is, they won't ever admit it. And the last fact is, they will pay out the nose one day. To be a daughter of God means letting Him dole out the appropriate justice — 'Vengeance is mine' and all that right?

But you? You don't need to worry your weary heart over that. You get to forgive the debt and move forward. Vengeance for us as humans is a waste. It's a heavy burden in and of itself. It drains you of the emotional energy better directed toward your healing and moving forward into all the future opportunities you've previously missed out on because of him. You've got some catching up to do! So letting go of the desire to have your vengeance is freeing.

So forgiveness is you saying, 'Hey, abuser. You stole from me...'" And by the way, you don't necessarily say this to them. You say this in your mind, right? Because saying something to our abuser, does that really help? Do they just have an epiphany and go, "Oh! I feel so enlightened. Thank you so much for pointing that out to me." No. Abusers don't do that. That's why they're called "abusers." "So forgiveness is you saying, 'Hey, abuser. You stole from me, and you owe me what you stole with interest. But I'm forgiving you the debt and moving on. Goodbye!'"

Now, I would add to this part, that what I'm doing is I'm saying, "Now you don't owe me the debt. Now you owe it to God. God is the debt-collector now, not me." That's what you're doing, okay? I should really update the article to say that.

"And guess what? Forgiveness isn't a one-time thing. You don't just say, 'I forgive you' and all the emotions fade away. That's a ridiculous, idealistic notion not rooted in reality." So anyone who says that you can do that is high on drugs or something. "Forgiveness is something God does in you, and it is a process that can take a long time depending on the level of the abuse or the wrong that was done."

Now yes, occasionally we hear a story where someone says, "I just had a lightbulb moment. I completely forgave the person who killed my child or who raped me when I was a kid or who abused me in my marriage. I completely forgave them, and I was set free." Yeah. I mean, I've heard stories like that, and kudos to them, but honestly, those are the exceptions to the rule. I think most of us have to go through this process. Corrie ten Boom even talked about this. Her sister Betsie had no problem forgiving all the Nazi crazies, but Corrie ten Boom had a very difficult time forgiving them, and it took her a long time. In her book, she describes it like... It's like ringing a bell. I think this is what she said — it's been many years since I've read this book, but from what I remember, it's like ringing a bell, and the bell kind of has an echo that echoes. You ring the bell and you forgive, but then there's an echo, but eventually it fades, okay? Let's get back to the article.

"If someone bumps into you at work, you can forgive them easily. If they hit you, you're going to have a harder time forgiving them. If they kill your child, you may spend a lifetime dealing with forgiveness. You may think you've forgiven them one day — and then something will trigger you and all that hurt and rage will rear up and howl at you, threatening your stability."

That's what the gospel is for. Jesus died for that. He loves you. He gets it. Let Him do His own work in you over the course of time. If others don't understand and they can't handle this process that you're in, that's their problem." That's not your business. That's their business. Okay? That's their work to do. And I would just say too, the more we fight against this process (I'm getting away from the article again), the more dirty pain we're going to experience and the harder it's going to be. The more we think, "Oh, I have to do this. Oh, I've got to do this now," or "I'm on a timetable," or "I can't believe I haven't forgiven yet," or "I can't believe I'm still dealing with this — I can't believe this is still coming up," the more judgmental we are towards ourselves, the more condemning we are, the more shaming that we are to ourselves, the longer this process is going to take. The only way that we are going to get to the place where we can let go of their debt to

us and let God take it over, let Him be the debt collector, is if we are giving ourselves space and 100% in on being madly in love with ourselves and having our own back in this process, saying, "It's okay."

Think about it. When someone's putting pressure on you to do something, are you motivated to get it done? No. That is not human nature. If someone's putting pressure on us and telling us to do something, there is something inside of us that resists that. So we can do that to ourselves too. But on the other hand, if you've ever been with someone who's like, "Hey. Let's just sit here. It's okay. What if we don't have to lose this much weight in this amount of time? What if we can just loosen up our thinking in that area? What if we can just work on learning how to care about ourselves and love ourselves, and maybe the losing the weight part will come as we are more in on loving ourselves just the way we are?" Do you see how that kind of loosens things up and takes the pressure off and then that gives us more of a spacious place in which to do this kind of healing work rather than this itty-bitty, tiny...

I like to think of it like... I talk about this in my programs. It's like being on the edge of a cliff and you've got one foot between the cliff... Like, the edge of a mountain. You're up against the edge of a mountain, and then one foot away is a drop-off. And you have to somehow live your life on that one foot of space between a cliff and a drop-off. Are you going to be able to dance? Are you going to be able to feel free? Are you going to be able to move and live and have your being in that place? Absolutely not. You're going to be paralyzed. However, the Bible talks about that God sets us in a wide open space, and this is what I think it's talking about. You can dance and sing and move and try new things and take risks, if you are in an open field and your body is free to move, right? That's what I'm saying. We need to give ourselves that space to do this kind of healing, otherwise we're just going to be stuck and paralyzed. Alright, back to the article:

"Here's what forgiveness is not: It's not, 'Hey abuser, you stole from me, and I'm going to be a good girl and let you keep stealing from me over and over and over again until I'm six feet under and you can't get anything out of me anymore. Why? Because I'm a forgiving person, and I forgive you.'

That's what many Christians will try to tell you it means. 'Forgive and forget. Forgive seventy times seven.' Because if you forget that they stole your dignity yesterday, you'll let them do it again today. And they love that. They are counting on you to do exactly that because it makes them feel better about themselves to tear you down. They feel big if they can make you small. 'So forgive, damn it!'" I actually wrote that in the article. Alright:

"If a person kept loaning money to someone who never paid it back, they have one of three

choices. They can keep willingly loaning the money and expect to continue doing so forever, thereby making the negligent recipient happily growing in greed and irresponsibility, or they can keep loaning the money with resentment in their heart, hoping for payback one day, or they can stop loaning the money, forgive the debt, and tell the money sucker to go somewhere else to get free money in the future. Which one is the wiser of the three? Read Proverbs. Proverbs has a lot to say on this subject.

So again, here's what forgiveness is: It's you forgiving the debt they definitely owe you and then making sure you don't give them anymore of yourself. It's this: 'Fine, you took that from me. I forgive the debt, but the rest of my life will not be poured into black holes in space.'

So let's put this all together so that you can fly free.

- 1. Your anger over being mistreated, and your anger over watching others be mistreated is normal. If you weren't angry about that, your pulse might be a bit on the weak side, which is a problem for a therapist.*
- 2. Your anger in and of itself isn't bad. You can use the energy your anger gives you to destroy those around you, or you can use it as a powerful motivator to make some serious changes in your life.*
- 3. If you decide to make those changes, you'll need to take it a step further and forgive the ones who have thrown you under the bus over and over again. That doesn't mean continuing to present yourself as a sacrificial lamb for them to suck dry.*
- 4. It does mean forgiving the debt they owe you for stealing your life away (at least part of your life). Once you've let them go, you are then free to spread your wings and fly into your own wholesome, healthy future.*
- 5. You are free, then, to grow up into the fullness of all God created you to be."*

And that's my take on forgiveness, for what it's worth. That is all I have for you today. Blessings on your week, and until next time, fly free.