

WHY SELF-LEADERSHIP IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN ACCOUNTABILITY

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 191 of the Flying Free Podcast. I want to start by reading an incredible win that one of the women in our private Flying Free group posted in our private forum yesterday. I've removed any identifiers in order to protect her privacy, but this is what she wrote:

"It dawned on me that it's been around six months since I came across Natalie Hoffman's book, which dramatically, and I mean DRAMATICALLY, changed my life. I know you all get it. It's been half a year. Half. A. Year. When I came across Natalie's book, I read it within a couple of days. I couldn't put it down. I couldn't believe that someone could put words to my experience and that it was actually, like, a thing. It felt like the scales were literally falling off of my eyes and I finally started embracing the truth I had been living in for sixteen years. I went from extreme fawning to a cold wake-up call within a matter of weeks, and I couldn't unsee it. I just couldn't unsee it. And I couldn't pretend any more.

Looking back over the past six months, I almost don't recognize myself. I still have so far to go, but I have come so far too. I'm beginning to understand what it feels like to love myself, to advocate for myself, to take care of myself, and to not feel guilty for doing it. I'm finding my voice again. I'm finding my confidence again. I'm learning that God really does love me. Like, He really loves me. It's not just a cute Christian saying. Deep down, I thought He actually wanted me to suffer and die and become nothing. He not only loves me, but I think He actually likes me. Is it possible that it's okay for me to like me too? Maybe I don't need a man to like me. Maybe I can just be okay with liking myself. I'm starting to believe that.

Also, I've gone six months without sex. I got married young, and I didn't even realize how much I relied on sex to feel loved, wanted, and approved of. The first couple of months without it was hard. I didn't anticipate that struggle, but the struggle was real. I felt desperate for physical affection, for a man's approval. I didn't realize how addicted I had become to my husband's approval of me. Probably because the only verbal affirmation I ever got from him was related to sex somehow. I didn't even know my value was so tied up in it.

The Flying Free program has been a lifesaver for me. I no longer feel desperate for a man's approval or desire for me. The mind work has been really hard and exhausting at times, but the models work." (The model, by the way, is a tool that I use in coaching my clients.) "Like, they really work." And they really do. "The model has allowed me to experience such deep healing and understanding, which has allowed me to have grace and love for myself. This recovering perfectionist has never experienced that before. I think I'm getting a taste or maybe a small peek of the butterfly life. I might not be fully emerged from the cocoon yet, but this I know: I will never go back to being a caterpillar. Isn't that the amazing thing about the transformation process? There's no reverse button. The butterfly can't go back into the cocoon and go back to being a caterpillar. I am forever changed, forever committed to this process. I'm all in. And I'm on the path to being truly set free."

Can you guys hear my dog in the background barking? This is what it is to have a podcast at home and to just have five million people and animals living with you. I literally do. I've got five kids living here and we have five animals living here: three dogs and two cats. Okay, I digress.

These are the kinds of incredible stories that I get to hear on a regular basis from the women who are doing the personal growth work in Flying Free and Flying Higher. Now, not everyone is ready for this kind of change, but if you feel something deep inside of you calling for you to be brave and open so that you can step forward to do this work, I would love to see you fly and I would love to help you. If you're still in your emotionally abusive relationship or maybe you're separated or you might even be in the divorce process, then the Flying Free program is perfect for you. You can learn more by going to joinflyingfree.com. And if you're a divorced woman of faith and you want to evolve into the next version of yourself so you can write a brand new chapter of your life and make it the best one yet, then Flying Higher is the group for you. You can learn more about that by going to joinflyinghigher.com.

Okay, today I want to talk about accountability. And the reason I was thinking about this subject is because someone sent us an email asking a question about the Flying Free small groups that we have in our program. Now, these small groups are optional. They're just for women in our program who want to get together with some of the other members and go through some discussion questions based off of one of our twelve courses that we offer. It's very casual. There are no small group leaders, but my daughter does facilitate the Zoom rooms that these groups meet in.

So anyways, the question that came in was this: "Is there a leader or somebody a little more advanced who would encourage me to go through the material? I really need to

work through the material, and most importantly, be held accountable." Now, this is not the first time that someone has asked a question like this, and I think it's because in our Christian culture, we have been programmed to believe that we all need someone else to guide us and tell us what to do and when to do it. We have been conditioned to believe that we are helpless, that we don't know very much, and we don't have the capacity for self-leadership or self-motivation. We have to be externally motivated by something outside of ourselves. That's what we believe.

And in fact, many of us, when we were younger and we did believe that we had the capacity for self-leadership at one point, we were rebuked when we made our own decisions for ourselves, and we were maybe told that we were being rebellious. I remember learning that a godly woman was teachable, and I learned early on that "teachable" did not mean that she wanted to learn, because I definitely wanted to learn. In that way, I was very teachable. But being teachable meant — at least in my circles that I ran in — it meant that she was willing to learn and obey whatever her assigned leaders said she must learn. That could include her pastor, her husband, whatever. Mostly men. But they were the ones who told her what she had to learn and how she needed to learn it.

Now, in both of the churches that I was a member of as an adult, they had their own list of books or resources, and people were discouraged from reading outside of their particular book recommendation list. In fact, the first church that I was a member of actually discouraged book reading and instead encouraged simply listening to audio tapes of the head pastor speaking. This is back when cassette tapes were popular. Remember those days? Now, I was too young and naive to see that this was blatant brainwashing. I was someone who, in high school, read C.S. Lewis' "Mere Christianity." I was an avid book reader. So when I was going to this church, I remember mentioning different books that I was reading, and I was dismissed, like my reading was a useless waste of time. "But here, have another audio tape of the head pastor sharing his personal stories and beliefs again." And I'm sad to say that I bought into it hook, line, and sinker at the time.

Anyway, my self-leadership, which had thrived in college and was just about to blossom into full adult bloom, it ended up being stifled and squashed, and I dutifully shrank to my assigned role as a woman-child who must be dependent on others (people who had a penis, mainly) to spoon-feed me whatever they decided was best for me. It took me about twenty-five more years to finally admit that this was really stupid, and I broke free. And all the folks who wanted to be my mommies and daddies stomped their feet and then said I couldn't play in their sandbox anymore. Which was okay with me, because I was an adult now, and adults have moved on from sandboxes anyway, right?

Alright, let's get back to accountability. So what I hear women saying is, "I need someone to tell me what to do and when to do it so that I'll do it." But I actually don't believe that that's what they need at all. I believe that we need to learn how to tell ourselves what to do and when to do it. And then we need to learn how to commit to obeying ourselves as much as we are committed to obeying everyone else. That is self-leadership. That's adulthood.

So do we need accountability? I think it's just a thought. I think it's an idea that someone made up. We hear it a lot in Christian circles I think because the brainwashing of dependent thinking creates dependent children, dependent adult-children, who, guess what? They need accountability. I mean, think about it: How many men are in accountability groups so that they won't look at porn? Why? Because they're not able to manage their own selves. They need a mommy and a daddy to do it for them. They need someone else external to themselves to lay down the rules and the regulations and then apply the consequences for their misbehavior. Otherwise they won't do it. So many wives are forced to play this role of mommy and child in their relationship with their dysfunctional husband. I think it's just icky.

The older that I get, the more I am of the mind to question everything. I really think it's important to question everything. Ideas come from somewhere. They're not necessarily facts. So what if we don't need accountability? Just think about that for a minute. Ask yourself, "What if I didn't need accountability?" What if we just need motivation? My dad, he loved food. He died a few years ago, but he loved food. I'm like my dad this way. He relished going out to eat fun things like cheeseburgers and malts and pizza. Same. But when my dad got cancer, he cut out all the sugar and he began eating big salads full of good, healthy things for you, and he was hopeful that those things would support his fight against cancer. Now, he wasn't all that motivated to eat big salads before he got cancer, but cancer became a huge motivator for him. Why? Because he wanted to live more than he wanted a chocolate malt. That's what it boiled down to. Pretty normal, right?

We have to want something more than we want something else in order to be motivated to get it. Now I would like to lose weight, but I must not want it enough to stop eating Rita's Ice and Pirates Booty. I could ask someone to hold me accountable and hide the Pirate's Booty, and that would be one way to deal with it. Or another way would be for me just to own my own choice to gain weight and enjoy Pirate's Booty even though it's literally going straight to my booty.

When my daughter was getting married a year ago, I was motivated, and I lost twenty pounds in six months. I fit into a great-looking dress, and I was proud of my

accomplishment. I can do it if I want to, and so can you. I just don't want to. That is the bottom line. And I don't need a mommy or a daddy to make me. What I need if I really want to lose weight, I need to be an adult and own my own choice. Adults do not need a parent telling them what to do. We hold ourselves accountable every day.

Think about all the things that we do. We hold ourselves accountable to brush our teeth every day, to take a shower when we start getting stinky. I mean, we do know how to do this, right? This means if we want to take a course, then take a course. Make a commitment, put it on your calendar, and do it. Have your own back. Would you ever tell a friend that you're going to meet for coffee and then just not show up because you just didn't feel like it that day? I mean, maybe, but probably not. But we do that to ourselves all the time. We mistreat ourselves and go back on our commitments to ourselves all the time.

So here's what I recommend. I actually don't recommend making a commitment to yourself unless you're serious. We have people who apply for the Flying Free and Flying Higher programs. They fill out this... It's not a short application. It's not, like, super long, but it definitely takes some time to fill out the application. And they have to check a box that says they're committed to doing this, and half the people that do it, they're actually not committed to doing it. They're saying that they are, but they're actually not. I'm saying don't say you're going to do something if you're holding the back door open as an escape route. Either commit or don't commit. That's it.

There's nothing right or wrong about this either, by the way. When I think about my gaining weight and eating Pirate's Booty, I'm not shaming myself and going, "Oh, shame on me for eating Pirate's Booty. I should really be losing weight." No. That doesn't work anyways — that just makes me eat more Pirate's Booty because I'm feeling guilty and gross. No. If I'm going to have some Pirate's Booty, I pour myself a bowl of Pirate's Booty. Lately I've been pouring myself just less. I just say, "You know, I want some Pirate's Booty, and I'm going to have some, and I'm going to own that it's probably going to add some extra calories to my daily amount for the day. I'm going to pour myself a little less than I did last night."

I have to be honest with myself and say, "Honestly, I haven't made a commitment to myself to not do this. Right now in my life, I have not made a commitment to lose weight, bottom line, and that is why I'm eating Pirate's Booty." So I'm just going to be honest with myself and admit it, and I think that's a healthier way to approach it and also the most likely way of overcoming it than if we lie to ourselves and say, "Oh, I'm going to do this," and then we don't do it. What we're doing is we're creating a bad habit of making a commitment, breaking it, making a commitment, breaking it. Then we

know, “Yeah, I know I don’t have my own back, and I’m just going to break it anyways,” and we literally can’t trust ourselves. We don’t want to do that.

Alright, here’s the thing: Nobody’s going to do much of anything that they don’t feel motivated to do, and we humans are motivated by our emotions. So why not use that to our advantage? Very few people want to go to work every day, and yet they do. Why? Because they very much want to own a house or a car or go on a trip. They believe that those things will make them feel good or feel happy. See those emotions? So they go to work to get the money they need to get the things they believe will make them feel good. Very few people love school, but if you want to be a doctor, you will be motivated to go to a lot of school to get what you ultimately want. Why do you want to be a doctor? Because you think that’s going to make you feel good. Maybe it’s going to make you feel important or make you feel useful or make you feel like you have a purpose in life or make you feel good about your life. Who knows? It doesn’t really matter what the emotions are, but if the emotions are motivating you to get your buns to school and do school, then that’s what you’ll do. Reading is work, but we read because we feel good when we hear a story unfold. So the good feelings motivate us to keep turning the pages.

We have to want something bad enough to be self-motivated to get it. People do not do things or change because someone is holding their hand — that’s like someone dragging us kicking and screaming somewhere — or because someone is making them or forcing them or holding them accountable. I mean, yeah, that is one way to do something, okay? I mean, I paid, actually — back when I was losing weight — I paid someone to hold me accountable to lift weights because I hate lifting weights. And when I was done paying that person, I stopped lifting weights. Why? Because I didn’t want to lift weights. I didn’t want to lift weights. I hated it. I still hate it. So that’s not the best way to do something. It’s not the way to create long-term change.

By the way, I’ll just tell you this: In the Flying Higher program, we had a guest speaker come in and teach a three-week course. His name is Kylar Dunn. He teaches how to be physically fit in a more intuitive way. And he suggested, like, this is just one little hack. And I’ve actually been doing this. I am motivated to do this. I can do this and I’m motivated to do it: When I brush my teeth in the morning, when I’m done, I basically do push ups against the countertop. And it’s kind of like weight lifting because I’m using the muscles in my arms, and I do that to failure. And I do that in the morning when I brush my teeth and at night when I brush my teeth. It just keeps my arms strong. And then I also do squats. So that I can do. Like, that I am motivated to do. Am I losing a ton of weight that way? No, because, you know, Pirate’s Booty. But I am keeping my muscles in semi-good shape. I don’t know. Maybe I’m fooling myself.

All of that to say that people change and take action when they are internally motivated from inside, okay? How many of you have threatened to leave your abusive partner and then suddenly he's asking you what you want him to do? Or if you've never done that, maybe you've heard someone else who's done that. My church held my ex-husband accountable — that's what they called it — and as long as they were holding his hand and telling him what to do, he did it. But as soon as I filed for divorce, the whole lot of them gave up and just let it all go. And did he continue getting help? No. He wasn't internally motivated. He was like a child who had to be held by the hand and told where to go and what to do: "Here, jump through this hoop. Okay. Now jump through this hoop. Okay." He had to be seatbelted in and given a sucker. Is this adulthood? I don't think so.

There's a lot of guilt and shame around this whole concept of accountability as well. We feel guilty because we really don't want to do a thing and we need someone else to force us to do it, and then if we still don't do it, we've got more guilt. It's almost like we want someone to hold us accountable so that we don't have to experience guilt and shame for not doing something that we don't want to do in the first place.

So I just want to ask this question: What if we don't have to do it? I think we make a mistake when we think, "I really should do such and such because it's the right thing to do," when we really don't want to do it, and we know in the back of our mind that we have no intention of following through with it anyway.

I even want to just say this: if you've thought about joining Flying Free... But maybe you don't really want to do it. Honestly, joining Flying Free is a huge step in a brave direction, and if you're not ready for that, then you're not ready for it. And it's okay. It is 100% okay to say, "You know what, I'm not ready for that. I really don't want to do that." And maybe a year from now, two years from now, you will feel ready for it and you will want to do it, and then when you are internally motivated, you will actually follow through with it rather than just joining, doing nothing, and then quitting. I think we need to be honest with ourselves. We need to be on to our brain and what it's trying to do. That's the only way that we're ever going to be able to commit to anything.

Now some of my kids love sports, and they're motivated to practice. I don't ever have to tell them to practice, those particular children. They want to be on varsity and they want to be the best at what they do, so guess what? They practice on their own. They don't need any accountability. They love it. Now other kids of mine, I've got one kid who loves computer coding, I've got another child who loves to draw — she draws amazing pictures — I don't have to tell them to do those things. They are getting very good, very skilled at those things, because they love to do them. They are internally motivated.

Nobody has to hold them accountable and say, “Did you do your drawing today? Did you do your computer coding today?”

When I was a younger mom, I forced my kids to take piano lessons. Only one child enjoyed them. The others did not. The child who enjoyed them went on to be a music major in college, and the others are doing other things with their lives, and piano is not a part of their lives. I wasted my time and theirs forcing them to do what they were never meant to do — what they never loved and were never interested in doing.

We only need to be held accountable for things we aren’t taking self-leadership in. And rather than asking someone else to be like our mommy and daddy and do this for us, I think the better idea is to learn how to take self-leadership and hold ourselves accountable. This is not only possible, I truly believe it is your destiny. And again, this is what I help women do in my programs. And if you want this kind of transformation more than you want to keep staying the same, then I encourage you to join us. You can go to joinflyingfree.com, or if you’re divorced, you can go to joinflyinghigher.com for that information.

Now, if you are feeling at all self-motivated at this very moment, I would encourage you to leave a rating and review so that other women of faith will be able to find this podcast and benefit from it as you have. This is how we as a community are able to spread this liberating message. And that’s all I have for you today. Until next time, fly free.