

CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAYS WHEN LIFE IS BLOWING UP - PART TWO

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 202 of the Flying Free Podcast. Last week, I answered some questions about Christmas and how we can get through the holidays when life feels like it's falling apart. And so many questions came in from the women in my program, in our private forum, that I decided to make this a two-episode series. So if you like today's episode and you missed last week's, you can head over to flyingfreenow.com/201 — that's for Episode 201 — for more discussion about surviving the holidays. Otherwise, you can find 201 — it's just the last week's episode — on your podcast app, whatever you're using.

Okay, so let's start with a question. And it's this: "My soon-to-be-ex is finally out of the house. Yay! We can put up as many pagan trees as we want, I can overflow the stockings with candy, and the kids and I can eat way too much sugar without taking incoming criticism or lectures on commercialism or our health. We can run from dinner to dinner with our large family, staying late, playing games, and come home to silence instead of questions, verbal traps to be used against me later, or judgements against the people I love. Yet as I am rushing around to put dinner on the table, the guilt shows up. I start feeling sorry for a man home alone without family on the holidays even though I know he hated attending, was critical of all the fanfare, and is reaping what he sowed. The kids also feel sorry for him, and they still have to endure the lectures, too. I feel survivor's guilt knowing that I get to escape it and the kids don't."

Okay, so remember that feelings come from our thoughts. So if we have the feeling of guilt in our body, that's an indicator of a thought in our brain causing the guilt. So just notice that feeling and say it out loud — "I feel guilt in my body" — and then ask yourself, "What am I believing or thinking that is causing this feeling of guilt in my body?" Now in this case, you might be thinking in terms of where your soon-to-be-ex-husband is at, is you might be thinking, maybe, "He will be alone, and if I was alone, I would be so sad, and therefore maybe he is sad and it's all my fault because I left him." Or you're thinking something about your kids, like, "I don't have to put up with that anymore, but my kids still do and it's not fair to them."

So it's fascinating to look at our thoughts. Most of our thoughts come from these long-held beliefs or programming based on years of life experience and the things we've

been taught or that we've chosen to believe over the course of our lives. So under these thoughts are some of these core beliefs. I'm guessing, okay? If I was coaching this person, I would ask this person to tell me, but since she's not here, we're just going to guess at some of her core beliefs:

"It's the wife or the mom's job to manage her husband's or her children's emotions."

"If anyone in the family is unhappy, the wife holds the key to cheering them up and she should."

"Women should not leave their husbands or divorce them or put their children in a position where they have to be with their dad without her."

"I know if I have a feeling in a certain situation, then another person will have the same feeling." That's a belief, you guys. It's not a fact. It's just something that we might believe.

"People should be happy all the time, and if they aren't, something is wrong and I should try to fix it if I can."

Now, these are just a few. There's likely many more beliefs that are similar to these that are sort of running like an undercurrent beneath the surface, creating these feelings of guilt when you're failing to come through as your brain believes that you should. But if you dig into each thought, you might realize they're not necessarily true.

So here are some questions that you can answer and journal about to maybe loosen up some of your thinking:

"Is it true or even possible for a human being to manage another human being's thoughts and feelings? If so, how?"

"Are there circumstances in which a woman should leave her partner? Is there evidence in the world that sometimes it saves lives to do so, and that sometimes it makes possible a new life that is safer and more meaningful for everyone?"

"Is it true that just because we would feel a certain way if we were alone, that everyone needs to feel that same way or will feel that same way?" I used to actually believe this. I used to think that everyone would feel as I did, but I've learned this is not the case. Everyone has different personalities and different values, and what causes one person to fall apart is something that another person feels quite indifferent about. What

creates anger in one person might create deep sorrow in another and utter joy in another. How can this be? Everyone has different thoughts and beliefs. You remember when those planes ripped through the World Trade Center? Some people were actually thrilled about that and other people were angry, and still others were ripped to shreds in sorrow. Do you see this? It wasn't because of the circumstance — it was because of what they made it mean.

“Should people be happy all the time? Why or why not? What if it's okay for people to have a human experience, and sometimes they're happy and sometimes they can be sad, along with the other wide variety of emotions that human beings have the privilege of experiencing as part of their short life on earth? What if we could just give our husband or our soon-to-be-ex or our children permission to have whatever human experience and beliefs and feelings that they want to have as a result of the things that happen in their lives?”

“What if we could set these people free from our own expectations of how they should feel or how we think they are feeling, and then we just focused on managing our own thoughts and emotions? What would life be like?” You can actually go get the transcript for this by going to flyingfreenow.com/202, and in the transcript you can actually read these questions, and I encourage you to journal them — not just this person who asked the question, but anyone else who might be wondering about this kind of thing. You'll get a lot of insight into your brain just by journaling some answers to these kinds of questions.

All right, let's read another question: “Last year in 2021 was our first official Christmas since the kids were born. My ex never wanted to celebrate it, and would sabotage or make us miserable at some point during or after our time with my parents. After all, it is a ‘pagan holiday.’” Both of these questions come from two different people, but it's kind of fascinating, because these men didn't want them to celebrate because they said it was a pagan holiday. I know that there are probably some listeners that believe it's pagan holiday too, and I'm not knocking that belief. I just think it's kind of interesting that we had two questions that were similar like that.

“I know all the history, good and bad. He would let me, but would become very cruel if I wanted to buy my parents gifts. So for about twelve years, my parents had to endure a lonely Christmas and the pain of us taking and not giving anything. Still hurts me so badly when I think of how much my abusive marriage hurt my whole family and friends I had. I can't make up for lost time. I know they don't blame me. I still feel guilty and shame at times. My kids are just happy he's gone and he has no rights to say what we can't do anymore. How do I reconcile my guilt and shame and not go overboard with

spending money to make up for lost time? This is not a Christmas issue for me. I feel this all year long with my kids, mainly.”

So this question is similar to the first one in that we are talking about a feeling of guilt and shame that comes from a belief that we have, that the past and everything that went wrong is our fault or our responsibility. Now, I know probably up in her prefrontal cortex, intellectually she probably doesn't believe that, but somewhere she's got a core belief that actually believes that it's her fault or her responsibility somehow, and that's why she's experiencing this shame. There's a core belief that there's something fundamentally wrong with us. That's why we have shame. That's where shame comes from. So this belief is showing up in the circumstance of wanting to make up for the past or believing that our past is like chains that are shackled to our feet for the rest of our lives. So here are some questions to dig into this:

“Is there something wrong with me? If so, what is it?” Get specific with your brain.

“Okay, brain. Something's wrong with me? All right, Let's write it down. What's wrong with me?”

“Why do I believe that?”

“Where did I get this belief from?”

“What if it's okay for this to be a part of who I am?”

“What if it's okay to be a human being and to not be completely perfect?”

“How am I different from other human beings on the planet?”

“How am I the same?”

“Do I own the past and do I have mastery over it?”

“Is it something I can fix or command or change? If so, how? If not, then what do I want to make that mean for my life?”

“How do I want to show up in the present for my life?” What do I need to be thinking about and focusing on in order to show up that way for my life and my family right here today? How is that different from what I've been believing up until now?”

“Is it possible to make up for lost time with our kids or ourselves or our loved ones?”

How?"

"What if it's okay not to make up for lost time, but to instead just enjoy and enter into and relish the time we do have? What would life be like if I believed that was okay?"

"What do I choose to focus on this season? The past, or what I have right now in the present?"

So here's the reality. We don't actually have the past. We do not have the past. It's gone, and it's never coming back. We also don't have the future. What we do have is right now, is this moment. It's the present. That's what we've got. That's a gift to us right now. Our feelings that we have in our body are going to determine how we show up for our life right now. If we are feeling shame in our body, you know how we end up showing up? Shame shuts us down. If we're feeling guilt in our body, do you know how we show up? Desperate or panicked. If we're feeling angry, you know how we show up? Annoyed, distracted, impatient.

How do we control our emotions? We control our emotions through our thoughts or our beliefs. So as long as I am believing that there is something fundamentally wrong with me, that I screwed up the past, that it's my job to fix the past, that it's my job to make up for it, I'm going to feel guilty and desperate, and I'm going to show up in ways in my life right now that will not allow me to be present right now and to be at peace with my family.

Now, it's optional and it's possible that I could choose to believe that there's actually nothing wrong with me other than that I'm just a normal human, and that it's not actually possible or my job or responsibility to fix the past at all, but only to relish the present and to show up now with a heart full of love for myself and my kids and my family, that we can enjoy a precious time of peace. It's really up to you. But this is why working on those core beliefs is so incredibly important, because those beliefs are going to dictate how we show up in our lives and the result that we get in our lives.

And by the way, when I say it's not your job to fix the past, I'm not talking about repairing things that we maybe did where we weren't showing up as the best version of ourselves and we inadvertently hurt other people. I'm all in on repairing things that we have been part of as far as hurting other people, 100%. But even then, you can try to repair it, but you can't fix it. You can't ever go back and fix it so that it didn't happen. But repair does go a long way if you feel that's an issue.

All right. Here's another question: "I notice a theme, especially amongst the ladies who

are in or have been in relationships with the more covert types. It's subtle, but there seems to be an underlying sense that we are flawed because of where we find ourselves on our healing journey or because of our natural self-protective response to having been in toxic situations for some time. Some comments I've observed are kids saying, 'What's wrong with mom?' Another gal said, 'I used to love the holidays,' or 'My in-laws must think I'm a jerk for not attending.'

I can so relate as I read these comments and concerns. One of our best character traits, conscientiousness, has been exploited, and now it's like we are burdened by this beautiful asset to the point of not being able to enjoy the holidays because of it. Ugh. Does that make sense? So I guess what I would love is understanding the model that teaches me that if, number one, dad or husband infers that I'm a Scrooge at Christmas, when in reality, I may just be being hypervigilant, in fight, flight, freeze, or fawn mode, because who are we kidding — the guy loves to wreck a damn holiday — or two, maybe I'm avoiding toxic family members because my toxicity tank is already on overload from being married to a toxic partner.

That I can choose thought 'X' in response to these circumstances rather than choosing what seems to be our common thoughts of, 'Maybe they're right' or 'Maybe I am a Scrooge or antisocial or rude,' or whatever. I just love to look at a model that empowers me to stand my sacred ground and love myself in spite of certain comments. What new thought can I choose to combat my sense of obligation 'to go along to get along' at the cost of my own wellbeing during Christmas?"

When she's talking about the model, she's referring to this tool that we learn about in depth and that we practice in the Flying Free program. She's asking me to build out her model, which isn't something I typically do for women in my program, but I do teach them how to build out their own models, and then I will work with them to help them see what their beliefs are creating for themselves. And then at that point, we can work together on some new ways of thinking or even just reframing our situation that's going to result in situations that are going to serve us better in our lives and move us forward instead of keeping us stuck on the same hamster wheel over and over again.

So I'm going to pretend I'm her right now, and I'm going to build out a model here on one of her thoughts. So the circumstance we're going to pick for this particular model is, "Husband says 'You are being a Scrooge.'" And then my thought about this is, "He is wrecking my holiday." And when I think this thought, I feel angry in my body. By the way, this is just one of many examples of how... You could build out your model any way you wanted to. Okay, so when I feel angry in my body, I find myself snapping at family members, I'm unable to focus, I watch TV instead of accomplishing some of the

holiday preparations that I had on my to-do list, and I lay awake at night and broil over this. And what's the result? I'm wrecking my holiday. Do you see this? My belief that someone else is wrecking my holiday leads to the result that I end up wrecking my holiday.

So I've given all the power to have a decent holiday over to someone else that's outside of myself. Do I really want to do this? What if my husband could keep his belief that I'm a Scrooge and I didn't have to make that mean that my holiday would be wrecked? What if I gave my husband permission to have his own beliefs and thoughts, and then I focused intentionally on what I want to think and believe about myself and about my holiday? How would my holiday be different? The reason that his comments impact us is because we are giving those comments credibility. There's some part of ourselves deep inside that believes, "Mm, he could be right," and this triggers our shame.

Now, I've given this illustration before, but I think it bears repeating: If you were a kindergarten teacher with your master's degree in childhood education, and a little boy of five-years-old said to you, "You're a dumb woman. You don't know anything. You're dumber than a chicken head," would you ring your hands at this dismay and think, "Oh, no! Here I've worked so hard to be educated, but I guess I'm still dumb — dumber than a chicken, even," and would you then feel shame or defensive in any way? Not likely. Why? Because the five-year-old's belief doesn't get more credibility than your own. We know that the five-year-old doesn't get it, and it's kind of adorable. It's probably mildly irritating, but it's certainly not going to ruin our day, again, because our thought or belief about what he said is so very different from what we internally know to be true by comparison.

So this is your challenge. You know you've done your healing work when your husband can say things like that and your thought is not, "Oh no, I could be a Scrooge. I better defend myself and get angry," and instead your thought is something more like, "Ugh, goodness. There he goes again, projecting his inner frustration with the holiday onto me. That's my man." And then you chuckle a little bit and move on.

Now, I will grant you, that's an exaggeration... You know, you'd have to have done a lot of work on your internal mind management to get to that place, but it is possible. It is possible. I think it's more likely when you're out of the relationship and your ex says something like that than when you're actually still living in your relationship, but quite frankly, I have read people share in the private forum who are still in their marriage relationship who are hearing their husband say these kinds of things, and they'll come into the forum where we have a place where you can drop your wins and successes, and they will share how they have been able to emotionally and mentally detach from

their partner's universe when he says things like that. And it is a huge win, and that is a sign that some really deep healing is taking place.

Now here's another strategy, though. Just admit it. Just go, "Lol — sometimes I really am a Scrooge. How perceptive of you," and then move on. Because at the end of the day, it's okay to be human. And I'm guessing that everyone listening to this has been a Scrooge at least once in their life. When my ex criticized me, especially toward the end, this was one of my favorite tactics. I would just go, "Okay, you're going to create a storm. I'm just going to fly right into it. Okay, I'm a rebellious wife," and then I'd just move. They really don't know what to do with that because their whole point, honestly, is to antagonize you and get you to feel shame and to defend yourself. They love to get you riled up. If you want to take back your own personal power, this is the way to do that. Just be like, "Okay, I guess so all. All right. I guess we're going to just go there." But nobody can make us feel shame that comes from inside of ourselves, and that's really why therapy is so important, and it helps to put us back in control of our lives and our healing.

All right. Here's some questions to ask yourself, though, when someone says something nasty to you about yourself:

"Is this person correct? In what ways — why or why not?" Write this down in your journal.

"What could be more true about who I am, and what is the evidence to show that this is more true about me?"

"Who do I want to give credibility to in this situation — My abuser, or my own inner sense of who I am?"

"Are there other people in my life who would say something different about me? Is their experience of me different? In what ways?"

"How can I have my own back inside of myself and stay in my own lane and stop focusing on my partner and his universe, his drama?"

All right, here's another question: "If I'm ready to file before or after the holidays, how can I do so in a considerate way? I know there is never a perfect time to file, and I also want to be as considerate as is possible. Maybe having family around during holidays would be helpful, or would it be harder? No way to predict."

Filing for divorce isn't a considerate or inconsiderate thing to do. It's just something that you choose to do. It's neutral in and of itself. Now, what you make it mean or what someone else makes it mean is a whole other story. You may file for divorce at any time of the year and someone might think, "Boy, that was really inconsiderate of her," and there's nothing you can do about that person's choice to believe as they wish. If you're hoping to file for divorce in such a way as to manage everyone's emotions so they'll all feel great about it, good luck with that.

I don't think it's possible. I don't know your family or what your relationships are like, so whether or not having them around you would be helpful or not isn't something I could even pretend to guess, but this is something that you may be able to guess at. I tend to just assume that filing for divorce is going to cause a lot of different emotions in the people around us, and that is to be expected. And those folks are responsible for their own mind management around that. That's not your responsibility.

All right. Here's another question: "To gift or not to gift, and how to accept or not accept inappropriate gifts is an issue for me with my soon-to-be-ex and his family." So if you are in the process of divorce, do you want to give and receive gifts from your soon-to-be-ex in his family? I think that's a personal preference thing. I didn't choose to do that, nor did my in-laws or my soon-to-be-ex want to do that with me. But maybe your situation is different.

I suggest sitting down in a quiet place, closing your eyes, putting your hand on your heart, and just asking yourself, "What do I want to do about this this year?" And then honor whatever yourself tells you. If you receive a gift that you don't want, you can choose to toss it, you could re-gift it, or you could send it back, but do whatever aligns with your core values. I personally don't believe that there's a right or a wrong choice here. It's just completely up to you and what you feel good about.

All right, one last question: "The only family member I've confided in about what's going on is my brother. Otherwise, this holiday season will be another one of faking it in front of everyone else. At this point, I'm just plain avoiding situations in which I have to pretend. For example, not going to church; I'm not attending my college reunion. But holiday celebrations with family with all of us present are not really optional at this point, and I'm not ready to make a solid move. Would you please consider addressing how best to negotiate this?"

When we have to attend social functions where we're going to run into people like this, we can frame it in one of two ways. We could probably frame it in lots of different ways, but I'm going to give you two. We can say that we're being forced to fake it — that's one

way. But how does that make us feel in our body when we think the thought, "I'm being forced to fake it," or "I have to pretend"? I might feel guilty in my body, I might feel trapped, or... I think I would feel powerless, honestly. So am I going to show up as the best version of myself in these situations if I'm feeling guilty or trapped or powerless? It's not likely. So I don't think that I would choose to look at the situation in that way.

When my daughter got married in 2021, I knew that I was going to see some family members who believe a lot of crazy stuff and had cut me off. But I was the mother of the bride, and I wanted to focus on my daughter and also experience an amazing day. I wanted to make some really precious memories. So if I had chosen to go into that day thinking, "Oh great, now I'm just going to have to fake it and pretend all day long," would that have created an amazing day for me? Probably not. Fortunately, believing that we have to go into a social situation and fake it is only one option.

The other option — again, there's probably more than two, but I'm just going to tell you the option that I think is a good option and the one I chose to do — it's to understand that there are concentric circles of relationships and there are varying ways that we interact with people based on our history with them, how much we trust them or don't trust them, or where the relationship is currently at. So if I'm going to see relatives that I only see once a year, or maybe I only see them at weddings or funerals, I'm probably going to show up differently around them than I'm going to show up with close friends that I get together with on a regular basis, right? I'm going to let down my hair and whoop it up with my close friends. Probably going to be more reserved with these other people. And I think that's normal and to be expected. I'm going to be polite and kind with everyone because that's who I choose to be. That's who I am — that's what aligns with my core values, not because I'm faking it, but just because that's who I am. But I'm not going to open up and share intimate details with people I can't trust or people that I don't keep in regular contact with. That's completely unnecessary.

So the question that I would ask myself going into each holiday gathering is, "Who am I..." And I suggest that you write this down as well, just because when you write things down, it helps solidify things in your brain. "Who am I as a person and how do I want to show up as myself in this situation, understanding the dynamics that are at play here?" And then you just get to decide. I find this to be not fake, but genuinely authentic.

All right, that's it for the questions. The holidays can be painful, there's no doubt about it, but I remember a painting I saw when I was a little girl. It was a craggy mountainside with a terrible, dark storm that was raging all around. And tucked in this tiny, little nook in the side of the mountain was a bird on her nest. This bird had made a small corner of peace and rest in the middle of the storm, and I believe that is possible for us. One

space that is all yours and doesn't belong to anyone else is your brain space and your heart space. Your inner world belongs to you. How do you want to create a safe, peaceful place in that world for yourself? You simply get to decide.

And if you'd like help with this, I'd love to have you join me inside the Flying Free program. You can learn more and complete an application by going to joinflyingfree.com. Now is a fabulous time to join, because I'm going to be re-teaching all of our courses live in 2023. I taught these courses six years ago, and they all need to be updated to include the information and the training and just how I've grown and evolved over the last five years. So this is a great time to join us. Again, that website to get information and apply is joinflyingfree.com.

Beautiful butterflies, this is all I have for you today. I wish you a Christmas in which you will experience the love and peace of your Creator, no matter what kind of storm is raging around you. Until next time, fly free.