

WHEN YOU ARE LONELY AND SAD IN YOUR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of [Flyingfreenow.com](https://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 257 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I want to talk about loneliness and sadness because in the Flying Free private forum, this is one of the most common experiences that are talked about by the hundreds of women interacting over there.

Here are some exact sentences that some of them have written: "I'm really struggling with feeling extremely lonely. How did you deal with this in a healthy way?" "How do you cope with loneliness or a shattered, broken heart?" "We don't speak to each other at all most of the time, so I just get really lonely for human fellowship and interaction." "I'm feeling really isolated. I just feel sad and alone." "I need help dealing with how lonely I feel all the time."

Do these expressions of loneliness feel familiar to you? I was listening to a past podcast episode that I recorded in 2021. It was called "When All Your Thoughts Are Despairing and Hopeless." It's Episode 141. If you want to listen to it, you can go to flyingfreenow.com/141. It has some good content, even powerful content, but I have learned and grown in different ways since that time — it's almost exactly two years ago from the time of this recording — and how I would talk about that today would probably be a little bit different. I believe everything I shared on that podcast. Don't get me wrong, there are some good things there. But I would probably add some things and maybe frame some things a little bit differently based on what I've learned since that time.

So, for example, in that episode, I focused on the idea of how our feelings in our bodies are created by our thoughts and beliefs, and this is absolutely true. When we believe that we are all alone and that God has abandoned us or if we believe that being alone is actually a terrible, horrible, or bad thing, then those beliefs, of course they're going to create devastating feelings in our bodies. And when we feel devastated in our body, we're going to end up showing up for our lives or not showing up for our lives in ways that continue to prove that we are in this horrible position of aloneness and that it's unbearable.

So in that particular episode, I talk about how we can change how we feel by

intentionally choosing new thoughts, or at least giving equal airtime to new thoughts that are going to serve us better. So for example, if our brain thinks, "I'm all alone, it's terrible, and God has abandoned me," we can notice that our brain is thinking that thought and maybe find a thought that we also believe — because we definitely believe that — but what else do we believe that might shift that devastation in our bodies into a different direction?

So a thought like this might help with that. For example, "I might be alone, but being alone might not have to be terrible. There is evidence in the world that some people have actually found peace and joy in being alone. And it is possible that God hasn't abandoned me but that I'm just going through a hard time and I can't sense His presence right now," okay? That's a different thought.

Notice how I did not judge my original thought and I also didn't try to change my original thought to the exact opposite of it. I didn't say, "What an idiot. Of course, I'm not alone. God is always with me. Being alone is awesome!" We can't do that because our brain won't buy into those thoughts at this point in time — not right now when our brain is firmly invested in believing that we actually are alone and it actually is terrible.

So sometimes we need to find a bridge thought. That means a thought that acts as a bridge from our unintentional, subconscious, programmed thought that is firmly entrenched in our thinking — we find a bridge from that thought to the new thought that we want to believe with conscious intention.

So a common bridge thought for me personally is something like this: "It's possible that I could be wrong about that." I think that a lot when I've got a thought that's really causing me to get stuck. I look at that thought, I write it down and I look at it and I go, "Well, it's possible I could be wrong about that." And when I think that thought that it is possible that I could be wrong about it... Notice how I'm not saying, "That's completely hogwash," because I'm not ready to go there yet. I'm only ready to go to the idea of, "Well, maybe I'm wrong." And then when I think that kind of bridge thought, my brain starts scanning the world for evidence that I could actually be wrong. Because our brains are brilliant at finding evidence for whatever they choose to believe.

Okay, so in that episode, it focuses on changing our thoughts and then how that practice of looking at our old thoughts and tweaking them a little bit, that practice carries huge potential to change how we actually feel in our bodies as well.

However, what I don't talk about in that episode is why we have those devastating thoughts in the first place and how sometimes our devastating thoughts are actually

true. What then? Can we really just go from feeling lonely to feeling connected and safe by changing our thoughts — abracadabra? I mean, yes, technically we can. We might have to gaslight ourselves, but technically we can. And we may want to work on that, especially... Here's when we want to work on that. If our programmed thinking has had us stuck in a certain place for several years, then it's not serving us, okay? Then it might be time to examine those thoughts and beliefs more closely and loosen them up a bit.

But what about if you are like one member who recently told us in the forum that she just got divorced, she's fresh out of a divorce, she's in full-blown grief mode because she hadn't ever been separated from her ex, and the divorce went super fast. A lot of times it doesn't go very fast, especially if you're divorcing an abusive individual, but her particular divorce did go fast, and sometimes they do. And she didn't have any time at all to process this loss that had suddenly come into her life and the grief of that loss, and now she is all alone in her new apartment all of a sudden and feeling this fresh grief and sadness and loneliness.

So in that case, I'm not going to coach her on how to come up with new thoughts so she can feel better. I mean, I actually did coach her because you can volunteer for coaching in the program, but we actually did come up with some new ways of framing her situation so she could have some hope in her particular situation. There were certain things that we talked about.

But otherwise, what she really needed was to accept that this grief was a part of divorce. This is the part of divorce where you feel a ton of grief, and walking through that grief process is a painful and necessary part of healing. When you go from living with someone for many years to living with nobody overnight, you are going to feel alone because you are alone. So rather than gaslight ourselves into feeling groovy about that, it would serve us far better long term to embrace that lonely grief and walk through that process — radical acceptance that this is something we have to face and just enter into. And that is what I want to talk about for the rest of this episode: how to practically do that. How to practically enter into that grief and walk that process.

So I'm going to share with you how I did it when I was grieving the loss of my marriage of twenty-five years. So for me, the grief was all front-loaded so that by the time my divorce was over, most of that grief work was done. I did my grieving from 2012 — if you want to put years on it — to 2016. That is four solid years of grief. Grief does not happen overnight, so you need to give yourself a few years depending on how long your relationship was. It does slowly get better — you're not always in that acute phase of grief — but it takes a good amount of time. And my relationship was twenty-five years in length. That's how long I was married, so I can't just expect that I'm going to

wake up one day and feel like a million bucks.

So what did I do? Well, I let myself cry whenever my body wanted to cry. I did not try to fight it or make it go away or not think about it. That meant that in the middle of the day when I was mixing up a batch of cold processed soap or I was making dinner or I was driving my kids to school, I didn't full-on ball if other people were around, sobbing and weeping and gnashing of teeth, but I did let the tears come, and my kids saw my tears. I didn't hide the truth from them that I was sad.

And yes, that reality did burden some of them and they felt sad for me. But that is part of living with other humans, and I didn't want to pretend that I wasn't experiencing that. If I want them to authentically grow up and be authentically themselves, that means that I need to be authentically myself to a degree, okay? Like I said, I did not allow myself to utterly fall apart to the point where they felt the need to make dinner or take care of me. I believed it was my responsibility to take care of them and I took that responsibility seriously and I took responsibility for all of my duties and all of my emotions, but I also did not pretend that I never felt sad and that everything was hunky dory.

I also wanted to show them that we can be sad and lonely in our lives and also still show up for our lives. I want this for them, for their futures, so I need to model this, what this looks like for them.

So when did I fall apart? I fell apart when I was alone at night, and that is when I hung out with, guess who? Me, myself, and I. And God. And this little group of us would sit or lay on our bed and cry together. We beat the pillow together. We curled up in the fetal position and rocked ourselves to sleep together. But you know what else we did together, me and all my inner parts? I'm going to tell you seven things that we did together when we were feeling sad during these four years.

Number one, we listened to uplifting music. I have a Spotify playlist that you can listen to. I'll put the link in the show notes. It is the exact playlist that I listened to in the car, while I made dinner, while I drove my kids to school, when I got ready for the day, and while I exercised. I always had it playing when I wasn't listening to a book or something else, which we'll get to in a minute.

And exercise — that was number two. That was the second thing I did. I had an elliptical machine and so I just got my body moving to music. And it felt good. My body needed that movement to process through the stress cycles that I was experiencing every day with nine children all by myself. So I made sure that I set my timer and did twenty

minutes of movement every day. It wasn't much, but it was enough to get me going in the morning.

Number three, I talked to people. I talked things out with my sister who was working for me at the time in my business. I talked to my counselor. Now, she turned out to be a bad egg at the end of the day, but during this time I didn't know that, and it did help to talk to her and have someone listen and care. I talked to a small group of women who were also survivors. We got together every other week for dinner and we did a study that was life-changing. I talk about this in my memoir. I processed with people who I believed at the time genuinely cared about me, and that was very healing. Now, I was still on my own, but knowing that they were out there was comforting to me.

The fourth thing that I did was I listened to interesting fiction books on Audible, and I got lost in the stories of others. Now, prior to this, I would only read and listen to non-fiction books, and they were always books by John Piper and by... I don't even remember all the names of the authors. I wrote about this in my memoir as well. But a lot of Puritan authors and things like that and Nancy DeMoss. I'm trying to think of some other people. Hannah Whitall Smith — I read all of her books. Anyway, I believe that that was not a waste of time to read books that were going to help me grow in my spiritual life, but it was a waste of time... I graduated from college as an English education major and my favorite, favorite classes to take and to teach were literature classes. I loved literature, I loved fiction, the classics, but I never really read too much modern fiction because again, I was taught that that was a waste of time and our time is so valuable and we should only focus on our spiritual life.

So what I did to kind of counter some of that programming is I started listening to fiction books. And what those books did is they gave my brain a break. My brain was constantly perseverating and looping on all of the drama in my life and the relationship with my husband, as well as the stuff going on with my kids, and the books helped me to think about other people and their stories. So I would listen while I got ready for bed. I would often fall asleep at night while listening to a chapter in one of these books. And I listened to several books and really, really enjoyed it.

The fifth thing that I did that I never used to do before is I watched series on TV. For example, when I made soap each night, my daughter and I would watch an episode of "Once Upon a Time" for an example. Now, prior to this, again, I thought that watching TV was unspiritual and a waste of time, but now I was using it as a treat for myself, and once again, it would give me a break from my own life and enable me to think about something else for a little while so I wasn't so exhausted thinking about everything going on in my own life.

Now, number six. This isn't something that I did, but I would have done it if it would have been a big thing back then, but podcasts weren't really a big thing back then. Or if they were, I guess I wasn't aware, and so I did not listen to podcasts back then. But I listen to lots of podcasts now. And back then I would have been listening to podcasts as well. The women in Flying Free have made an incredible list of recommendations in the private Flying Free forum, so if you're interested in joining Flying Free and being part of that forum as well as getting access to all of the resources I've created for you, you can go to joinflyingfree.com.

And then number seven, I started to do little things to show myself that I was loved by me. I started going to a chiropractor, I got a back massage once a month for a year, I would do my work at a coffee shop while I was waiting for my autistic son to get out of therapy, and I would treat myself to a fancy coffee, which I never used... I used to always think that that was a waste of money and I should never, ever spend money on anything like that. I bought nice underclothes for myself instead of buying really cheap stuff that would get holes in it really fast.

I stopped doing things just because someone else was pressuring me to do them, and I started being really intentional about how I spent my time and what I chose to do with other people. I started choosing only to do things that I had really good reasons for doing and that I liked those reasons, not just because someone else thought I should be doing it. So basically I started saying "no" to things that people would ask me to do, and that helped me to be able to say "yes" to more things that were more life-giving and healing for myself.

Now, some people might look at this and go, "Well, that's so selfish." That's the upbringing that I had. I was just programmed with thinking all of those things are so selfish. "You shouldn't do any of those things. You should instead be getting out there and basically laying down your body on the railroad track and letting a train run over you because that's all you're good for." But I was starting to shift my thinking, intentionally choosing to no longer believe that, and wondering, "What would it be like if I lived my life not on the railroad track as a pancake, but actually out there living and moving and being healthy and strong and putting amazing things into the world because I now feel and am experiencing amazing things inside of my own self?" I wanted to try that out for the last half of my life. So that's what I started doing.

So anyway, these are all the practical ways that I soothed my grieving inner parts. Now, let me be very clear. These things did not make my pain go away. I still was experiencing pain in my body because I still was sad and lonely and grieving loss. And also, to be honest, I was very fearful of what the future held because I was kind of

wondering, "I don't think this marriage is sustainable," but also the idea of divorce was anathema to me, so I really honestly didn't know what was going to happen. But these things that I did, they did comfort me and they did get me through those years.

And another thing that I did is — this is the final strategy I'm going to share with you — but I would wake up in the morning and I would say, "I am going to just get through the next few minutes. That's all I can do is just get through the next few minutes." So basically what this means is I just allowed the pain to be what it was. I didn't fight it or resist it, I didn't hope and pray it would go away, I didn't believe there was something wrong if it didn't go away. I kind of just decided, "Okay, this is what it's going to be for a while."

And if something sad is happening to us, I personally believe that feeling sad about that is actually the right and normal way to feel. It's not the wrong way to feel. What that means, if you're feeling sad about something or you've lost something, it means that you had, or at least believed that you had, something valuable, and now you no longer have that valuable thing. Whether it was real or not or in your imagination is irrelevant. The fact is that you truly believed that you had that valuable thing.

I believed that I had a happy Christian marriage and a happy Christian family. That's what I wanted. I was very invested in living in denial a lot of the time because that's what I wanted to have and so that's what I had to believe that I had. It was too hard for me to go to that place where I realized, "I've never had that ever, and I'm only pretending to have that because that makes me feel better somehow."

But the fact is that when we love and value things here on this earth, it is inevitable that we will one day lose them. Whether we're talking about something that we really have or something that we thought we had, whether we're talking about people that we love, our youth — we're all losing our youth. Every day that goes by, it's slipping away — our health, our money, our possessions, our talents.

Have you ever seen a singer that's... Oh gosh, I can't think of the name of the singer that recently I saw her interview. She's very, very old. She was popular many, many years ago — fifty years ago. And she had actually a long and amazing career. I don't know why I can't think of her name off the top of my head, but I'm losing my youth, that's why. And my brain is also going. I'm losing my brain. I'm losing my mind, all right?

So anyway, I can't think of her name, but just imagine someone. Or think of Taylor Swift 60 years from now when she's in her 80s or almost 90. She's not going to be able to get on stage and do the things she does right now. She's not going to look the same and

her voice is not going to sound the same. Because I heard this other woman, I heard her singing, and she doesn't have very much of a voice anymore because she's an elderly woman. So we lose our talent, even. We lose our skills, and it's so sad. We don't get to keep everything forever.

The only thing that we get to keep into eternity, I believe, is our connection to ourself and our connection to God, and possibly our connection to those we love. I choose to believe that. But everything else we're going to leave behind, it slowly goes away. So getting really good at letting go is part of our maturing as an adult. It's part of our human development. And it's when we fight and resist that process of letting go that we actually experience not just the clean pain of loss and grief, but we actually experience dirty pain that's layered on top of that clean pain. So I recommend leaning into the pain of your loss and holding as much space and time for that as you need to process it, all right?

So the other Episode 141 that I mentioned at the beginning of this one, that's a great episode when you're feeling stuck. It's like, "Okay, I've been grieving this loss for four years." If I had gotten to the end of that four years and I wasn't healing and getting better and actually having more better days — I know that's terrible grammar — but if that wasn't actually happening, then I might want to go back and go, "Okay, what's going on here in my belief system that is actually not true because it's holding me back, and what do I actually need to let go of as far as things that I'm choosing to believe that are keeping me stuck in this process of grief?"

So for those of you who, you've got fresh grief or you're pretty new to all of this loss and stuff as far as your relationship and this waking up process, maybe waking up to the reality that you're living in an emotionally abusive relationship, I hope that this episode has given you some things that you can do to help you as you walk through that.

Now, if you want more help and support, like daily handholding during your own lonely time of grief whether you're in an emotionally destructive marriage that you're stuck in, or maybe you're separated, or maybe you're in the middle of the divorce process, or maybe you're even already divorced and you're trying to pick up the pieces, I would love to offer you what I've created in the Flying Free Sisterhood Program, and you can learn more by going to joinflyingfree.com. And if you're already divorced and you want help and support with rebuilding your life, I've also created resources for you as well in the Flying Higher program, and you can go to joinflyinghigher.com to learn about that.

Hey, beautiful butterfly. Thank you so much for listening. If you liked this episode, be sure to

subscribe, and then consider leaving a rating and review so others can find us. To connect with me and get a free chapter of my book, head over to flyingfreenow.com, and until next time, fly free.