

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FACING THE NEW YEAR WITH HOPE

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 47 of the Flying Free Podcast. Happy New Year! It's January 1st today, and I'm so glad that you've decided to join us. Today I have with me Sarah, Kim, Becky, and Rachel. We're going to be talking about setting goals and planning for the new year, although we might still be dealing with someone who has dysfunctional behaviors in our life. How do you take back control of the things that you can control while letting go of the things that you can't? That's what we're going to be talking about today. Let's get started.

Welcome to this podcast episode, beautiful ladies! I'm so excited — there's five of us that got together today. What we're going to be talking about today is... For those of you listening, we got together before we pressed the record button and went around talking about what we wanted to share. We decided to just press record. We might go all over the place. But this is January 1st. We all want to wish you a Happy New Year.

Every single one of the women on this podcast today has come out of an abusive relationship and are either remarried or are getting remarried. We've got three that are remarried and two who are engaged. We have some things we want to share with you about when we were in our abusive relationships and how we viewed going into a brand-new year. We think of a new year as being a new chapter in our life. On the one hand you can feel like, "It's a new chapter of my life, and I can already see how it reads. It's going to read exactly like all the other chapters. I don't feel motivated. I don't feel excited; in fact, I'm depressed." I used to think, "Oh my word, it's a new year. Who's going to die this year?" That's how morbid I was. I had no hope. I was waiting for all the different shoes to fall. It was depressing. Plus, women in abusive relationships feel like they don't have a lot of control. Even when you're divorced, you often feel like many of your options have been stripped from you, so a new year can feel very overwhelming as well as constricting. There are all these conflicting things going on in your mind, in your emotions, and in your thoughts.

I thought we'd do an episode with these women and talk about our own experiences of facing a new year and maybe some of the tips or ways that we coped, and pass those ideas onto you. Hopefully it will be encouraging and help you get off on the right foot for this brand-new year, 2020. So who wants to start? (We probably should have

established this at the beginning.) Becky, you're kind of the planner extraordinaire.

KIM: I was going to say, "Have Becky start."

NATALIE: Yeah, let's start with you.

SARAH: I was thinking the same thing.

BECKY: Okay. So I'm a little bit opposite of Natalie. When the new year would come around, I was always glass half-full. No matter how bad the previous year was, "By golly, this year is going to be better! I'm just going to forget about how bad everything is and I'm going to press forward with everything in me to make it better." But the problem is it never got better. I would even tell the kids in the specific things that were hard, "I know next year is going to be better," and it never was. Now I'm remarried to a good man. I remember saying... First, I don't say, "Next year is going to be better." I don't have to, because it's just good. But I looked at my husband two weeks ago and said, "Do you realize I don't have to say, 'It's going to be better next year?' It's just good as it is." So for anyone who wants hope, you can get there one day.

I made a list of things that I had absolutely no control over because my ex would take control. Then I had things that, because of his control, it wasn't that I didn't have control over it, but that the control I had weighed me down because the responsibility was so heavy. For me, I had no control of our finances. I had an ex who wouldn't work, and I was working eighty to ninety hours a week to provide, and he spent every penny. When I would tell the kids, "It will be better next year," it was because they never got to see mom. Mom would always be at the computer. (I worked from home, so I did get to see them.) But I would work harder the next year, build another business or grow another business. We made more money, and it was all gone.

I'm going to say, that didn't change until I got out. Actually, no. The last two years it did change because I started putting down some boundaries, but this also made my life even worse. I cut him off our company business accounts. I cut him off all my credit cards. I cut him off and then I started taking the control back, because if I am going to have a sixth child essentially running rampant, I was going to take the control I could take. That's one thing I did. That has gotten so much better since I divorced. The other thing that I had control of but that weighed me down was my weight. I had five kids and I was a brisk ninety-eight pounds after my fifth child. He would still call me fat and ugly. No matter how much I tried, I was never skinny enough. At year seventeen I said, "Forget it." I stopped caring, and as you can see, I am not ninety-eight pounds anymore. I have a full figure.

NATALIE: A beautiful figure.

BECKY: But I will tell you, the weekend we spent at Kim's house I realized something about myself. This is how I'm going into next year. I used to always say, "Start with a goal. Once you have your goal in place, that's where you begin." But for women coming out of abuse, we have this extra step we have to take. For me it is determining, "Why do I have the goal? Why do I want to lose weight? Why do I want to eat healthier? Why do I want to work less, or why do I want to save more, or why do I want to have the laundry and the socks done every week?" They are never a bad thing, but I was always doing it because I was walking on eggshells. I was appeasing an abuser. I was appeasing somebody else; even in childhood, it was my parents. So I don't know how this happened, but when I was sitting in Kim's room downstairs when we were doing that Facebook Live, it hit me that I don't lose weight for myself. Since that weekend, I have lost fourteen pounds.

NATALIE: Wow!

BECKY: Because I came home and told my wonderful new husband, "If you call me fat, I will lose weight," because I was so used to appeasing everyone else and doing everything for everyone else. This time I told him, "I want you to know I am going to start Whole 30 again. It's not for you. It's not for the kids. It's for me." I have never had an easier time of saying, "no" to sugar, drinking lots of water, and enjoying it. Because I am doing it for me and not some kind of selfish, "I'm going to go to the spa all day for self-care." I'm talking the self-care that most of us never, ever, ever were allowed to do.

SARAH: I just want to say, that's awesome! That's awesome! I'm super happy for you.

BECKY: I am too. I'm excited about next year, because I finally feel like I have control of it because I'm not doing it for somebody else.

KIM: One thing I mentioned when we were talking before we started the video... Someone talked about healthy eating, and I know Becky was just on that topic, too. (Congratulations, Becky! Way to go! I'm so glad you're doing that for you.) I talked about one little step towards healthier eating at home and helping your kids with that is when you get home from doing all the grocery shopping and unload them all... I know this is a lot of time upfront, because just getting the groceries takes forever. But if you can cut up your vegetables and your fruits or wash them and cut them up, and then I put mine in nice glassware to avoid plastics. Then it's so easy to grab it for a healthy snack versus if I've got bars or cookies on the counter, which I would eat instead because it's easy and yummy. But if you can just grab a quick healthy thing, it is easier for your kids, too.

When they ask for snacks, I find that very irritating and annoying. I don't know if any of you other moms do.

NATALIE: Even for people who don't have kids anymore, or their kids are all grown up and it is just them and their husband or them and a teenager, that's a great idea. I have to not buy snacks and stuff at the store. That's where I say "no" — at the store. Then I don't have to say "no" at home, because I won't say "no" at home. I know myself. If it's sitting there, I'm going to eat it. But if I don't have it... My problem is that I don't buy anything, and then we don't have anything to eat.

KIM: Then the kids say, "We have nothing in the house." I know. I bake, so that's hard. It's hard for the waistline.

NATALIE: That is hard. Stop baking.

KIM: Well, I had a few other thoughts. I know a couple of quick goals that some people have. I'm just throwing these out. I didn't make steps for these. Reading more and turning off the TV — I think that's a good one — trying to read a good book once a month. I know, Sarah, you're going through "When to Walk Away From Toxic People." I've been reading that one. It's amazing.

SARAH: Oh, that book is so good.

KIM: It is so good.

NATALIE: Who's that by?

KIM: Gary Thomas.

NATALIE: Oh, I have that book! I've been reading that too!

SARAH: It's so good. I'm doing a coaching group through it right now.

NATALIE: I saw that.

SARAH: It's on everybody's mind. It's amazing. So good!

KIM: I'm so glad he wrote that book. But if you're putting some of that good stuff into your mind and into your soul each month, you're going to grow in ways you don't realize, even.

NATALIE: Can I jump in with a tip right here about that? Some people say, “I don’t have time to read.” Here’s what I used to do. I didn’t either when I had tons of kids at home — when do you read? But when I would lay in bed at night, I would read for about ten or fifteen minutes. It had two benefits. First, I’d get through about two books a month doing it that way. I’m a fast reader, but you could get through at least one book a month doing it that way. Second, it made me sleepy and concentrated my brain on something other than ruminating over all the crap I had dealt with that day. It got me focused on something else, and I would get sleepy and then go to sleep. I did that for years and years and years.

SARAH: I’m going to dovetail on that. One of the things that I keep reading about is that you put stuff in long-term memory — your long-term memory files are most open just before you fall asleep. I’ve read about other homeschool moms who have their kids go over their multiplication tables in bed as they are falling asleep (they will have a chart on the wall by the kids’ bed or something) precisely because that is what files it into long-term memory, and then your brain files the long-term memory into the short-term memory while you sleep and your brain files. So if you are falling asleep listening to scripture, listening to good books being read out loud, or that kind of stuff, it is going into your long-term memory where it can positively impact your thinking patterns. So that’s another good reason to do that.

NATALIE: Wow! Thank you for sharing that. That’s good stuff. Kim, keep going.

KIM: One more quick goal: Being on my phone less and present more. Especially with my kids, I don’t want them to see me with the hunched phone posture. It’s just normal now. Or in the carpool line at school, I don’t want to be on the phone when they get in the car. Or with people and friends, if I am with them for lunch or dinner or wherever — be there with them and leave the phone in my purse. That’s just a quick thing.

Natalie, you mentioned decluttering earlier. When I was going through my divorce process, eventually I got to the point where I just wanted to get rid of stuff. It felt so good. We all just have so much clutter and extra. I started by doing a drawer, a shelf, a closet, or a room. When you break it down into smaller areas, it really feels attainable and it feels good. Then it keeps rolling and it’s a snowball. Eventually, you will have many spaces in your house decluttered. It felt good to go through my books and get rid of all the marriage books, the CDs, and the marriage studies that I did for so many years. I threw all of that away.

One way to do this (these are just practical things here), if you walk into your back entry and there are shoes laying everywhere (that drives me crazy), that system that you

have, which is like no system, isn't working. So find a way to work with the habits that your kids have. If your kids come in the door and the shoes just end up on the floor, stick a basket there to throw the shoes into. At least it looks less cluttered or less messy that way. I checked out some books at the library on how to declutter — the Marie Kondo thing that's big. I think it's a really good concept to ask of something, "Does this bring me joy? Have I used this in the last twelve months?" If not, then get rid of it. It feels so good to get rid of stuff. If you start small, you will end up getting rid of big things — like a husband. I joked with my friends about that when I was decluttering. This is terrible.

NATALIE: No, that is so funny!

KIM: I think I talked with you about this, Natalie, about your bedroom. Especially if you are in the same marital home that you shared before, make it your own. Make it your own space, your haven. Repaint it if you can. Paint isn't too expensive, but it has such a big impact. If you can, get some new bedding. Declutter your room. Not only will decluttering feel like more space, but mentally it is getting rid of clutter in your mind, too. When you walk into a room and it's pretty clean and tidy, you don't feel the burden when you walk into that same room where you think, "I have to get rid of this, and I have to fold this basket of laundry, and there's junk all over the floor." Mentally, it just helps so much to relieve some of that stress.

BECKY: I'm going to jump in and say one thing about the bedroom. Change where the furniture is located. Change where that bed is. Because then when you walk in, those memories don't trigger as much, if that helps.

NATALIE: That's a good point.

KIM: And do the color in the room that you want or the bedding you want — what makes you happy, what brings you joy. It doesn't matter anymore about anybody else. I had a client tell me one time about "Certain things from your previous relationship that bring memories, get rid of it." She called it negative energy. That just stuck with me. You don't want that in your life anymore. It may be painful, but it may be worth it, too.

NATALIE: Can I jump in here quickly and offer a caveat? For those of you listening who are still with your partner and are trying to figure out ways to cope, you probably can't change your bedroom because you'd get in trouble if you did. Here's what I used to do when I lived with my ex-husband. He was a hoarder — he still is. He did not like to declutter. He would get angry if I threw anything away. Decluttering was not something I was allowed to do without repercussions. What I did was decide to create clean spaces

where I spent most of my time. I thought about it, and I spent most of my time in the kitchen, in our bedroom, in the dining room area, and the living room. I thought that I would keep those areas super clean.

I used to sneak some things into the garbage, but my ex would go dumpster-dive and find the things and put them back where they were. I stopped throwing things out. First, if it was small, I started putting things in a basket. (Every few months I would have to buy a new basket.) Then I'd put the basket on his desk. Pretty soon his desk was full of all these baskets of garbage. I didn't care, because that was his space. He gets to choose how he wants to live. He should be able to, right? Everyone should be able to make their own choices about how they want to live in their space. The other space I felt like I could put stuff was the garage. We had a three-car garage and a huge storage room in the basement. Even if you have a small storage room, just throw it in there. Start making your clean spaces and your hoarder spaces, and make them very separate from each other.

By the time I divorced mine and I moved out of that home (he's still living in that home), I left everything. I only took my things that I had bought for myself that I loved, that gave me joy, that were mine. I took those and I left everything behind. That was a good feeling. Right now he lives in a three-car garage home, and no cars can be parked in there. There is no room for any cars. That's just one of the things that you can do. Find spaces for the junk if you can't get rid of it, and create your own clean spaces. Even your bedroom — though you share it with him, if he has a particular taste you probably have to go along with that, but you can still create a corner of your bedroom that is just yours. Maybe a little reading nook where you put a special chair and a little desk. Find spaces in the house that you can make completely yours. Sorry about that. I just wanted to give a caveat.

KIM: Thank you, yes.

BECKY: Mine was a hoarder too. I wonder if that's a symptom.

NATALIE: Anybody else have a hoarder?

KIM: A little bit, yeah.

RACHEL: Yeah, mine was very obsessed with his stuff and would get very upset if anything was touched with his stuff.

SARAH: Mine was definitely not a hoarder. He was more of a neat-nik who would fly off

the handle if there were any kids toys left on the floor and the house looked like it had been lived in by an actual family in his absence. But he was super particular about his things, and he had more clothes and shoes than me.

BECKY: Mine definitely had more. I had 4% of the closet. He had 96%. In some of our homes it was a big closet, and I still had 4%. If we had dressers, he had all the drawers and I got one. Looking back, I should have taken back more drawers. I should have taken back more space — I just didn't know I could. Even if you are still in it, stand up for yourself. You have just as much right to be happy as that other person — and I'm not going to say anything ugly about them.

NATALIE: Right. A lot of times we think, especially conservative Christian women, believe it's part of their duty to make that other person happy. When I started standing up to mine and started doing things more my own way, he didn't like it. But we're talking about emotional abuse. He didn't like it. He would get mean and critical, but I knew he wasn't going to hit me or kick me out of the house. He was just going to get really mad and make my life miserable for a while. I started realizing it was worth it to get to do some things my way. I did buy a new bed sheet, and he didn't like it. I bought a new table, and he didn't like it. But I loved those things. They gave me pleasure, even though... By that time, it got to the point that I realized he didn't like anything I did anyway, so what did it matter? I might as well just make myself happy in some ways.

BECKY: Do you feel like because you were making those choices that it gave you more strength to make the bigger choice, like Kim was saying, and get rid of the last piece of junk?

NATALIE: Yes, it did. It totally built up my strength because I realized, "I can do this. On a fundamental level, nothing bad happens to me." My fear of his hatred toward me or his disgust of me, I was afraid of that because I desperately needed to be loved. But I realized that the more I started loving myself, the less I needed him to love me. The more I started validating myself, the less I needed his validation and support. That just gets better and better over time. I think that's something that women can do, definitely, even in the middle of living with their abuser. Not only that they can do it, but they really should do it for their own well-being.

KIM: For many women, oftentimes one of their goals is new friendships. Figuring that out can be kind of overwhelming and scary. At least for myself, the possible rejection, wondering if anyone even wants to be my friend, especially if you've been in an abusive relationship for so many years, you almost don't feel like you have value for someone to want to be your friend or to want to spend time with you. You almost have to work

through that on your own. But you are worth it. You do have that value.

A few steps I wrote down and things I have done, especially over the last year, I decided I wanted to invest more of my time and energy in life-giving relationships, because there are some family and former friendships that just don't have that quality to them, where they bring life and joy into my life. I don't want to cut ties with that, but I'm not going to invest so much time and energy into those people. If you think about the people in your life who are lifegiving to you, try to initiate lunch, dinner, or coffee time with them. Another way I found to do this is to make it a point to text, email, or call them and get a date on the calendar. So often we see someone at church or school and say, "We should get together sometime." I decided a year ago or so to follow through on that. If you see them and say, "We should get together," I will try to text or email them the next day or within a few days. I'd say, "It was great to chat with you. Would you like to do lunch sometime?" If they say they'd love that, throw out a few dates. "I have Mondays and Wednesdays available." If you get it on the calendar, it actually happens. If that goes well, then do it again and again. That's one of the biggest challenges — actually making it happen.

Another way is to consider the gift of hospitality. I enjoy having people over and having people come into my home and cooking. I know that's not for everybody, or they may not have the space. But if you do, that is so encouraging for some people, and it speaks care and love to them to be invited into someone's home. It's nice to meet at a restaurant, but I think it's a little bit different getting invited to their dinner table and they took the time to make you a meal. I have a sweet woman from my church, and she has invited me and my kids over a couple of times into her home. She makes us dinner. Especially when I was going through my divorce, it meant so much. "Someone actually cares about me." When you are questioning your worth and value, to have someone care enough to feed your kids and yourself — it's huge. So doing that for other people that you maybe want to establish a friendship with, or maybe there are people in your circle that could use some extra love and care too. You don't know where that could go to — maybe a friendship at some point.

A couple of other things: If you have regular, casual contact with people — perhaps you see the same woman at the library every week — consider asking her if she wants coffee or something if you enjoy your interactions with her. If you have kids still at home, get involved in their school, their church, their soccer team, or the library. Here we have a lot of breweries or coffeehouses. You could start volunteering and meet people that way. The biggest two things I have are smile often, and have a warm, sunny disposition about yourself. Be loving, welcoming, and a good listener. Don't judge people. If you're the kind of friend you're looking for, I think you will attract positive

people to you. There's a couple of women in my life that I see, and I just enjoy being around them. Try to emulate some of the characteristics that you see in some of your favorite people. Those are the notes I had.

NATALIE: That's beautiful. When you said the smiling thing, I just recently read... It was encouraging kids in how they feel and how they can help change some of their feelings. One of the things it said is always to try to put a half smile on your face whenever you think of it, because, apparently, when your body smiles, it actually affects how you feel. When I read it, I thought, "No." I tried it; it does. It works. You start to think, "I must be kind of happy because I've got this little smile on my face." So try it.

KIM: Your posture changes a little bit. Really quick, there's these two women in my kids' school, two moms, who are always frowning — like, scowling. It's scary. You want to kind of run from that type. They might be nice. I've never gotten close enough to know because they look so scary. They might be nice. But if you walk around with a scowl on your face all day, it does kind of throw people off a little bit.

BECKY: I wanted to say something about the friend thing. I loved, Kim, everything you said. She is the best entertainer that I have ever had the privilege of going into their home. She's a good baker, too. But I have some friendships that were very close before I divorced, and I desperately want those friendships still because they were so close. But we think so differently now — theologically and in many ways — because of recognizing the abuse I was in and the theology of the church I was in that kind of encouraged that. Once you get out of abuse and you begin questioning things, you question everything. A girlfriend who lives close to here, I desperately want to have coffee with her, but I know that it's not going to be good for me. I will come back and I will not have that closeness anymore because we're just too distant. So like Kim said, I'm focusing on finding the newer friendships than trying to get the old ones to be what I want them to be.

KIM: That's one of the reasons I invited you ladies over too, was that women who have been through similar stories and backgrounds... I know Natalie and I talked about this a little bit when I first presented the idea to her. Because we all have probably lost some of those friendships, it was really kind of scary to go out and invite all of you, because some of you I hadn't even met in-person. But don't be afraid to put yourself out there. You might end up with a "no," and that's okay. You can try again another time. It doesn't mean you're not worth it. Maybe it just didn't work out. I would just encourage that you try it. If you get several "no's," then move on to somebody else. That happened to me and I thought, "Okay, they don't want to hang out." But I was so blessed by all of you women coming out. That's just one example of putting yourself out there. It is scary,

but it will be worth it too at some point. Go ahead, Sarah.

SARAH: Kimberly, that weekend was absolutely amazing. I loved getting to know all of you guys. It was one of those things that stands out in my mind from the whole year. I want to thank you for putting yourself out there, because it gave me and others the opportunity to kind of reciprocate and put ourselves out there. I didn't know all of you or any of you in-person before that. It was really awesome. It was like this snowball thing. I wanted to dovetail on what you were saying, Becky. This whole ide ... I think a lot of times on those friendships, we cling to friendships or other relationships that might actually be non-beneficial out of sentimental value. I think it's really common. We cling to stuff and we cling to people out of past sentimental value even if they are not beneficial and are not healthy for us right now.

BECKY: Like our ex-husbands.

SARAH: Like ex-husbands. Like best friends from ex-husbands. Like people who helped keep you in an oppressive, abusive structure or system. One of the things I've been learning from this book "When to Walk Away" that we've all been looking at and reading is that Jesus knew when to respect that someone else was not at the same level and just let them walk away. If they are not going to be building something up and they're not ready to hear things that will lead them out of where they are, leave it be, because it is not good for our mental health. For me, something that I've had to learn is to ask, "Am I keeping this item or chasing this friendship because of sentimental value or because it's actually healthy for me?" If it's not actually healthy for me, let it go. It ties into some of the things in my notes that I want to share. I just wanted to dovetail on that idea that we cling to things because of sentimental stuff even when it's bad for us.

BECKY: I was going to say, that doesn't mean that you "X" them out of your life. I just don't go have coffee with her anymore because it's not going to be good for me. If I run into her at the supermarket, I still love her to death. I just will never have that relationship with her again.

SARAH: I should clarify that I'm talking about specific investment in something where you are chasing it, not necessarily being rude to people. I'm not saying go be a jerk. I'm just saying not that deep... You guys know what I mean.

NATALIE: Sarah, why don't you share what you wanted to share on the podcast today?

SARAH: Sure. I had three or four different things running around in my head. I wanted to see what everyone else had and niche into whatever fit. One of the things that

stands out for me that blends with what others have been focusing on is if y'all are like me, you can start feeling guilty about stuff you aren't doing that other people do well. For example, I went out to the mailbox this morning to get yesterday's mail because I was too tired to do it yesterday because I was giving myself a crash day and I was laying in bed with chips and queso and Netflix. I did not make it to the mailbox. I gave myself permission to be lazy all day, which I didn't used to be able to do. That's something new I'm learning to be able to do in itself.

So I went to the mailbox this morning and there is this gorgeous Christmas card from somebody. I got this immediate stab of guilt, because people expect Christmas cards, right? I didn't send any Christmas cards. I haven't sent any Christmas cards for like four years — five, seven — I don't even remember. But every year that I get gorgeous pictured Christmas cards, I remember I used to do that when my kids were little, back when I was in my abusive marriage and I was the pastor's wife. There were a ton of things I did because it was expected.

I did things like... Kim, you were talking about hospitality, and girl, I have to say, you have a phenomenal gift of hospitality as a way to connect with people's hearts and serve people. I'm a hard-core introvert even though I can talk on podcasts. But I spent years as a pastor's wife doing the big hospitality thing because it was expected of me, not because it feeds my soul and gives me great joy. Kim, my observation of you is that it is something that feeds your soul and gives you great joy. I loved watching you be so hospitable. I applaud and admire that. I like hospitality too, but part of my trauma for me is having done so much of it simply out of a rigid set of expectations.

So for me, one of the things that I have changed and that I will continue to reassess in the new year is, "What is my motivation for doing something I feel obligated to do? Is it because of someone's external expectations? Or is it because it is actually the best thing for me, the best thing for my family, and something God wants me to do?" For example, when in my past life I used to have people over, I did the full-on nice china, multiple plates, bowls, three-course or four-course meal. I did that because that was expected of me by the person I was married to. Anything less was not representing the family well. There is absolutely nothing wrong with a gorgeous table and a fantastic dinner.

But you know what, when people come to my house now, you get whatever I've got and it's on paper plates. (I see your thumbs up, Becky.) For me, it's not that I don't know how to cook or I don't know how to bake or that I don't love a well-lit table. I was raised by a southern mama in a southern culture. I know how to do all of those things. But for me, that is something for my mental health, because when I'm done with the meal I would

rather sit there and talk to you than mentally stress about how I will have to stay up late after I put my kids to bed to wash the mountain of dishes. For me, that's a choice I've made intentionally to let go of a sense of obligation to arbitrary external expectations.

I think in any situation, whether you are out of an abusive situation or whether you are still in an abusive environment, that is something that we can do in micro steps as we enter the new year. "Is this thing (whatever it is), is it because I assume other people expect it of me so I am trying to live up to those expectations, or is it something that brings me great joy and that increases and enhances my or my children's mental health and well-being?" Being able to get to the point of cocooning down to the essentials and letting stuff go if it is just arbitrary external expectations — just releasing those — is super freeing. You can fly freer, I think, if you are not trying to flap your wings while carrying the burden of other people's expectations.

Some of my tips for the new year is to assess, even in the small things. If it zaps your time and energy, is it really necessary? Is it something that you can live without? If it is something that others just expect of you, just let it go. One of the other things I do, and I do it with my kids a lot too, is whenever I'm facing a new choice... I think every woman that is listening to this is coming from her own context, her own personality, her own set of trauma and expectations, however many children you have or don't have — we're all different. But one of the things that I wrote down was that I've learned to ask myself four questions when I'm making a big decision. I wrote about this in one of my books.

The first one is, "Is it right?" This whittles it down when we're trying to deal with those expectations. "Is it right?" That's just a moral question. "Is it right versus wrong?" Sometimes we have to assess what we believe is right and wrong if we've been brainwashed to believe something is wrong, but it's not actually wrong. It's okay to ask really hard questions about the stuff that we've been told is right or wrong. The second one is, "Is it best?" Sometimes things that are right are not actually best for right now. That's kind of a time and place question rather than a right or wrong question. "Is it right, is it best?" The third one is, "Do I really want it?" This one cuts both ways, because I might want something, but do I want the fallout too? I may want a fifth piece of cake, but I really don't want the sore throat tomorrow, so I know I actually don't want the fifth piece of cake. It's like a cause and effect question, and you have to ask both of the bookends of that question. It's a double-edged sword. The fourth one is, "Does it align with who I want to be?" There are some things that are perfectly, morally acceptable. It might be great for right now, and there's time to do it. It's something I enjoy doing and there are not negative effects. "But you know what, that is just not aligned with where I want to head in life. It still isn't going to make my top priority cut." I've found a ton of

freedom in whatever choices I have to make by following that little question formula.

NATALIE: I like that. That's very helpful.

SARAH: It's something that is simple enough. I started teaching my kids when they were four or five, "Is it right?" "No, mama." "Okay, then you don't go any further." "Is it right?" "Yes." "Well, then is it best? Is this the right time for it?" "No, mama." "Okay." You can start teaching kids cause and effect even when they are young so they have some kind of framework for making wise choices, which is hard, especially if you are growing up in a confusing home. Anyway, those were my thoughts moving into the new year.

NATALIE: I love that. Thank you, Sarah. Those are good. Rachel, you're the last one.

RACHEL: I have so enjoyed sitting here listening to all these wonderful ladies bringing their own unique perspectives and gifts, because it is such a blessing. I love each of you ladies. I want to build on what you guys said about making the decisions based on getting really internalized on why you want to do them. Those questions you said, Sarah, are valuable. I wrote them down because I want to start using them.

To summarize that, it's important that we be intentional about getting honest with ourselves. For me this is important, because I have lived in denial for fourteen years with my husband about who he was and how he treated me. I was able to really fool myself to a very deep level. What that resulted in is that I have no idea a lot of times about how I really feel about things. So checking in with myself and trying to figure out where I am at and actually having an opinion is sort of revolutionary, because a lot of times my opinion was whatever was going to make someone else happy.

My goal for myself this new year is just being intentional and taking responsibility for myself and stewarding my own life and not allowing other people to come in and tell me who I am and what I want to be. Thank goodness I'm not in a situation where I have to deal with that on a daily basis, but to be honest, a lot of times my insides still feel like that. It still is ringing in my life. That can be discouraging, because it's like, everyday I have to wake up and make a decision that "It is my life. It is my day. These next minutes and next hours are something that I have to choose to shape. God will be with me as I make those decisions, but it is mine. He's not pulling my puppet strings. Whatever happens, I don't have to have a fatalistic attitude about life. I choose it. I decide where to go." It starts with honesty about what's going on with me, what my day looks like, what I need to get done instead of just living off in the clouds and hoping the day goes well. That's all I have to share.

BECKY: Can I add something to that real quick? I was in a Facebook group and a lady was literally asking a very similar question to what Rachel just talked about. All of these Christians chimed in with the response, "Just fall on Jesus. Just rest in God," which is a great idea, except there's no action to that. Combating that old way of thinking, part of that was, "Well, I guess God is just going to have to take care of it." No! God gave us a brain. God gave us logic. God gave us two hands. God gave us two feet. We can make the changes for ourselves. I was thinking that December is normally very depressing for me because I tend to think back on the year. For a moment I will think, "I haven't gone as far as I wanted to come." But then I will think, "But the glass is half-full. We're better than last year, so I will make new goals." I think the one thing... I didn't think five or six years out. I thought a year out that I would be at where I am at five or six years out. Does that make sense?

NATALIE: Yeah.

BECKY: I wish I would have had a better perspective of understanding that once you get divorced, it will take a lot of time for life to become what you kind of envision your life to be. My life is more than I ever envisioned now in some areas I didn't even think about. But in other areas, it took years and years and years of dealing with a lot of fall out, and it doesn't happen overnight. I try to look back and make a list of what did change, what did progress, and what made a difference and then encourage myself.

NATALIE: You know what, that's a good thing to end on. I've noticed in the Flying Free group there have been some people who are either newly divorced or are in the divorce process. Actually, a few have been divorced for a while. They are coming back and saying, "Whoa! I thought that life would be so much better by now." I have a local woman, too, that I've been helping. Her divorce is finalized now, but she's also just in the thick of rebuilding. It would be like... I remember a tornado going through Arkansas. I had a friend who lived there at the time, and it hit her home and demolished her home. She showed me before and after pictures. It's like that. Now your divorce is final. You have a home that is leveled to the ground. There are no trees around anywhere for miles and miles. Now you want your life to be normal all of a sudden. It's not going to be normal. After something that catastrophic, it's going to take a few years, and your life is never going to be the same again. Your home is never going to look the same again. That's not necessarily a bad thing.

I really think that we grow inside as human beings. We grow closer into the image of Jesus Christ. We are stronger. We are more courageous. We are more equipped to help other people. We are more equipped to see truth more quickly and lies more quickly, which also translate into a better decision-making process in our future. We just grow

in maturity. In that way, it is so much better. But as far as the logistics of life — the financial logistics, the where you live, your job satisfaction, how fulfilled you are feeling at any given moment, dealing with your children and all of their fallouts whether they are in their thirties or their grade school years (because there will be fallout in their lives as well that you've got to worry about), navigating new relationships and possibly even a new romantic relationship — this is huge.

BECKY: For me, it was letting go of that ideal of what I thought... You know how in the bad marriage you are working so hard to make it better? So you have this idea of this ideal. I had to realize it will never be that way, and that's okay. It is totally okay. I will be a divorced woman. I will not have a family where we have great, great grandkids coming around and that whole picture. My life looks messier, but it's way happier.

NATALIE: Yes! I think every single one of us would say that our lives look a lot messier, but we are all a lot happier. With that, Happy New Year to all our listeners. Hopefully these ladies will come back on with me in the future on a more regular basis and we'll be able to hear from them as 2020 unfolds. And that's it for today. Thank you so much for joining us. This episode of the Flying Free Podcast is made financially possible by the private Flying Free Sisterhood program which offers courses, workshops, live coaching and more for women of faith seeking hope and healing from emotionally and spiritually abusive relationships and communities. Find out more at joinflyingfree.com. Thank you so much for listening. Until next time, fly free!