

REBUILDING YOUR SELF-ESTEEM AFTER DIVORCE

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.

In this episode I want to talk about a problem. The problem is this. Many of us have become ghosts of ourselves. God created us to be these multi-dimensional, colorful beings made in His image to fulfill His purpose for our lives – to be Queens in this world – and we have become fearful ghosts.

We are afraid. Afraid of people. Afraid of what might happen. Afraid of what others think about us. And when you are a ghost, there isn't much substance or strength to you, is there? So you become an easy target for predators to prey on.

This isn't right that we are ghosts. That's not our destiny in Jesus Christ. That's the enemy's goal for us because when we are ghosts, our power to fulfill God's purpose is neutralized.

Let's talk about eternity for just a minute. When I think of eternity, I think maybe it will be like the scene in the Wizard of Oz where Dorothy leaves the dull, dry, colorless world of Kansas and enters into the vibrant, bright, alive, energetic, colorful world of Oz.

That's what I imagine it will be like to enter eternity.

Now follow along with me for a minute and let's go further and think about Jesus Christ. I imagine that while now He lives in spirit form in the essence of who we are – and He lives in our minds eye in an imagination kind of way, in eternity, face to face, we will be amazed to see His Reality. To experience all of His bright dimensions.

It's like comparing something solid to something ethereal or ghost-like.

When Jesus came to this earth, He brought the solidness of God down to this planet. Nobody was able to turn Him into a ghost. He never lost Himself. He stayed solid and strong from beginning to end. He fully embraced all of this earthly human experience – the joys and the sorrows. The love and the abuse. When people waved palm branches and sang His praises, He was consistently solid in who He was. When they called Him the son of the devil, He was consistently solid in who He was. What if we could be THAT solid? I believe that is our opportunity here!

Jesus wants you to reclaim your SELF. And do you know how He is going to do that? By helping you understand the skills you already have within yourself – that HE PUT THERE – to rescue yourself. He didn't create you to be a helpless princess in need of rescue. He created you to be Captain Marvel. And if you haven't seen that movie – you need to.

Do you know the reason we became ghosts of ourselves?

Some of you might be thinking it was because of your childhood. You grew up in a dysfunctional home where you were abused. Some of you might add that you were bullied in school. Some of you would say you've lived a life of rejection and loss. And some would say your abusive partner has erased you and turned you into a ghost.

And all of you would be right – in a way. But those things are not the real reasons you became a ghost. And if you believe that, then there is no hope for you to ever come to life as the Queen you are deep inside.

No We have gone from Queens to Ghosts because of our beliefs. We don't believe we are Queens. And we do believe we deserve to be ghosts and that God even wants us to be ghosts. And our beliefs are reinforced every day NOT by the things that happen to us or the things others tell us – because all those bad things happened to Jesus and He was defined in all kinds of horrible ways by people – and He remained a King in full color. Our beliefs are reinforced every day by the things we tell ourselves.

So we can't just say "I'm a ghost because of everyone else." If we say that, we'll never get our power back. Because we can't control what others think about us or say about us. To get our power back, we have to be able to say, "I am a ghost because of what I've chosen to believe."

Now we have power to change.

So here's another way of looking at this: Pretend your life – who you are as a human being – is a house on a pretty little lot. You were given this house when you were born. This is your body and mind and spirit. You've got a fence around your house (remember, this is YOU), and inside your fence you have a nice green yard with some flowers and trees and bushes. Your home is painted a lovely color, and inside your home are all the things that make you, YOU!

On your block are other homes. They belong to other people. But when you were born, you weren't given those homes. You were given YOUR home, and it will be your home until you die. You will never be given another home – and God will never give your

home to someone else.

God gave you that home and said, "I want you to be responsible for this home and this yard. You get to steward the things I put inside your home (your gifts, your personality, your opportunities, your resources). Take care of them. Take care of your yard. Take pride in your home and the work you do to make it a beautiful image of my Son.

I put a fence around your home. You get to decide who you let in. Only let in Truth. Don't let in lies. Lies are like termites, they will destroy your home at the foundation, where you can't see them – and one day the whole thing will cave in. Keep your home full of the light of my love and my truth – and it will stand strong.

Only let in people who are respectful of your home and My light in you. If you let in people of the lie, they will bring the termites and the darkness. They will break your precious pieces of treasure I placed in your home when you were born.

You don't need to feel guilty about sending them away if you do wake up and realize they have made themselves at home in YOUR home. I gave THEM their own home. So they aren't missing out on anything when you send them back to their homes. They must be responsible for their home and leave yours alone."

Here's the lie that some people will tell about that picture I just gave you about your home. And I hope you'll be able to see the lie more clearly now that you see the Truth more clearly.

Because the Bible says to love your neighbor in the same way you love yourself. This means that in the same way you respect your own home, keeping it in good condition and taking pride in your work, so you respect your neighbor's home, doing your part when you visit to keep it in good condition – and taking pride in their hard work.

But the lie says this: your home is NOT your home. It belongs to all of us. If you are a nice person, you'll let anyone come in at any time without permission and do whatever they wish. If you don't allow this, you are a mean, selfish shrew.

When someone comes in and disrespects your home by breaking your treasures or eating all of your food or taking a dump in your toilet and clogging it and then walking out so you can clean up the mess, and you decide not to let them in the next time they come barging through your gate, they will make that mean you are a bitter, and self-centered woman. Unwilling to forgive. Unwilling to serve others.

If you take a break to try to rebuild what was broken, and you only invite one or two people to join you in the rebuilding process, you may be told you are rude and a recluse. You are not trusting God. You are not being fair. You are not being generous.

This is the propaganda that is all over in the modern Christian neighborhood, and it's false. I used to believe this. I wanted everyone to know that I was a nice person they could trust. I was generous. I was kind. I was forgiving. And I really WAS all those things, but I misunderstood how to live a life of generosity and kindness and forgiveness. I let anyone in, and resented those who came in and wreaked havoc. I was angry when others broke my treasures, but I did very little about it because I believed the lie that boundaries were "mean". I was afraid to go out into the sunshine because I was hiding from the abuses of others and then I resented others for my lack of sun.

I began to take very little pride in who I was, for I didn't believe my home was really mine to begin with. In fact, I believed my main responsibility was my husband's home! So I neglected mine while meddling with his. This is what he and all the other folks in the neighborhood expected. They expected that if it was a man's home – his woman was responsible for tending his garden and making sure it had great curb appeal. Meanwhile he did nothing in his home but kept invading mine and destroying it.

I felt unworthy of having a nice home. Unworthy of having good people come to visit. I felt like my home had little value and little interest. I felt hopeless and helpless to change anything about my home.

Wouldn't it be nice to wake up, knowing that your home was YOURS? And you got to decide what to do with it, when, and how? That YOU were responsible, not for your husband's home or your adult child's home or your mother's home or your friend's home, but just for YOUR home? That you got to choose who to let in and who to keep out and when? Who to talk to over the fence, and who to invite inside for coffee?

When you are a whole person in full color, walking in truth, you will experience more fulfillment in life, more focus, and more freedom. Your relationships will begin to shift, and you'll be one of your greatest advocates and friends – instead of being one of your greatest enemies.

If God cares for your home and gave you the important job of being responsible for it, you absolutely must care for it as well. That's honoring the Creator being a good steward of God's good gifts to you.

I'm going to use a tool Brooke Castillo teaches in her podcast, "The Life Coach School

Podcast,” but I’m going to apply it to what we are learning in this episode.

Do you know what motivates us to action? Feelings. All human beings do things that make us feel good, and we avoid things that make us feel bad. That’s how God wired us. Don’t ask me why – it’s just the way it is. Human beings live their lives trying to increase the good feels and decrease the bad feels.

And do you know what causes our emotions or feelings? Our thoughts. What we THINK about causes us to either feel good or bad. We believe what we tell ourselves. That’s how we create beliefs. By repeating something to ourselves over and over again. When you think a thought over and over again, your brain begins to believe it. That’s how God made us. Isn’t that amazing? If that’s true, that means we can change our beliefs, and that’s good news!

I didn’t know about this. I thought my beliefs came from my church and my parents and the books I read. But they don’t. Our beliefs come from our thoughts. Because think about it – how many times have you heard someone say something you don’t believe? Or read something you don’t believe? When you heard that thing or read that thing – did it force you to believe it? No. Your thoughts about what you heard or read dictated what you chose to believe.

So when Bill Gothard would come into town and talk about Basic Life Principles every night for a week, I chose to believe all the things he said, and that created a result in my life of becoming a self-righteous prick.

When my mom told me I was too emotional and bawled too loud for attention, I chose to believe I was a big, ugly, selfish, bawl baby, and that created a result in my life of believing it was selfish to be sad or have negative feelings.

And when my pastor told me I should quit my teaching job and go into full time ministry, I chose to believe that was a good idea, and that had the result of changing the entire course of my life.

And when my husband told me my ideas and opinions were stupid, I chose to believe him, and that had the result of my experiencing anxiety, fear, and depression.

Is it any wonder God’s Word tells us to hang out with wise men? To think about what is good and true and pure? Because if we hang out and listen to abusive people or fools – we will start to think their thoughts, and that will cause us to have a certain kind of emotion – like shame or fear or anger or frustration or hopelessness or anxiety – and those emotions will cause us to make decisions in line with those feelings – and those

decisions will create our destiny.

So if you feel crappy most of the time, what does that say about what you are thinking?

When we live with a toxic person, they are telling us lies about ourselves, and we are running those lies through our head, thinking about them all the time, and then, because they are repetitive, we believe them. When we believe them, we have feelings and emotions attached to those beliefs. We feel ugly and stupid. We feel that way, not because someone told us we were ugly and stupid, but because we believe that about ourselves.

It's so important that we get this – because you aren't going to get yourself back because someone else gives yourself back to you. You will **ONLY** get yourself back when **YOU** reclaim yourself. And this is how you do it.

Think about a wild field with a well-worn road running through the middle of it. How did that road get there? By vehicles riding over it again and again over the course of a few years. If you wanted to start a **NEW** road – you'd need to run your vehicle over some pretty rough terrain at first. It wouldn't be easy for a while. But eventually, you'd have a new pathway through the wild field.

This is how the neural pathways in our brains work. We either continue to use the same ones over and over – or we create new ones so the old ones will disconnect and disappear. This is called **REWIRING** your brain. And it is essential to your healing.

So I teach an exercise in the Flying Free Sisterhood called the ABCDE tool. It was created by Albert Ellis, and it has changed my life. Brooke Castillo teaches a revised version of this model that I find easier to grasp. And I'm going to teach it to you so you can begin this rewiring process on your own.

I'm going to take a couple of examples from my own life to show you how this tool works.

The first step is to identify the thing that happened. The circumstance or “activating agent”. The problem. So for my example, here is my problem: Members of my family of origin and also my ex-husband abused me in different ways.

Now these activating agents or problems are neutral until we think a thought about them. That's hard to grasp, I realize – because it seems like that problem I just described would be negative. But it's not. Consider all circumstances to be neutral until

you think a thought about it. Because consider. The fact that my loved ones treated me abusively was NOT a negative thing for them. They thought it was just fine. They had no problem with it. I'm the one who THOUGHT it was a negative. It doesn't matter what my reasons were for thinking it was negative – the fact is that I thought it was a negative – and that created a bad feeling inside of me which we will come to in a minute.

So that's the second thing we look at then – our THOUGHT about the circumstance. And my thought was "If my family and husband treat me like I'm worth nothing, then I must be worth nothing. I mean – they know me best, right? So they would know. I'm worthless and unlovable."

So that was my thought most of my life.

Step three is identifying how that thought makes us FEEL. So for me – that thought makes me feel despairing. Now I could talk about lots of other feelings – but they would probably be connected to other thoughts surrounding that circumstance. For example, I might also be feeling ANGRY – and this feeling could be coming from the thought, "It's not right that I've been treated this way."

But when you do this exercise you want to focus on just ONE thought and the ONE main feeling you have about that thought. So I'm going to focus on the thought that I'm unlovable – and the feeling of despair that creates within me.

The fourth step is to ask myself "What do I DO when I feel that feeling of despair?" So step four is the action we take as a result of that feeling. And for me, when I feel despair over the thought that I'm unloved, I work hard to be worthy and win their love. I tried to please everyone. I groveled. I fawned.

And what you DO – your action – creates step number five: the RESULT.

My result was that I got burnt out. I was exhausted. I felt worse than ever, and I began to actually believe that I was the crappy person my husband said I was.

So there's nothing we can do about the fact that people in our life treat us like crap. But what I want to show you is how you can take your Queenly power back and stop making that fact mean that you are worthless or that something is wrong with you. Because remember? Jesus also got treated like crap – and He never let that mean anything about Who He Was. That's our goal – to live like Him.

So if we can't change the fact of our experience, what can we change? The thought we

have about that experience. So let's start back at the beginning and see what happened when I began to think differently about the facts of my life.

FACT

Members of my family treated me poorly or abused me.

MY THOUGHT

I began to think (and this was a process) "What was broken in their lives that they would abuse a family member?" So their abuse of me began to tell me something about THEM – not me.

And this thought created a shift in my

FEELINGS

I began to feel compassion for myself and repulsion for their behavior. I no longer believed they were better than me, and I was the worthless, unlovable dummy. I now saw myself as worthy of love – and them as ignorant of how to care for the hearts of others.

ACTION

And when I started feeling like that, I started inviting them to get help and I began to set boundaries. I began to create space between myself and them.

RESULT

And when I did those things – I got results: Freedom. Ability to think clearly. Ability to find space and emotional resources to do more important work.

Notice how my worth isn't even an issue in the second scenario? Let's do another one:

FACT

My ex-husband is telling everyone I have borderline personality disorder and that I abused him.

THOUGHT

"This is not right! I need to correct this so people know the truth about me!"

FEELINGS

Panic

ACTION

I spend a lot of emotional time and energy writing emails defending myself, writing texts defending myself, trying to get my ex to stop, trying to get my kids to believe me, trying to get everyone else to believe me.

RESULT

Exhausted. And people actually believe my ex even more now because I've been acting like a panicked cat in a corner instead of a badass adult woman.

REWIRE:

FACT

My ex-husband is telling everyone I have borderline personality disorder and that I abused him.

THOUGHT

"Wow – that's interesting. I guess I will find out who my real friends are."

FEELINGS

Sad.

ACTION

Grieve in healthy ways. Sit with the feelings of sadness. Wait and watch what happens.

RESULT

I lost some friends. I gained emotional and mental space in my life for authentic friendships based on who I am and not for what I do for others.

I'd like you to try this on your own. Get out a piece of paper and draw five lines across it. Write down the words: Circumstance, Thought, Feeling, Action, and Result – and try this out the next time you get triggered or freaked out about something. This will take you from ghost to Queen.

Thank you for joining me today – until next time, fly free.