

HOW DO I FORGIVE SOMEONE WHO KEEPS HURTING ME?

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 81 of the Flying Free Podcast! Today I have with me Daphne and Rachel, and we're going to introduce you to Daphne. She's been on the podcast in the past, but it's been quite a while. We'll do introductions in just a minute. First, I want to say that our topic today is on the subject of forgiveness. I was going to sing that song. Who sings that song? "Forgiveness even if, even if you don't love me anymore." Who sings that song? Does anybody know?

RACHEL: I'll have to do a quick Google.

DAPHNE: I've heard it, but it's not coming to my mind.

NATALIE: All the people listening are now shouting the name while they are driving. I have no idea.

RACHEL: I wish we could hear you.

NATALIE: Anyway, before we get started on our topic, I wanted to let you know that the Sisterhood Group, it's called the Flying Free Sisterhood Education and Support Group, is opening back up again at the end of September. That's just in a few weeks. You can apply to join the program by going to joinflyingfree.com. You know what I've been hearing from people more and more... And I think it's because over the course of several years, there are so many resources that I've put out there, the podcast and all... We're going to hit one-hundred episodes by the end of this year. That's a lot.

RACHEL: Wow.

NATALIE: There's the podcast. There's tons of articles on the Flying Free website. I'm starting to do these Monday morning things where I connect with people on Facebook and then I post it on YouTube. So there's all these resources out there and a lot of people are thinking, "Gee, I'm getting a lot of really good stuff. Why do I need to join the Flying Free Sisterhood? It's probably just going to be all this good stuff packaged up with a bow on it. I don't really want to pay for that."

But do you know what I'm hearing from people that think that prior to joining the Sisterhood, and then they join the Sisterhood? They are coming back to me and saying, "I had no idea that there was so much more that was offered within that group. It's incredible and it's life changing." So I'm offering that out to you who are getting a lot of benefit from the podcast, the articles, and the YouTube videos. It's very different on the outside, and it's everything that I can offer you for those of you who cannot afford to be in the Sisterhood.

But if you can afford to pay \$29 a month, there is so much more rich material inside the Sisterhood that is built up in a vault over the years, plus new stuff that is being produced every single month for your benefit. Also, the other aspect of it is that you get to have community with other people who are just like you. The other thing is that you get access to me. You can process what you are personally going through with me in the forum and through coaching that I do every single week. I get a lot of emails from people asking for help and telling me their stories. I love that and I want to help everyone, but I do have to constrain myself to the women that are in that Sisterhood group. I give all of myself to those women.

If you want extra help and you need that systematic process of going from crawling to flying, from the caterpillar stage to the butterfly stage, I would really encourage you to try out the Flying Free Sisterhood. A lot of women start off with one month, and then they come back and sign up for a whole year because they say, "This is exactly what I need, I'm committed to this, and I'm going to go through this whole program." So that said, I want to reintroduce you to Daphne. I think I'm going to have her tell us in her own words, "Who is Daphne?"

DAPHNE: Hey y'all. That might give you a first clue: I'm from Texas. Of course, I must lead with that. I have been in the Flying Free Sisterhood for about a year and a half now and have been divorced for about a year from an emotionally and spiritually abusive man, a Christian man. So, the group has given me a lot of support during this time. I am also a legal aid attorney. That's what I do professionally. Anything else you think is helpful for folks to know?

NATALIE: Just that if they want to hear you and I dialoguing in the past, we went to a conference last fall that was put on by the Southern Baptist Convention, correct?

DAPHNE: Yeah, that's right. We did that episode back in October.

NATALIE: Yeah. Daphne and I got to see each other. It was super fun. We've seen each other a few times now in different places and conferences, but they are always down in

Texas. But then it gives me a chance to leave Minnesota and go stay somewhere warm. Anyway, we saw each other there and hung out. We took in the conference and then we had a lot of thoughts about it. So, we recorded a podcast episode. I don't even remember the number of that episode.

DAPHNE: It was a bonus episode, I think.

NATALIE: That's right, it was a bonus episode.

DAPHNE: Bonus Episode 1, maybe?

NATALIE: Yeah. I think we've only had two bonus episodes, so it shouldn't be too hard to find. Anyway, you can go check that out if you want to. [This episode is no longer available]

DAPHNE: I also share more of my story with Natalie in a butterfly story in the private Sisterhood group, so if anyone is listening to the podcast who is in the group now and new to it, you can go back if you are interested and listen to that. Or if you are considering joining the group that is another thing: you get to hear not just me, but the stories of so many other women who have walked similar paths.

NATALIE: That's right. With the podcast, we do these little survivor interviews. They are very short. But the butterfly interviews (they're not interviews, but just stories that are within the Sisterhood) are much more. You get more of a deeper picture of what goes on inside of their lives and more of an idea of how they were able to extricate themselves from the relationship, which I think is encouraging and important to understand if you are looking and thinking about what your options are moving forward. To be able to hear what other people have gone through and that they have survived and thrived going through the same things that you are going through.

But today we want to talk about forgiveness. I think there is going to be a lot of things to say on this subject because we are women of faith, so forgiveness is a big deal for us, right? Forgiveness is a big deal because we may have spent years and years, decades even, dealing with someone who has repetitively hurt us and done destruction to our spiritual lives, our emotional lives, and sometimes our physical bodies. So, forgiveness is like, "Forgive? What are you talking about? I can forgive someone who maybe does one nasty thing, but to forgive years and years of unrepentant sin, how in the world? What does that even look like? What does it involve? Is it even possible?" I know you said, Daphne, that you had come up with a whole bunch of ideas of what forgiveness is not. Maybe we could start there. Do you want to share?

DAPHNE: Yeah. To start off, one thing that has been super important for me in my journey of healing and growing as a person is having precise definitions for things that are just spouted off as rhetoric. I had always been told and had internalized the idea that I need to forgive. I hadn't thought a whole lot about what that means, but I had internalized some things about what I felt like that means.

One of the things I felt it meant before was that it was something someone had to request of me, and it was something I did for them. So, it came down to someone demanding that and then I could think about forgiveness. But it wasn't something I necessarily thought of outside that context.

NATALIE: Okay, so someone would have to ask you for forgiveness for a specific thing that they had done to you, and then you would decide from there if you were going to forgive them or not?

DAPHNE: Yeah, that's kind of the framework that I grew up with. Someone wrongs you. They ask for forgiveness and then you are required to give that to them. But in thinking about that, it doesn't really tell you what forgiveness is. It seems like forgiveness is some sort of restoring of the relationship, but that's not what it is when it comes down to it.

The definition I have found helpful for forgiveness is... One part is making the decision to deliberately get rid of your negative feelings towards someone who has wronged you for the purpose of healing and moving forward. But sometimes that definition is hard for me too, because we can't always really control our feelings. So kind of a second part of the definition that I've come up with that has been helpful for me is committing to not letting those transgressions against me hinder me from moving forward in life and committing to not having those things control my actions and thoughts moving forward.

NATALIE: I was going to say, that's the big question on our minds. How in the world do you do that?

RACHEL: Right. It goes even further than that: committing not to do the same back to them. Releasing the debt that they essentially owe you because of the way they have treated you. Releasing that to God, allowing Him to be the one who applies vengeance. It says in the Bible, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay," says the Lord." Not taking vengeance upon yourself is an act of forgiveness.

NATALIE: Yes, because you want justice so badly.

RACHEL: Exactly! The justice, we all crave that! We have a desire for justice. We can't go seek that for ourselves by doing that, the way that we've been treated, back to them. It doesn't work like that.

NATALIE: I think I've said this elsewhere, but for me I've felt like with the people in my life that I've had to forgive... Sometimes I feel like forgiveness kind of ebbs and flows. But I've had to let them off the hook for that justice. What I've said in the past is, "Let them off the hook, but then put them on God's hook." The only problem with that is that if you are also struggling with "Is there a God? Is God for me? Is He going to keep them on the hook or is He just going to let them off the hook too? The Bible says that God forgives too, so does that mean that anybody can do whatever they want to do to anybody else and then God just forgives everybody, so it's no big deal?"

I think a lot of us think that way and then think that "Justice really is up to me, and I have to create that justice for myself." When you start going down that rabbit trail, at least for me, that's when I lose my peace. That's when I lose my joy. I miss out on feeling good about my life. I got to the place where I was just so sick of feeling icky about my life and all the people in it. I just wanted to be happy.

RACHEL: Allowing those feelings of unforgiveness to control you means that your ex husband is still controlling you in a way. You've lived like that long enough. Forgiveness is an act of trusting God.

NATALIE: Yeah. So Daphne, what do you think about that? I'm curious to know if you've come to the place where you're able to forgive your ex or other people in your life who have hurt you.

DAPHNE: Yeah, I think so. Going back to one thing you said, when you were focused on him you were feeling bad. I think that is one of the things to consider when we're thinking about "Do we need to forgive? Should we forgive? What's up with that?" I feel like a lot of times in these situations, people are being pressured to forgive even by someone they are or were in a relationship with, by the church, or by their family. People are pressured to forgive as if that means some type of restoration of a relationship or some type of willingness to communicate or be involved with that person.

But what does that do for us in terms of how we're doing at dealing with the hurt? What I've come to is a place of looking at forgiveness as something that is for me. It involves another person or another group of people to the extent that they did something wrong against me. But forgiveness is really me saying, "That can't control me moving

forward." It's not even about justice for me because I feel if I say, "Hey, I'm going to forgive them so that God can give them justice," then it is still about them and it's not about me and my commitment to move forward in my life. That's where I've come to.

I know a lot of people struggle with faith and "What does that look like coming from these situations?" Even thinking about "Are we commanded to forgive? What is that whole thing? What is that supposed to look like?" Ultimately, I think that (and Bob Hamp talked about this in a video a few years ago that he released about forgiveness where scripture is talking about how if we don't forgive, then God won't forgive us) it depends on how we think about it. You talked about this picture of God as an abuser that a lot of us take on, which is that "If we don't do this, then He is going to withhold His love from us." But if we change that view to be that "If we don't forgive others, we are not enabled to experience forgiveness and healing for ourselves," that is how I see that dynamic working. That works better with my new picture of faith and who God is now.

RACHEL: That's good. Building on what you said there, Daphne, in that Bob Hamp video, he talked about how you can't forgive what you don't recognize. So healing from the trauma you've been through in your marriage means a continual acknowledgment of what's been done to you, and only then can you forgive that. You can't forgive what you don't see happening.

So my husband hurt me over fourteen years, and it was subtle. It was like a subtle wearing down of who I am and all the things I had to offer him. He was wearing away at my self-worth. He was wearing away at my personhood. I must be able to see that effect and how it has played out in my life before I can do the hard act of forgiving him for what he did. That's hard. That's an active, spiritual pursuit to be able to release him to God for justice. Forgiveness is not just a one-time act is my point here. You must keep pursuing it over time. I'm still finding ways that I have to forgive my ex-husband.

NATALIE: That was something I was going to ask you guys. Is there ever a point where you felt like you had really released him and you could move on, or do you still kind of work on that here and there?

DAPHNE: I definitely think it is a process because there are different things that come up, different circumstances in life that come up, that show, "I thought I was going to have this at this point. I had an expectation that my life would look like this, and it doesn't because of this same situation." So it keeps coming up. When I think about forgiveness, there's another thing that I don't think it looks like. I don't think it looks like you won't continue to be hurt or have disappointment. I think it means that we're making the deliberate decision to not allow that to control us, whether it's controlling

our thought patterns or our behaviors.

What does it look like when those things come up? I think it's a deliberate, intentional choice. An example of that is that I just moved, so I'm in an apartment by myself. A couple of years ago I wouldn't have imagined that would be my situation. But it is what it is. That is what my reality is now. Is that disappointing? Of course, but do I allow that to control my thought patterns? Am I going to spiral now into what could have been, what should have been, and how it was all his fault? Or am I going to embrace what my life is now and move forward in healthy ways? I think that's what forgiveness, that kind of continual forgiveness, looks like: continually making the choice to handle that in a healthy way.

It's not not being hurt. I think many times forgiveness is used as a weapon against people who are hurt, especially in the church. It's like, "Clearly you haven't forgiven! You're still hurt!" But no, that's two different things. You can still be hurt and at the same time forgive and at the same time choose to not be in a relationship. All those things can be true at the same time.

RACHEL: Yes! Forgiveness is not reconciliation. I think that's what you just said there. That is so misrepresented in Christian culture a lot of times. "If you've forgiven, that means that you've returned to relationship the way it was. You're not remembering what's been done to you."

NATALIE: You give them a blank slate, a clean whiteboard. "You can write your crappy graffiti on the whiteboard all over again because we're going to forget that you just did that."

RACHEL: This message was so prevalent in my mind when I was married before that every single time... I didn't see a pattern. I couldn't look back and say, "This happened before," because I would feel guilty that I remembered what he had done to me before. It took me fourteen years and some education to finally know what was really going on. I would feel so guilty about not forgiving him. He would even stonewall me for three days when I knew that he had really done something wrong. All he had to do was ignore me for long enough, and then I would feel bad and feel like I needed to forgive him. These are all distorted ideas of forgiveness.

NATALIE: It puts the perpetrator in the victim role, because by your not forgiving them, now they are a victim of your unforgiveness.

RACHEL: Right.

NATALIE: It's such a brain... (I was going to use a swear word there.)

RACHEL: Yeah, and if you know anything about narcissism, that's like... Being a victim is how they live their lives and who they want to be. They want to be a victim because that means they get to control you. They get to have you feel bad for them. That means that you do what they want you to do.

NATALIE: Okay, so Daphne, are there any other things that you had that forgiveness is not?

DAPHNE: I touched on this a little already, but I think it's important we talk more about the idea that because you forgive someone... That is a totally separate question from whether the relationship can or should be restored. I think a lot of people struggle. I struggled with that idea. I was hesitant to forgive because I felt like that would say something like maybe I was ready to be in relationship or have other conversations that I wasn't. But when I disconnected those two ideas of forgiveness and continued relationship, that freed me up to heal myself.

I want to say "to give permission" (I can't give permission to anyone for anything), but I want people to feel free to consider the option that you don't have to continue in relationship with someone that has continued to hurt you. That is a decision you can make, and you can forgive because forgiveness for someone doesn't mean that there won't be consequences that they might experience in their lives as a result of loss of relationship with us.

Again, that isn't like, "They need to feel this pain!" It's focusing on "What do I need to do to keep myself healthy? I know I've been in this place of whatever hurt or bitterness, like you said, Natalie, has been making me not feel good, not be healthy. What do I need to do to get to a good place?" One is acknowledging that pain and that hurt, committing to moving forward, but also examining your life for areas where you can prevent some of that. That's where boundaries come in.

RACHEL: Yes. Being self-controlled instead of being controlled by other people. Choosing what you will and will not allow, what kind of behavior you will and will not tolerate in your life. If someone is hurting you, you are allowed to make the decision to protect yourself. You do not have to continue that just because you are married to them. In fact, if you are married to them, that increases their responsibility and accountability for hurting you even more because they promised when they married you that they would protect you, that they would be alongside you, and that they would cherish you. If they are continually breaking that vow, then that is something to think

about.

NATALIE: Right. In the Flying Higher group, which is a group that I'm doing... And you guys are both in that, right?

RACHEL: Yeah.

NATALIE: It's for divorced women. We just did a lesson on unconditional love. I think this goes along with that, because there is a lot of confusion about what unconditional love is. I've been very confused about that. Unconditional love and forgiveness... I mean, think about it. Forgiveness is really an act of love, right? An act of unconditional love.

RACHEL: Yes. It is.

NATALIE: We think we believe that unconditional love means the same thing that forgiveness means. It means that I am giving you a carte blanche to do whatever you want to do to me, and I will just "love" you. What does loving someone unconditionally mean? It means letting them run all over you. It means still giving them dinner, doing their laundry, giving them sex, and saying, "I love you unconditionally. You can beat me up. You can call me names. I'm just going to love on you like crazy."

That's absolutely insanity. That is not unconditional love at all. In trying to parse out what the difference is between what unconditional love is, one of the breakthroughs I recently had is that I am estranged from my family of origin. One of the looping thoughts I kept having every time I would think about them is that "They don't care. They don't love me, and they don't care." I was talking about this with a coach, and she helped me to see.

She said, "What could you think instead of 'They don't care'?" because the result in my life was just misery. I didn't want to feel miserable about that anymore. I wanted to feel unconditional love for my family members even though we had no contact with each other. I believed that it was possible to feel that unconditional love because our feelings are something that we have. It's not something other people have to feel. We have our own universe, and we feel our own feelings within that universe. I wanted to feel love for them and I wanted to feel connected to them even though we were not connected physically.

The thought that she helped me come up with whenever my brain says "They don't care," is "I care." That has been transformative for me. My focus is not on them and

what they are doing and offering the world, but rather back on me again (because I can only change me), and it's about me. And I do care. So whenever my brain says "They don't care," and I start thinking about the things they did that hurt me, I stop and think, "But I care. I care about them."

I not only care about them, but unconditional love means we have unconditional love for ourselves so that when we make mistakes, we still can hold space for ourselves, love ourselves, take care of ourselves, to grow and develop into the person that we are meant to be to our full potential and be as happy as we possibly can be in a world where all the other humans are doing whatever they want to do even though they are not things that make us feel comfortable.

RACHEL: That is so good. The way it has been helpful for me to think about unconditional love is "Wanting the best for someone no matter what." Sometimes the best for someone means not allowing them to hurt me anymore, because if I am continually providing an opportunity for them to sin against me, that's not good for them or me. It can be allowing someone to face the consequences to reap what they have sown. It can be really loving for them to face the consequences of their own behavior. Filing for divorce from my husband, as crazy as it sounds, was an act of love, because I love him too much to allow him to continue treating me in the ways that he has been treating me any longer. That isn't good for him and it's not good for me.

NATALIE: It sets such a loving example to everyone around you, even though they might not see it as loving. It shows the world that there are consequences for wrong behavior and that we all have our own personal power, that we can all take the responsibility that God has given to us which is simply to take care of ourselves and to offer all of our potential into the world, and to let go of control of all the other people including the people that we are closest to, because they get to make their own choices for their own lives. When they make those choices, there are going to be natural consequences to that.

DAPHNE: Yes. I find it funny how a lot of these terms like "forgiveness" and "unconditional love" are weaponized and thrown out to make people feel like they must relate to someone else in a certain type of way. I feel like I'm in a place where I'm going back to the beginning and asking "Why do I need to do this? Why do I feel it's important to me to have unconditional love? What is that? Is that even a thing? What are people doing when they are saying that and using those terms?"

One of you was saying, "Is unconditional love now a license for you to treat me however you want because I can't put conditions on our interactions?" So I'm backing up and

looking at things from a bird's eye view of "What does this mean and is this important?"

I think when you are talking about forgiveness, I want people to feel the freedom to ask the questions of "What does this mean? What does this look like?" I feel like, especially in the church, we are told what things mean and what things look like and we never question them. We're never allowed to question them. When you start dipping your toe into the water of thinking about things differently, you can feel guilt and shame thinking, "Am I just not wanting to forgive? Am I not wanting to be like Jesus?" I want to remind people that there are plenty of Bible believing, seminary-educated theologians who believe different things.

So it's okay to step out and ask questions about what you've always believed, especially when you see that the fruit of what you are believing in your life is bitterness, pain, and physical ailments. When that is the fruit of the beliefs in your life, it's okay to step back and say, "I don't think this is right."

NATALIE: That's such a good point, and I don't think that our religious environments necessarily offer that space for people to wrestle with those kinds of things. They say, "No, this is the way it is. This is how we say it is. You either buy into it and you can be part of our club, but if you are going to wrestle with it, if you are going to read authors that are outside of our white-listed authors, then begone with you because you are just a rebel." Whatever.

DAPHNE: Absolutely. It goes back to what is their goal in doing that? Is it control? Another thing is that in general we just don't deal with emotions well...

RACHEL: In the church?

DAPHNE: ...in society. In the church, but in society at large, too. We're not really taught emotional intelligence, especially in the church. The scripture says, "The heart is deceitful," so that means "emotions are bad." So if you are feeling angry or sad, stop it.

RACHEL: Yep. That's about it.

DAPHNE: Exactly. Stop it because God is good. But man, I imagine a theology where God can handle us being sad and disappointed, you know?

RACHEL: Yep, almost like He created us like that, with a capacity for those emotions.

DAPHNE: Right.

NATALIE: Okay. Well, ladies, did we solve this problem for the whole world now? Is this the definitive guide on forgiveness? I don't think so. But...

DAPHNE: I thought so. I thought we did a great job and that was it.

NATALIE: I think this gave a lot of food for thought for people because here's the thing: if you're listening, you are going to have to go and wrestle with all this stuff on your own. This is not easy stuff, and it's not like this overnight epiphany. It could be. There could be some major breakthroughs in your life, especially if you have already done some thinking about this. Someone could have said something in today's episode and the lightbulb goes on, and then it's all clear for you.

I think that happens, but I think more often it's part of a process. The light goes on not suddenly, but it slowly gets brighter and brighter and you slowly start to feel yourself releasing that burden of the person who hurt you. They are not a burden, but the pain that they have caused you is a huge burden that you carry around. Here's the thing about other people that hurt us: they move on with their lives and they don't care. They aren't thinking at all about the devastation that they've left behind.

We want to think if they could just get it and just see it then "I could feel so much better and be able to forgive them. If they would just say 'I'm sorry,' instead of 'I'm sorry, but...'" If they could articulate all the things that they did to me, then I could forgive them and move on." But no. Because if we're depending on them to understand us, to have a meeting of the minds... First, that is never going to happen. Second, we're giving all the power for our well-being into the hands of another person, and that is the opposite of what we want to be doing as we are getting our badass on and healing and becoming adult women who have a lot to offer to this world.

DAPHNE: I think just to summarize where I am with forgiveness in general, it's a tool that can help us learn to cope with the difficulty of life in a healthy way, in a way where we're in a position to bring our full selves and gifts to the world to benefit others.

RACHEL: One final thought I want to add is that if forgiveness feels overwhelming, that's okay. I would encourage women to release that overwhelmed feeling that feels insurmountable to the Lord and ask Him to help us to forgive. This is something I've had to practice, because the hurt is so deep. But I want to testify to what He has done in my life.

Last fall I got married, remarried. The day before I got married, my ex mother-in-law sent me a nasty text message. I was so hurt. I was sitting there crying. I had been

having such a great day. I was excited. I didn't know what to do. I was instantly taken back to this place where I was so filled with shame and not being good enough and all that. But I felt the sudden clarity of what I needed to do. I sent her a text message back saying that I loved her and that was it. Then I blocked her so she couldn't respond, and I didn't have to hear from her again.

NATALIE: I love it.

RACHEL: That was something that I never thought I would have been able to do. That's the power of the Holy Spirit when you allow Him to work in your life and you surrender that pain and ask for His help to do what we've been called to do as Christians, which is to forgive. But it's not just a simple thing that we do once. It's an ongoing process like we have talked about. All the glory to God for that empowerment to be able to do that.

NATALIE: That's beautiful, because in that moment love was spilling out of you for three people. It was spilling out of you for yourself. It was spilling out of you for that woman right where she is at in her life. And it was spilling out of you for God who gave you power to do that. I think that's a perfect way to end this whole episode with that story.

I do want to say one more thing that has nothing to do with forgiveness. It has to do with this podcast and getting it into the eardrums of other women. I've been doing this for a year and a half now. I didn't realize this because I am not a tech person, but I've become aware that when people leave ratings and reviews on iTunes, iTunes apparently looks at that and realizes that people like this podcast. "If these people like it, then maybe more people will like it." Then they start pushing it to people's podcast feeds as, "If you like this one, you might like this one."

So one of the ways you can help other women become aware that this podcast is available to them is by going to iTunes, finding the Flying Free podcast on either your phone app or online, and leaving a rating and review letting people know what you think. We read those. We love reading them because they are very encouraging and give us feedback as far as what it is about this podcast that you like. It helps us rally and decide we want to give people more of this, because this is what they are enjoying and this is what they are benefiting from. So give us your feedback, please. You can leave a rating and review anonymously. You can pick any name you want. You don't have to use your own name. I know some people are sensitive about that. Anyway, we would appreciate that. We always feature someone's review on the website when we post a new podcast. That's fun too. Thank you so much for listening. Thank you, Daphne and Rachel, for joining me today. That's it. Until next time, fly free!