

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH THE PAIN OF BEING REJECTED BY YOUR FAMILY?

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 (get this) 99 of the Flying Free Podcast! It has been two years. I can't even believe it – it's completely flown by. I'm excited because next week for our 100th episode. I've feverishly been putting together a special episode with clips, short little twenty to thirty second sound bites, from almost every single podcast episode that we've had so far. They are like little gems. There are almost one hundred. Not quite, because some were not conducive to this, but almost one hundred gems, little sound bites that you can listen to all in one sitting. I'm not sure how long it's going to be yet, but it will be under an hour. I'm guessing maybe forty-five minutes.

Next week you'll get to hear it. I'm recording this 99th episode in November. It's November 6th today. You'll be listening to this at the end of December. Our family has COVID-19. We just had our first confirmed case last week. I've brought in some more kids for testing. So who knows? I could be dead by the time you are listening to this. Isn't that morbid? Hopefully that's not the case.

Today I want to answer some listener questions. I have this app I send people to, and they can leave questions. I didn't realize that the inbox was getting full. I found it again the other day and saw all these questions that have come in. I'm excited to answer three of them today. Let's listen to our first question. Here we go.

CALLER 1: Hi beautiful butterfly sisters! What I am struggling with is the anger, resentment, and bitterness over all the heinous things he's done over the years, and especially the smear campaign at the end. His horrible lies have made my daughter disown me and cut off access and ability to visit my one and only granddaughter, a brand new baby. Well, she's two now. I would be embarrassed to tell you all the different ways I wish he would be punished and hurt and frankly, just disappear. I know it isn't right to think about the consequences or revenge, and I know forgiveness is in the future. But even a criminal who is forgiven has to serve some time in prison, which feels just. How do I get over this knowing that there might be no justice?

NATALIE: Okay, I can really feel for this person and her question. I think a lot of us have felt like this. I've done a lot of work in my own life in this area. The justice thing, wanting to have justice, is not a bad thing at all. I think it's a very human thing. I think God is a

God who wants to see justice. He cares about the marginalized and He cares about victims. I think that's normal. It means you are a normal human being, and it's a good thing.

Here's the problem, though. If we don't see justice (and we may not see justice right away), what do we do with all those feelings, then? There's a model I teach inside of my coaching program. I want to show you how this model works with a situation like this. You take the circumstance, which would be the daughter disowning you, and you think about what that makes you think. What is the thought that you have when you think, "My daughter has disowned me"? From what I read in the question, your thought is that your ex-husband should be punished.

The feeling that you get... Our thoughts create our feelings. Thoughts start in our brain and trigger feelings or vibrations in our body. Those are our emotions. The feeling you get when you think he should be punished is this hatred and possibly some despair.

The action that you take... Our feelings cause us to do things. We do things that make us feel good, and we avoid doing things that make us feel icky feelings. When we're feeling hatred and despair, we don't like that feeling. So we do things such as buffer with overeating, drinking, smoking, or alcohol. (Well, I suppose you're drinking alcohol, but you could drink orange juice, though usually people don't buffer with orange juice.) You might stew. You ruminate. You don't get out there and live your big life.

The result that your action brings to you is that your ex gets away with the ultimate destruction of you. Do you know who is punished? You are punished! Your original thought, "He should be punished," gives you the result that you are actually punishing yourself. Do you see? Our brains are always looking for evidence to prove what we believe is true. So this is the result you get.

But we don't like that result, do we? We don't want to punish ourselves. Here we got away from abuse – we got out of that relationship. Are we now going to spend the rest of our lives stewing, ruminating, and punishing ourselves for it? I say, "No way!" Here's the thing, though: we can't change our circumstances. If we go back to the circumstance here, the daughter disowns you. That must stay the same, because we can only change ourselves and our own thoughts to get different results. We can't change anybody around us. We need to keep that circumstance the same: "Daughter disowns me."

Here is where your power lies. Your power lies in what you choose to believe or think about that, and this is so amazing because you get to decide. You get to decide what you want to think about this. Your brain is so used to thinking certain things because

you've been programmed like that from childhood. But what if, as an adult, you pulled out some of those thoughts and decided, "I don't want to believe that anymore. Why do I believe that? Do I want to keep that thought sentence in my head? Since it isn't serving me very well, maybe I want to change it."

Let's say that you decided to think this thought. Instead of thinking, "He should be punished," what if you thought this? "My daughter disowned me, but I own myself and God owns me. I belong to myself and I belong to God. I may not belong to my daughter anymore, but I belong to myself and to God." If that is a believable thought for you... It has to be believable. If you say that out loud to yourself and think, "I don't believe that at all," then you will need to do some work on rewiring your brain. But most of us, especially if we are Christians, can believe that God loves us and that we belong to Him.

When you think that, you're probably not going to think hate and despair when you think that. But your body may have feelings of love and maybe even the beginnings of empowerment. When we feel love and we feel empowered, most humans will go out and live their big lives. They make decisions. They can make mistakes and fail because they know that's okay. I can make mistakes and fail because success is usually built on a pile of failures, so it's alright to do that. When you live your big life, the result is that he doesn't get away with destroying you. He doesn't get away with anything. You win! The ultimate punishment for men who want to see the destruction of their partners is for you to get out and live your big life, to get out, and to win. That is a big punishment for them.

I want to share a verse with you, because this portion of scripture was extremely helpful for me when I was feeling like this when I first got out of my relationship. This is from Psalm 73: "God is indeed good to Israel, to the pure in heart. But as for me, my feet almost slipped; my steps nearly went astray. For I envied the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have an easy time until they die, and their bodies are well fed. They are not in trouble like others; they are not afflicted like most people.

Therefore, pride is their necklace, and violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge out from fatness; the imaginations of their hearts run wild. They mock, and they speak maliciously; they arrogantly threaten oppression. They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues strut across the earth. Therefore his people turn to them and drink in their overflowing words." (Did you catch that? This is Asaph. He is saying, "These people are so wicked, and even in their wickedness people will turn to them and drink in their words." That is really frustrating!)

"The wicked say, 'How can God know? Does the Most High know everything?' Look at

them—the wicked! They are always at ease, and they increase their wealth. Did I purify my heart and wash my hands in innocence for nothing? For I am afflicted all day long and punished every morning. If I had decided to say these things aloud, I would have betrayed your people. When I tried to understand all this, it seemed hopeless until I entered God’s sanctuary. Then I understood their destiny.

Indeed, you put them in slippery places; you make them fall into ruin. How suddenly they become a desolation! They come to an end, swept away by terrors. Like one waking from a dream, Lord, when arising, you will despise their image. When I became embittered and my innermost being was wounded, I was stupid and didn’t understand; I was an unthinking animal toward you.

Yet I am always with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me up in glory. Who do I have in heaven but you? And I desire nothing on earth but you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, my portion forever. Those far from you will certainly perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, God’s presence is my good. I have made the Lord God my refuge, so I can tell about all you do.”

CALLER 2: I’m struggling with living alone after forty-two years in a relationship and thirty-five years of marriage. I do not want another man, but I can’t visualize a future. I’d like to hear from more people who are living well as a single and how they are handling things like fear of their declining health and the need for support as they age. I’m extremely isolated in all my family dynamics and geographically, and I live in hiding because my abuser is dangerous. Thank you.

NATALIE: This is a great question, and hopefully my answer will apply to everyone no matter what situation you are in. One thing she has noticed is that if we can’t visualize something in our future, it is simply because we haven’t practiced that yet. We haven’t activated that part of our brain that does that kind of visualization. We are all programmed to believe certain things from the time we are small children. Those programs run on autopilot in our brains. As I’ve mentioned before, our brains will look for evidence of what we already believe is true.

It’s a simple fix, really. It’s simple, but it takes some work. You need to program your brain to see a new future for yourself. If you want to stay single, you need to see a future for yourself as a single. You need to activate the part of your brain called the reticular activating system. This part of your brain, once activated, looks for evidence too.

For example, if you are thinking about buying a car and you are looking for... When I was looking for a van, I was looking for a Honda Odyssey. When I bought my Honda Odyssey, it turned out everybody on the road was driving a Honda Odyssey the same color that I had. I had never noticed that before, but the RAS in my brain was activated to notice that now. We do a bunch of work with this in our Flying Higher program. Flying Higher is for divorced women of faith, and we help them to fly higher.

What you want to do is ask yourself a bunch of questions about your future. Sit down and write these things down. Don't type them. Actually take a piece of paper and a pen, use your hand. This will activate many parts of your brain when you do this. Answer questions like this: "Who do you want to be?" Try to imagine. I do this exercise with the women in my group where we visualize going into outer space and coming back to earth in a different time and place. We then meet our future selves. We get to talk to our future selves. We look to see what that future self looks like.

For example, when I envision my future self (because I have done this exercise) I have long, gray hair, a beautiful gray color. (I may have to color it to get it that color in my future.) I live in a small home that is tastefully decorated but really simple, totally decluttered, and with clean spaces. I've got lots of love in my heart. I'm wise and calm and at peace. I bring wisdom and calmness and peace to anyone who comes near me. That's how I envision myself. That's where I want to go with my life. You can ask yourself things like, "What do you want your career to be?" "What do you want to be doing?" "What will your friends be like?" "What kinds of activities would you be doing?"

One of my favorite children's books (I've owned a couple of copies of these because it becomes dog-eared and ratted and I have to buy a new one) is called "Miss Rumphius" by Barbara Cooney. She's an amazing children's book writer, but she is also an amazing children's book illustrator. She uses colored pencils to draw such precious pictures. But I think my favorite book she's written is called Miss "Rumphius." It's about a little girl who grows up wanting only to make the world a better place, but she doesn't quite know how to do that. She is a single woman. She's a librarian at first, and then she goes on adventures. She injures her back (I think in India), and she ends up doing what she's always dreamed of doing, which is settling in a little cottage overlooking the sea.

There are these beautiful drawings of this little cottage where she lives by herself. She is still thinking about her dream to make the world a more beautiful place. She plants lupine flowers all over the place. She plants these seeds all over her community, and pretty soon lupines spring up all over. In her community, they end up calling her "The Lupine Lady." She grows old. The children gather around in her home, and she tells them stories of her adventures. She is this little, wise, old lady who has brought so

much beauty into her community.

That is what you want to do. Miss Rumphius had this vision from the time she was a small child. Because she had that vision, her brain was looking for evidence to make that true, and it made it true. She made all her dreams come true because they were so vivid in her brain. That's exactly what you want to do. You want to visualize how you want your future to be.

Obviously you need to do this with some constraint because, for example, you can't just say, "I'm going to be a race car driver," or "I'm going to be a famous opera singer." (Maybe you can't sing, so you can't do that. Or maybe a race car driver isn't in your future because you have osteoporosis like I do and having a little fender bender will crack your body up.) You must be reasonable.

But there are so many things you could do within the constraints of what you have going for you. If you're in hiding and cannot go out and meet people in your community you are in now, perhaps you could visualize yourself moving to a new community and coming out some place where people can't find you. This is your opportunity to discover who you are.

Maybe you don't have loving, trusting relationships with your family, but you can develop a loving and trusting relationship with yourself. Another idea is to go back and think about when you were a child. What kinds of things thrilled you when you were a little girl? How can you bring some of those things back into your life now that you are an adult who has agency, autonomy, and opportunity to make choices for yourself?

As kids, we don't have that agency and autonomy, but as adults, we do. Now we can take the bull by the horns and make some decisions for ourselves. Again, we maybe can't do everything, but we can do many more things than you could even imagine right now. But if you sit down and brainstorm, journal, write pie-in-the-sky ideas, Google, research, I think you'll find there are amazing opportunities waiting for you out there whether or not you get remarried.

CALLER 3: Hi. I was married to a man who, for the first thirteen years, was extremely spiritually and emotionally abusive, and he was a pastor. I had four children with him, but the problem is that he created such doubt and such mistrust in me and in the kids that now, even though the children are adults, I still am struggling with those relationships and a means of trusting me, accepting me, and loving me for who I am now, and I really need your help.

NATALIE: I wish I could do some coaching with this woman. This is what I do in the Flying Free program and even more extensively in the Flying Higher program. This is what I would do if I were to coach this woman. First, I'd ask her to give me a specific example of something that her adult kids do that is causing her to think the thought, "My adult child doesn't trust or like me." I'd have her give a specific example. (I'm just going to make one up for the sake of this podcast.)

Let's say an adult child sends her an email that is a scathing email, very accusatory, nasty, passive aggressive, and all of that. She gets that email and reads it. That would be her circumstance: got an email from her adult child. Her thought (and I'm going to use the one she wrote in) is, "My adult kids don't trust me or like me." That is the thought she is having. That thought in her brain is creating an emotion, a vibration, in her body. If I were coaching her, I would ask what she is feeling, but I'm guessing it is something like shame, sadness, or maybe even despair. I've actually experienced this, so those are the things I felt.

Then I would ask her what she does when she feels shame or sadness. I'm guessing she might say something like, "I isolate, I hide, I don't interact with them, I stew, I buffer." (Buffer means you try to make the bad feelings go away by drowning in Netflix or Facebook or beer or whatever.) When you do those things, what is the result that you get? Usually the result proves the original thought. In this case, the original thought is "My adult kids don't trust or like me." The result is that you don't trust or like yourself. This is similar to the first question we had in this episode.

But here is your opportunity. What if you could let those kids go and let them be who they are? They get to have their own models for life, their own manuals for how they interact with people: what moms are supposed to do or not do, what dads are supposed to do or not do, and what kids are supposed to do or not do. What if we just let all that go? That's a lot of drama and responsibility that has nothing to do with you. What if you just focus on you, your relationship with you? That is the relationship from which all your other relationships matter. I want you to be able to see how.

If you have an amazing relationship with yourself, then you can be filled up with love for others regardless of what their attitude is toward you. When you are full of love and trust for yourself and that shame is gone... Shame is a killer! (If you've never read any of Brené Brown's work, you really should. Her books are amazing.) If you can get rid of shame and be filled with love instead, you're going to be able to see other people, including your kids, more objectively and be able to give them the freedom to believe whatever they want to believe. It is totally okay, because it is not a reflection of who you are but just thoughts in their head. It is stories they have made up in their own mind

and how they have put all the pieces together that make sense to them based on their programming.

It sounds like a lot of their programming came from an abusive individual who tried to program you with the same thoughts. They are just believing what they grew up believing, and it has taken over their adult lives now. But you have the freedom to believe what you know to be true in your mind and heart.

The problem right now is that you've bought into their version of reality. If your family doesn't trust or like you, or if you believe that, you make that to mean that you must not be a likable or trustworthy human being. That fills you with shame. But is that really true? Are you really not trustworthy? I'm sure there are people who like you. I would also like you to question your belief that they don't trust you or like you. You don't know for sure that is true.

I had a son who sent me an email once that was horrible. That's probably why I used that example at the beginning. I think at the moment he didn't trust me, and he didn't like me in that moment in time. But deep down inside, he has always trusted me and always loved me because I'm his mom, and we used to have a close relationship. I've not done anything to undermine that trust. But his dad has planted a lot of interesting, fascinating ideas into his head that have undermined that trust in me. That is natural to have happened.

It very well could be true that they don't trust or like you, but it is also possible that they may be temporarily confused because they have little life experience under their belt, they've been programmed by an abusive individual, they grew up in a dysfunctional family, and that's what happens. Your situation is like the first caller's situation. This situation is a replay of hundreds of women I've talked to in the programs I do. It's a common scenario.

The women who have been able to rise above that are the ones who've been able to let go of their kids. Not that they stop loving them, for sure. You don't need to let go of your strong desire for your kids to love and trust you as that's a natural, normal desire. Hang on to that. But let go of the need to have that love and trust in order for you to be happy.

The fact is, if we are letting other people's ideas and beliefs dictate our own happiness and our own emotions, that is going to create terrible results in our life. We're basically giving over all the power for our future, the things we do, our emotions, and how we show up in the world to other people. We might as well go back and live in an abusive

relationship.

The people on the podcast episode today, it sounds like all of them are out of their relationships, and yet, these are three perfect examples of how abuse can strangle us long after we are out of those relationships. It's one of the reasons I developed a program for divorced women. It's kind of like Custer's last stand. We want to tear down those last few strongholds in our lives that are holding us back from being who God created us to be and living how God created us to live to our fullest potential.

That is all I have for you today. I can't wait to connect with you next week. One more week – Episode 100! I'm all in for that. I hope you're in with me. Thanks so much for listening. Until that 100th episode, fly free!