

GOD DOESN'T HATE ALL DIVORCE

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 284 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today, we're going to answer two questions, one about the verse in Malachi that some translations have turned into a cliché of sorts, the “God hates divorce” message, and then we're also going to talk about why God doesn't always answer our prayers. So two pretty big issues I think a lot of people are struggling with. So let's listen to the first question.

LISTENER: Hi, Natalie. I joined your Flying Free program in 2021 and was a member for about two and a half years. And thanks to you, I gleaned strength and knowledge and was able to leave my abuser. And this year in 2024, I'm divorced and I'm free and I'm so much better off.

And I have a question about a verse in Malachi. My ex is trying to convince my young adult children that God hates divorce no matter what. And I remember there were verses in that chapter about explaining sort of about how there are reasons other than adultery that God does not hate divorce, and I wonder if you could please go over that with me in a way that I could explain it to my kids. Thank you so much.

NATALIE: I would love to explain this in a way that you could explain it to your kids. Isn't that the best way to learn things anyways? So let's dive into this. There are many different translations of Malachi 2:16 due to some confusion about the Hebrew language used and the vowels that were added and passed down through various translations over the course of the centuries.

It's very technical and complicated, but there are a few scholars who have addressed this online, and I will post links to a resource page that I have that will link to all of these different articles, and I'll do that in the show notes if you're interested in learning more and you kind of like the scholarly approach.

But honestly, I prefer to give you the bottom line in the easiest way possible that you could actually use to explain it to your kids. Maybe it's because that's how I understand things. Sometimes when I read all of the technical Hebrew and the Greek and the dots and the tittles, I just kind of glaze over and I don't understand all of it.

So anyway, I will give you that link — some people are like that. Some people, they love to dive into all that stuff and that's why they go to school and they get seminary degrees and all the whole nine yards. That is not me. But that doesn't mean that those of us who aren't like that can't understand what's actually going on here. So I'm going to try to give you the bottom line, all right?

So the translation that many of us grew up with is the New American Standard translation that simply states, "I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel." And when a well-meaning but misinformed and potentially judgmental Christian quotes that verse in that way to someone who is considering a life-saving divorce from an abusive partner or maybe a cheating partner or an addicted partner or whatever, it can feel like, "Well, that must be the final say of God on the matter."

But the fact is, that is now considered by most Bible scholars to be a mistranslation. In fact, many translations do not translate it that simplistically because they take into account all of the technical pieces that I'm not going to go into here, but that you can read about in the links that I provide.

So instead of going into all of those details, I'm just going to read some other translations that are considered to be more accurate. So the Christian Standard Bible, CSB, says, "If he hates and divorces his wife," says the Lord God of Israel, "He covers his garment with injustice," says the Lord of Armies. "Therefore watch yourselves carefully and do not act treacherously."

The English Standard Version, ESV, says this — it translates it this way: "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "covers his garment with violence," says the Lord of Hosts. "So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless."

The New International Version 2011, NIV, says this: "The man who hates and divorces his wife," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "does violence to the one he should protect," says the Lord Almighty. "So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful."

Do you see the difference here? In the traditional, old-timey translation that does not take the Hebrew language into consideration, it just simply says, "God hates divorce." But that translation is missing all the nuance, and that's not what it actually says. They've changed it. That translation changed it. And I believe that it was changed so that it could be used as a weapon of the devil who, by the way, loves to use the scriptures to deceive people.

Just take Jesus in the wilderness as an example, where He was tempted three times by Satan and the devil used scriptures to tempt Him. So it's used as a weapon. The Bible can be used as a very effective weapon to victimize people. Satan hates people and he always poses as an angel of light. So what's he going to use? He's going to use God's book in order to weaponize it against people, to victimize them.

God loves people. So God is obviously going to use his words in the opposite way. So wherever you see victimization, oppression, and abuse, just please recognize that's not God at work. That's the adversary at work.

So where you see people, including so-called Christians, claim to be Christ followers but they're actually teaching things that enable, excuse, justify, deny, and minimize victimization, oppression, and abuse, then you're not seeing God at work. I don't care how much they use spiritual, scriptural language — they're not doing God's work. They're doing the adversary's work.

So also notice how those who quote that verse in the simple translation of “God hates divorce,” they do so without talking about the context of that entire chapter. And that's what we're going to talk about right now. What was this chapter in Malachi all about? God is talking to the religious leaders in this chapter. Just notice that. He's telling them that they are being naughty. They are being arrogant. They are not showing love and compassion and care. They are not looking out for victims. They are not representing God well. These religious leaders are being unfaithful to God and to God's people.

His big point in this chapter is their unfaithfulness to their commitment to honor and serve God by honoring and serving His people. Remember, God loves people. So when religious leaders are actually using God as a weapon to hurt God's children, God doesn't like that.

So what does God do? He tells them He's going to humiliate them. How? By taking away their positions of power and causing their own sinful behaviors and attitudes to snap back in their faces. He actually uses the word “dung” — to smear dung in their faces.

Now, one of the ways that the religious leader's attitudes are trickling down into the people's lives is that the Jewish men are putting away or divorcing their wives in order to hook up with pagan women. And this in turn is causing them to worship pagan gods. Do you see how this is infiltrating God's people?

So in light of what this chapter is all about, which is religious leaders being unfaithful and then the men who are following these religious leaders also being unfaithful in their homes, God is essentially saying this: “When you men show hatred to my people by putting away your wives so that you can marry pagan women, you are covered with the sin of exhibiting gross injustice and violence to your wife, the very person you should be protecting. And shame on you.”

He is not talking to women who are survivors or victims of abuse. He is talking to

religious leaders and unfaithful, hateful, unjust, lustful, violent men who are using and abusing women.

Now, if we were to bring this principle into our world today, God would be addressing pastors and clergy who lust for power and teach men from the pulpit that it is not only okay but actually biblical for them to lust after power in their homes and use the Bible to justify it by calling it a biblical role of leadership for them to power over their wife.

Many of these leaders and the men who follow them are behaving as demigods in their homes, forcing their wives to worship and serve and please them instead of God. And saying that, "When you worship and please me and do what I want you to do, that's when you are pleasing God," and that is a lie. That is a trick. They are tricking women into idol worship. They are treating their wives unjustly and violently with their words and deeds and attitudes. They are essentially putting away their wives without legally divorcing them, forcing them into a life of servitude and oppression and calling it a biblical role, using the Bible to justify their vile treatment.

Now, in Deuteronomy 24:1, God tells the Israelite men that if they're going to be this way, if they're going to discard their wives, they are at least required to give their wife a certificate of divorce so she can remarry. Why? Because that's the merciful thing to do. Essentially, God is saying, "Okay. If you're going to be an asshole and discard your wife so that you can get a newer model, the least you could do is give her a certificate of divorce so she is also free to remarry and to be provided for."

Notice how God doesn't have to address lustful, power-hungry, sinful, violent women. Just the men. It's the men in that culture who were doing that, and it is the men in this culture most often who are doing that in our religious homes.

In neither of these passages is God talking to abuse victims. He's actually doing the opposite. He is addressing the wicked men who are controlling the abuse victims. And I believe God does not look at the wicked leaders in pastoral and husband roles today with admiration or respect. In fact, what I'm seeing is what God promised in these passages. I believe that God today is stripping these kinds of people of their power and humiliating them publicly one by one. Every time you see a wicked religious leader fall, you are seeing that play out. In Malachi, God even uses language that indicates their own behaviors are what bring about their own demise.

People are leaving churches by the droves. There is a reason for that. Personally, I think it's exciting to watch God do His thing and expose the fraudulent version of Christianity because that is the only way that the true light and love of God will be able to spread

and to heal the human race.

If you are someone who feels displaced by the church because you are an abuse survivor, I want you to know that I've created a safe place where you can gather with other women just like you — women who love Jesus but who don't love abuse and who can no longer turn a blind eye to it. In this safe space, you will be able to learn, ask questions, get coached, hear others get coached, watch workshops, hear testimonies, take classes, and more.

There is a tuition fee, but it is small. It is only \$290 for an entire year of close support and ongoing education. You guys, I've seen so many little programs that are out there that are four or five week programs that cost more than that. And they don't provide even a fraction of what you get inside of Flying Free.

When you get an entire year of this for \$290, you also get a free digital download of my book, *Is It Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage*, and a free digital download of the workbook for *Is It Me?* which is a thick, robust, hardy workbook that will help you process the things that you learn in the book.

Now, if \$290 is too much for you to pay in one chunk, we do offer a monthly option where you can pay \$29 a month and do it that way. And we also have a way for someone to sponsor you for a year. So if you can find someone who's willing to be your sponsor, a friend or a family member, we will help them get you set up. You can just have them send me an email: natalie@flyingfreenow.com

Here's what one person recently wrote into us and said: "I have done a lot of therapy and research over the years, and I will say that the content from this program is so important. I am finding that it is the missing link, fixing a lot of cognitive dissonance and confusion both in my emotional and spiritual health and in the very elusive issues in my marriage. A clearer picture is emerging that makes so much more sense than all the weird ideas that never really worked or seemed right. Thank you so much for all of the passion and hard work you and your team put into this."

You can learn more about the Flying Free Sisterhood by going to joinflyingfree.com. All of the information, all of your questions will be answered over on that information page. And there is an application process, but there's a link there to complete an application to join. All right, let's listen to the next question.

LISTENER: I, like Natalie, paced the floor and prayed most mornings over my ex-husband and our marriage for thirty-six years. I prayed Psalms 1 and Scripture

constantly. She gave testimony how she diligently did the same.

My question is, why didn't it work? Why did we see no fruit? We were pure in our asking and trusting in the Lord, but it did not accomplish what we thought it would. Perhaps it was because we expected someone to rescue us, even expected God to magically transform our husbands, and the one God wanted to transform was me? I had to learn I was a person of worth and have my own back.

By the way, I'm now married to an amazing man and healed and delivered, but any answers provided I thank you for in advance.

NATALIE: Okay, to answer this question, I'm actually going to read one of the short chapters from my newest book called *All the Scary Little Gods*. This is Chapter 88. There's 89 chapters in my book. They're all really short. But this is towards the end of the book, obviously — 88. The last section of my book, I kind of go over just some different ways that I am thinking about things. You have to read the rest of the book to find out how I got to these places and what I used to believe and how I was programmed as a child and then how I chose to live out that programming as a young adult and then as an older mom.

But the end of the book is really kind of where I am at right now. And this particular chapter is called "Prayer." And it really does answer this question much better than I could answer in a podcast episode.

I'm going to sprinkle little chapters of this book throughout my podcast just to give people a taste, but if you want to read the entire book, and I really do encourage you to do that, you can go get it on Amazon.com. It's called *All the Scary Little Gods*. Just do a search for it in the bar. I will provide a direct link in the show notes, but you can also find it this way. And you can get it in a Kindle format or an Audible format — I read the Audible version — or a paperback.

All right, so here's Chapter 88 called "Prayer." It starts with a quote from Richard J. Foster who wrote a book called *Prayer*. And the quote says this: "Real prayer comes not from gritting our teeth, but from falling in love."

"A woman of faith in an emotionally abusive relationship has likely spent most of her life fervently praying for relief. Praying for help. Praying for hope. Praying for answers. Praying for her children. Praying for a healed marriage. Praying for her husband to wake up and stop hurting their family. Praying to be a better wife. Praying for patience and perseverance. Praying for power and grace. Begging to be seen and heard.

And finally, after years of no change and nothing to show for her investment of time and emotional energy, she stops. God will do what He does, so what's the point of asking for anything different? God becomes an extension of her abusive partner, refusing to hear or see or validate her, controlling everything, doling out tokens of kindness here and there simply to string her along, desiring one thing only: His own glory and fame.

She is a pawn in her husband's game and an even smaller, more insignificant pawn in God's game. She is powerless, helpless, and hopeless. It's a dark and desolate place to be. This was me. I spent thirty to sixty minutes a day pacing my kitchen floor before the family woke up, praying. Just praying.

But what if prayer isn't what we think it is? What if the purpose of prayer is totally different? What if the God we were praying to doesn't even exist? What if our Creator is so much more than a gumball machine? What if the point of prayer is simply love?

If we believe the purpose of our life is to go from one tangible victory to another, we will be sorely disappointed. Victories defined by our limited time and space locked consciousness are almost always things that bring us comfort and joy now. Christians love a good testimony. 'I once was blind, but now I see.' 'I once was sick, but now I'm healed.' 'I once was stuck, but now I'm free.'

What about the ones who remain blind, sick, stuck? We don't like to talk about them. In fact, because that scares us, we push them away and blame them for their problems. If it's their fault, then we can avoid catching their bad luck disease by our own efforts of working hard, being good, and praying right. If we expected that blindness, sickness, and stuckness would sometimes be companions on our journey, we might resist less.

I no longer think of prayer as something I do. I think of it as something I am. I no longer believe prayer is a simple, single formula for connection to God. I believe prayer is a way of being. When Paul says to pray without ceasing in 1 Thessalonians, I think this is what he's talking about.

If we think of prayer as being an audible dialogue between us and God, with some possible physical rules like making sure eyes are closed, heads are bowed, and knees are bent, we will not be able to pray without ceasing. Someone's got to make dinner. But what if prayer is a posture of simply being aware that we are in the presence of our Creator every moment of every day? Our inner rant while we drive down highway 35W is a prayer. So is belting out the words to Katy Perry's 'Roar' a few minutes later. So, too, are the body-wracked sobs we have that night in our empty bed after we've put the

kids to sleep and the house is quiet and dark and lonely. All of it. Sacred time and space. Prayer.

Consider this: What if the very darkness and feeling of abandonment is your current prayer? And what if the Creator always meets you there even if you don't sense His presence? How would your life change if you knew, really knew, this was true?

Praying can be pacing your kitchen floor every morning, but it is so much more than that. Prayer is life. Every breath you take in and out is a prayer. Every walk you take, wherever it leads you, is a prayer. Every bite of food you enjoy is a prayer. Every thought you have is a prayer because God is woven into the fabric of your DNA, your core being. You are one with God. As a beloved creation, your very existence is a prayer because you are connected in a mysterious cosmic way to your Creator. This Source is part of you.

As your awareness of this connection grows, you will experience more and more confidence and peace and rest in that Presence. It is there even when you are unaware, in the same way that an infant's relationship and communication with its mother is very real and sweet and intimate in spite of the fact that the infant is not cognizant of the scope of that relationship or communication. Prayer is our intimate, mysterious, and powerful connection with the Lover of our souls. It is our oxygen.

We want so badly for life to be this way: I put in a quarter — I get a big, juicy, colorful gumball. I put in the time — I get a promotion. I put in the right ingredients — I get a delicious apple pie. I put in the homeschooling — I get godly children who will rise up and call me blessed. I put on a jumper that covers my knees — I never get sexually abused by a man. I put in a certain number of hours in prayer — I get all my prayers answered, most of them in my lifetime.

It doesn't work that way. As we've learned, life on planet Earth sucks. Abusers live to ripe old ages without sanctions, while victims die young from cancer. Kids rebel. Hurricanes destroy homes and kill people. Daddies molest their children.

I don't think this is what God envisioned, but in spite of the choices humans make, Love is doing a bazillion trillion things every moment of every day to create beauty out of the ashes of our lives when they collide with the brokenness of earth.

Life on this planet will always be a bouquet of roses and thorns. God doesn't promise us a gumball for a quarter. But God does promise that Love will always be with us while we are in the middle of all that is wrong on earth. And we also know Love's got us when

life is over, and God will make everything right in the fullness of time.

When we give up our gumball machine idea of God, 'We pass from thinking of God as part of our life,' writes Richard J. Foster in his book *Prayer*, 'to the realization that we are part of his life.'

I also believe prayer brings unseen powers into play that change the course of history in ways we will not see until eternity. As we grow into our awareness of how connected we are to our Creator, even when we cannot see or feel it, we will also grow in our confident conviction that God not only hears us, but God goes into action in the world because of us.

Greg Boyd preached a sermon called, 'Why We Can't Know Why,' in which he made the point that everything every human does all day long has a ripple effect that continues through all of history. Think about that. It's mind boggling.

It made me think of a scene from the movie *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, in which a ballerina is hit by a truck. The scene plays backwards to all of the minute things that happened that led up to the accident. If only the phone hadn't rung. If only a man hadn't taken her taxi. If only the taxi driver hadn't purchased a cup of coffee. If only, if only, if only. But all of those things did happen, and the result was that the ballerina and the truck were at the same place at the same time and there was a horrible accident.

Now, take that scene and multiply it an infinite number of times, and this is what is going on in the world on any given second of any given day for thousands and thousands of years. And while God doesn't control all these minuscule choices everyone is making, Love does infuse life with a bazillion trillion stories of redemption. There are hurricanes, yes, and there are also rainbows.

So where does prayer come in? Greg Boyd says that if life is made up of an infinite number of ripples from all our human choices, prayer is like throwing a big boulder in the water. Now we've got a wave. Prayer makes a difference, but perhaps not in the ways we always want. We have to remember that we are finite, and we don't know what God knows.

When I think of how I might apply this to my own life, I think of how I prayed for my kids all those years, and so many of them are suffering in ways I never wanted for them to suffer. Some are very confused. Some have turned away from God. How can this be? Can I trust God? Did God not 'Choose them to be His own?' Were they created for the

sole purpose of being lost for all eternity? If God is who I believe God is, I cannot believe that's true.

I don't trust my kids to know or understand what's best for them. I don't trust them to make wise choices. I don't trust them to cling to God. I trust God to save them in Love's own time and in Love's own way. I have to surrender my fear for them and my love for them to our Creator who loves them and knows them far better than I could ever dream of knowing or loving them.

When I pray that Love will restore broken relationships one day, I believe in faith that Love will do things I'll never know about in order to bring about such a restoration. If not here on earth, then in eternity. I just don't believe this life is all there is. I don't believe a story as wonderful as the one God is writing finds its ending in time and space.

How does God answer prayer on this planet? Through us. We are the hands and feet of Jesus in this world. We demonstrate who God is by the things we do or don't do. When we fight for justice and truth, we are showing a facet of the character of God. Imperfect, yes, but still, amazing privilege.

You may pray that others will see the truth, but Love may answer by helping you to see the truth. You may pray for God to open a door, but Love may turn you around and open a completely different door, a door you didn't know existed before.

When we see wrongs that need to be righted, people who need to be cared for, or projects that need to be created, that is the Holy Spirit within us moving us to be Love's presence in this world.

God was always going to rescue me from abuse. How? Through a woman named Natalie. But first, Love had to teach me how to be a rescuer. And the first victim I needed to rescue was myself."

If you liked that chapter, it's just one of 89 in my new book, *All the Scary Little Gods*. Again, you can get it in Kindle, Audible, and paperback format on Amazon. And I do read the Audible version myself. You can go to scarylittlegods.com for more information.

Here's a little review from Amazon: "In *All the Scary Little Gods*, Natalie Hoffman fearlessly opens up about her journey of breaking free from religious trauma, and her story resonated deeply with me. Like many others, I've grappled with the weight of

oppressive religious teachings, and Hoffman's candid account provided a sense of validation and understanding.

This memoir isn't just for those directly affected by religious abuse. It's for anyone who has felt the suffocating grip of dogma, whether from family, church, friends, or a partner. Hoffman's words serve as a beacon of hope for those yearning to break free from the shackles of fear and embrace a God of love and compassion. Her story is a roadmap, a guide that gently leads readers towards healing and self discovery.

If you're seeking solace and guidance on your journey to liberation, *All the Scary Little Gods* is a must-read. It offers a poignant reminder that while the path to freedom may be daunting, it ultimately leads to a place of profound self awareness and empowerment."

Again, you can go to scarylittlegods.com for more information, and if you're interested in working more closely with me, I would love to work with you. Just go to joinflyingfree.com.