

Seven Steps to Letting Go of the Past

By Susan Gregory

"Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it?" Isaiah 43:18

This is adapted from a short talk-show interview I saw with Bishop Dennis Leonard, the Senior Pastor at Heritage Christian Center in Denver, Colorado. These are his seven steps and then I added my own thoughts.

1. **Let go of the baggage.** Whether we realize it or not, as long as we hold on to our past, it serves as a heavy weight on us. We need to let it go! This may not be an instantaneous experience, but it can be our goal. My friend who experienced a very painful divorce uses an image of a leaf floating down a stream. Whenever a negative thought comes into her mind about her ex-husband and the pain he brought to her and their family, she imagines that she drops the thought onto the leaf and watches it float down the stream and out of her sight.



I have written the names of past pains on a sheet of paper and had a ceremonial "burning" to help me get in touch with letting go of the pain forever.

Another imagery I use is a set of keys. Imagine that I tossed you my keys and then walked away. Someone comes to me and says, "I need your keys, Susan. Can you give them to me?" I have to explain that I no longer have the keys. In the same way, I "toss my cares" to the Lord . . . then if someone asks for the care (my mind or emotions), then I send them to the Lord who has them!

2. **Close that chapter.** Just as in the verse of Isaiah 43:18, the Lord says, "*Do not remember former things.*" Another way of saying that would be, "*That was then and this is now.*" Rather than going back and re-reading the same chapter again and again, close that chapter in your life. Move on . . . read on to your future. You can't read two chapters at the same time. Close that chapter and let it go. Let it get dusty on your "life bookshelf."
3. **Quit talking about the past.** "*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.*" Proverbs 18:21 Every time we talk about the problem or pain, we take what is in the past and bring it back into our present day! God forgets our past . . . so should we.

I was able to help a friend end the dwelling she was putting on a painful relationship. She kept going back to the past. She said, "I just can't stop thinking about it." I told her that the next time she turned to those thoughts to imagine that she was sitting down to her dining table and serving herself a bowl of putrid smelling poison. That did it for her. She used that imagery for the next several weeks and it broke off thinking about the pain and thus talking about it.

An individual did something very unkind to me . . . a very selfish act with me as the victim. I had a choice to either let it go . . . and not tell anyone about it. Or, I could call my best friend and cry on her shoulder and every time someone would ask about this person, I could go over the recent hurt . . . OR, I could make a commitment to the Lord to not talk about it. When I did that, it allowed the pain of this act to leave me. No one would ever ask me about it, causing me to have to remember it again. And I could let it drop. That was a good choice for me and taught me a powerful lesson about the value I receive when I “quit talking about the past.” This is also an important part of forgiving a person. My motive of telling others would be to bring revenge and hurt . . . and we all know that’s not my job to do!

4. **Let go of the shame.** We make mistakes. Sometimes we consciously or unconsciously do things that hurt ourselves or others or we flat out disobey God’s Word. Thankfully, we have Jesus and, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* 1 John 1:9 Even if we have confessed and received forgiveness, we must let go of the shame that may try to linger. Instead of dwelling on the shame, focus on the new spirit in you. Be thankful for the fact: “That was then and this is now.” You are a new creature in Christ and you can shed the shame.

Since 2007 was such a hard year for me, I wanted to make sure I did everything I could to get it into my past. On January 1st, I took a shower and “washed the year away.” I prayed and confessed while the clean water poured over my body. I let 2007 run down the drain never to touch me again.

5. **Enjoy today!** We’ve all read about or listened to teachings about the power of gratitude and positive thinking! But few of us engage in the practice. Engage is a verb and it requires us to take action. If we are to enjoy the day, we need to do it. I can’t enjoy for you. You must enjoy for yourself. You can enjoy by making a conscious decision to look at the positive things in your life, as small as they may seem right now.

While 2007 was a very hard year, I made a list of 100 things for which I could be thankful. Some of them were big and others were very small. I had to dig down deep into my memory for those 100 things. But that was a great way to preserve the good memories (they are now written down) and they blessed me all over again. Actually, this is the third year I have done this exercise and I highly recommend it, even if it’s not New Years Day. Go back and remember the previous year and record the good that happened.

6. **Walk by faith and not by sight.** This should be “how we are.” But to walk by faith, we need to know the Scriptures. When we know them, then we can “think” them. That’s what having the mind of Christ is all about. That’s why we need to spend time meditating on God’s Word - so we can think like the Scriptures. That’s what God told Joshua to do, *“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”*

Joshua 1:8 Instead of focusing on our circumstances, if we want something different, we must focus on the promises of God. And we find those promises in His Word.

Then we must believe. What does it take you to believe -- without any doubt in your heart? The Bible says that "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Keep saying the promise over and over again so your mind can hear it. Surround yourself with the Word. Flush your doubts with the Word. Do whatever you need to believe!

7. **Believe and understand the power of forgiveness.** This is a big one! If you have unforgiveness in your heart, GET RID OF IT! Do you hear me shouting? I have realized in my own life the power of forgiveness. Whenever something "comes up," I immediately say to the Lord, "Oh, look, there is another place where I need to forgive." Then I go to work and employ the steps to forgive.

Remember that forgiving and trusting are two different things. Trust is earned. Forgiveness is a free gift, no strings attached. You can forgive a person and still not trust them and that's okay. Forgiveness is not accepting the person's action as right. Just as the Lord forgives us, we must forgive others. The bottom line is that it's a commandment.

No one else can forgive for you. You are the one who must forgive those who have hurt you, done you wrong, or caused you damage. I know it's hard. But the Lord calls us to forgive and the benefits far outweigh the act.

Letting go of the past takes work. If we want to move into a New Beginning, we must let go of the past. Again, the choice is ours. Will we purpose to do it, or will we stay in the rut of the past?

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