

10 PRINCIPLES ON HOW TO FORGET YOUR PAST!

~ Rev. Paul R. Shockley

Philippians 3:13

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,

Sometimes our past is our worst enemy.

Have you ever found yourself telling someone about an unpleasant experience you've had whereby you have been wronged in some way. As you tell the story anger or pain builds up inside of you, you get excited and emotional, your skin becomes red, and your facial muscles become distorted. And when they ask, "When did this happen," you reply, "Five years ago this March."

There is so much in that moment of re-telling stories. Memory can bring back the pain of that event as if it happened yesterday. Many people have difficulty forgetting wrongs done to them in the past, saying something like, "How can I ever get over the hurt of being betrayed by who I thought was my best friend?" "I can never trust my spouse again." "How can I ever forgive my parents, my siblings?" "How can I get beyond the rejection of my own children?" "My boss is a fiend." Other still find it difficult to forget the years spent in rebellion against God and that past comes back to haunt them, whether they are non-believers or believers. Regardless, *they consider themselves useless to God*. Some of these people want to serve God, but can never seem to take the first step, and take that step with joy. Then there are those who live in the past, with nearly every conversation turning back to their past accomplishments. I remember when I...or "we always did it this way"...they are people who always speak in past tense, whose lives are neutralized by their past accomplishments and achievements.

I say all that to say, so many of us struggle with our past, finding it almost impossible to forget it about it and move forward, whether it is past mistakes or great accomplishments. Yes, indeed, all too often our past can be our worst enemy. "*We find it easy to forget what we should remember, and remember what we should forget.*" ~ Mary Whechel

The following ten principles might help us learn not to allow our past to dominate our present reality and potential future:

1. **Remember that sin is conquered by God's forgiveness;** there is no exception, whether it be your sin or somebody else. Forgive yourself because you are a recipient of God's grace. Every time you feel the regret well up inside of you, and you confessed that sin, you asked for forgiveness by those whom you hurt, dismiss it; don't feed it. The reason why is, if you are a believer, your past is covered in God's grace. We have to count it to be true that God has forgiven us. *If the God of the Bible has forgiven us, shouldn't we forgive ourselves?*
2. **You can never forget your past apart from God.** If you have find yourself absorbed by your memories, pray and meditate on the biblical doctrine of grace, counting it to be true. Without God's grace, a victimized mindset, an unforgiving spirit, or past regrets can foster into bitterness. And bitterness robs joy, poisons peace, sours love, and makes others who love you-miserable.

3. **Deliberately choose not to allow your past to control you; it is a choice you must make.** The Apostle Paul is continuously making that choice; he is not going to allow his past regrets or accomplishments to haunt him; they are worthless to him. Forgetting your past does not mean that it excuses the other person's sin nor does it guarantee that he or she will not hurt you again. Rather, forgetting the past means you are not going to dwell on it. Moreover, you aren't going to use the past to manipulate or control the present or potential future.
4. **Forgetting involves asking forgiveness.** If you have wronged others, go to them and do the following (in the Lord's strength):
 - a. Acknowledge what you did wrong.
 - b. Ask for forgiveness to the hurting party.
 - c. Recognize the consequences for your wrongdoing without argument or excuse.
 - d. Reflect upon how you are going to act differently the next time; be determined not to pursue that course of action again.
5. **God understands the challenge of forgiving those who hurt us.** He does not forbid the believer to feel the result of a wrongdoing...but He does ask us to forgive them:
 - a. Matthew 18:21-22:

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."
 - b. Mark 11:25:

"When you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."
 - c. Ephesians 4:32:

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace."
 - d. Colossians 3:13:

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."
 - e. 1 John 1:9:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
6. **Human credentials can produce nothing that is pleasing to God.** If we are living upon past accomplishments we need to ask ourselves the following questions:
 - a. Does my life qualify as a success in God's eyes?

- b. Am I being a good steward of the things God has given me (health, prosperity, family, work, home, church, etc)?
 - c. Have the goals I set for myself been honorable to God;
 - d. Have they been worthy of the years and energy I poured into them?
 - e. When I stand before the Jesus Christ at the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ, will I hear “Well done, my good and faithful servant. You are an overcomer!”
 - f. How can I be sure that the legacy I leave is one that my family will inherit?
7. **Those of us who think we have attained spiritual superiority--give it up;** it is pride puffed up; common sense people can see right through it. Rather, God asks us to be people of humility as reflected in chapter 2...willing to minister and be ministered to.
8. **If you aren't pro-actively walking with God, don't be surprised to discover that forgetting the past is difficult.**
9. **Learn to recognize haunting memories for what they are--an attack from the flesh, energized by dark spiritual forces.**
10. **Don't wait until you can get the past behind you before you start focusing on God; start where you are.**