

The Gift of Letting Go

Air Dates: May 16-20, 2022

Day One

A friend once said to me that she was learning about the gift of letting go, and I immediately related to what she was saying. There are several gifts of the Spirit listed in Scripture, but you won't find the "gift of letting go" there. So, it's not a gift that some people have and others don't. Rather it is a gift we give ourselves, and we are the only ones who can do that—and everyone desperately needs this gift.

I began to make a list of what we often need to let go of, and I was thinking that maybe this list would be helpful to you as well.

Letting Go of Our Dreams

We all need goals and visions and missions that we aspire to and work toward. So, I'm not talking about letting go of God-given dreams and ambitions. I'm talking about letting go of your daydreams, for one thing. If you're not careful, you can find yourself living in a world of daydreams. I think this is often a result of missing pieces in our lives, and we start to build a fictional world in our minds around that missing piece.

For example, if you want to be married and that piece is missing in your life right now, you can start daydreaming about how wonderful married life would be. Even if there is no potential mate in sight, you can imagine the perfect mate who would fulfill all your dreams and make that make-believe world a reality. That may seem harmless—and small amounts of very occasional daydreaming are—but when it becomes mind-consuming, you are setting yourself up for discouragement, depression, disappointment and disillusionment. And another thing—living in that make-believe world consumes time and energy and keeps you from productive activities.

Then sometimes you need to let go of a life-long dream and trust God for your future. If you're dealing with a broken dream—one that seemed like a dream-come-true but instead has turned into a nightmare—you may be at that point where you need to let it go. Believe me, I know that seems like mission impossible, but it's not as hard as you think it will be, and if it's time to let go, God will reward you with a peace that will amaze you. I've been there, and I remember when I finally let go of my broken dream, peace swept over me like I never imagined and I realized how much of my pain was self-inflicted.

Day Two

Have you ever heard of the gift of letting go? Well, this gift of letting go isn't found in the Bible per se, but certainly the Bible is full of admonitions to let go. I want to talk about letting go of the controls of your life—and this applies to all of us control-freaks!

Proverbs 3:5-6 makes it very clear that we are to turn over the controls to the Lord: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

And again in Isaiah 48:17: “This is what the Lord says— your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.’”

It’s easy to quote these verses, but when it comes to giving up your plans and asking God to direct you in the way you should go, well, that’s not quite so easy, is it? Maybe you do what I’ve often done—you come up with your plans and then you ask God to bless them. *Lord, here is what I want to do; it’s a really good plan; I’ve thought it through very carefully and I’m sure you agree that this is the way I should go. So, please bless my plans.* Are you guilty of that kind of control tendency, as I often am?

When will we learn that God’s ways are best? As we just read from Isaiah, God teaches us what is *best* for us. He’s not trying to make your way hard; he’s not trying to steal your joy. He simply knows what is best for you. He is far better at controlling your life than you are! So, please give him the blank piece of paper and ask him to write the plan.

And here’s the thing: this gift of letting go of the controls of your life and giving God permission to run your show is not a once and for all thing. It’s pretty much a daily attitude, an on-going commitment, an intentional decision you will have to make on a regular basis. Your days need to begin with relinquishing the controls of your life to God for that day, admitting your inadequacy to control your own lives, and once again acknowledging that you belong to God and he is in control.

I urge you to let go of the controls of your life—give them over to God. And then do it again tomorrow and tomorrow—and all the tomorrows of your life. You’ll never regret it.

Day Three

Is there someone in your life right now that has done you wrong? Someone who deserves to be punished and suffer for the wrong they’ve done you? Are you willing to let go of your right for revenge?

This is one area where lots of us find it very difficult to let go. If you’ve been truly hurt by someone—especially someone who has never apologized or tried to make it right or even acknowledged that they hurt you—no doubt your natural reaction is to get back at them. How can they get off scot free while you are left hurting, even devastated? It just eats at your sense of fair play—it’s just not fair. So, how in the world can you let go of this deep desire to see them punished for what they’ve done to you?

I’ve met people who have become so fixated on the hurt done to them, so determined that the other person suffer, that they have become obsessed with revenge. It’s understandable how a person could get to this place. Your mind dwells on the injustice, and the more you think about it, the more you cannot let go of the anger. Then that anger turns into bitterness and you inflict even more pain and hurt on yourself.

The Bible says that vengeance belongs to the Lord and he will repay. If you’re hanging on to a desire for revenge, this is one truth you need to learn and accept. God is the avenger; he knows who deserves punishment; he knows about wrongs that have never been set right. And unless a person repents and truly forsakes their ways, God is going to have the last word. Those wrongs will not always go unavenged.

So, if you can let go of your desire to get your pound of flesh; if you can take them off your hook and put them on God’s hook, you will free yourself from the terrible pain of that hurt. The more you refuse to let go, the more you increase the pain. And the more you suffer for it.

One of the best gifts you can ever give yourself is to let go of your right for revenge. Trust the God who sees and knows all, and who will someday settle every score—his way.

Day Four

Learning to let go is a gift you can give yourself, a very valuable gift.

I'm often amazed at how people get so bent-out-of-shape over the small stuff. You know—like yelling at an airline employee because a flight is late, screaming at the driver in front who stopped on a green light, fussing at your kids or mate because they left socks on the floor, losing sleep because your next-door neighbor's dog irritates you. Small stuff. And then I have to recognize that I let small stuff upset my days far too often as well.

Years ago I began to see that this was a problem for me. I was really bad at letting the small stuff ruin my days. So, I started praying about it, for one thing; and then I learned a simple technique which has served me well. When I'm starting to get upset, I ask myself, "What difference will this make in twenty-four hours?" And I've set a rule for myself that if it won't matter this time tomorrow, I simply am not allowed to spend any energy on it. I can't get angry; I can't get frustrated; I can't get my feelings hurt; I can't complain about it—because it won't make one bit of difference this time tomorrow.

I highly recommend that you learn to ask yourself this simple question—what difference will this make in twenty-four hours—because I can testify that it is life-changing. You will learn to let go of the small stuff, and you'll discover that probably about 90 percent of what is bugging you today is small stuff that won't matter in twenty-four hours. Just think of how much stress this will take out of your life.

Jesus said, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34).

Day Five

I want to encourage you to let go of your past. I know—it's not easy to do that. But like everything else in the Christian journey, it's something you learn to do by faith, not necessarily by feelings. The passage in Scripture which speaks to this so clearly is from Philippians 3:13-14, where the Apostle Paul writes:

"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Paul says that he's not all the way there—he doesn't have everything figured out. But he knows that in order to go forward, he has to forget what is behind. That doesn't mean you can literally erase your memory, but rather that you refuse to re-live the past, to dwell in the past. It's gone and there's nothing you can do to change it.

You must stop telling yourself that you are a victim or you aren't qualified or you've messed up so much that there's no hope. You can't undo the past, but you can make today and all your tomorrows promising and good through the power of Jesus Christ.

There's a prize ahead for you, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ. There's a reason to be hopeful and joyful because of Jesus who has called you to be in heaven with him. Dwelling on your past keeps you mired in hopelessness, self-pity, anger, or depression. God has good days ahead for you. Can you, by faith and through his power, let go of your past? Just pray right now that God will make that a reality in your life and keep praying it as often as you need to. You'll discover that what you can't do on your own—let go of your past—God can do for you.