

## What People Are Saying about Dan Willis and *Freedom to Forget*

Each of us has been hurt in the past. I began reading *Freedom to Forget* and couldn't put it down until I finished it. Pastor Dan made me face some still active wounds within me. He made me realize how, without me previously knowing it, those hurts had claimed control over portions of my life. Lovingly, Pastor Dan walked me through how to deal with the pain using godly principles and examples, helping me to look to the future instead of constantly staring at the rearview mirror.

—*Marvin Rhodes*,  
Vice President of Operations,  
TCT Network

Dan gets past the clichés and platitudes and down to where most of us live in *Freedom to Forget*. He gets so close to where I have lived that it's almost painful. But he has been there too, and he has the courage to admit it. The power of the book is not just in having insights into where we live, but a biblical way through the struggles and temptations we all face. This is an important book for Christians and non-Christians alike and it is definitely on my recommended reading list.

—*Dr. Jerry Rose*,  
President/CEO,  
Total Living Network

*Freedom to Forget* is the evidence that something good has happened in the life of a person desperate enough to accept God's loving effort to free them from themselves. Because we tend to live within ourselves, we can tend to forget all that God has in store for us. Our freedom comes when God helps us cut the cord to our baggage of past hurts, bruises, failures, and disappointments. Dan speaks to the brand-new life that we have when we grasp our "freedom" to move into the light of God's promises.

—*Pastor Ed Smith,*  
Pastor of Trinity Christian Center, TBN

My friend, Rev. Dan Willis, a powerfully and passionately anointed messenger soldier and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, shares his heart with us in *Freedom to Forget*. This work will be an empowering sensation to us all. Thank you for sharing yet another magnificent gift!

—*Sylvia St. James,*  
National Talent Coordinator/Director,  
House of Blues Sunday Gospel Brunch



# FREEDOM TO FORGET

*RELEASING THE PAIN FROM THE PAST,  
EMBRACING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE*

DAN WILLIS



WHITAKER  
HOUSE

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible. Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the *New King James Version*, © 1979, 1980, 1982, 1984 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®, NIV®, © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (AMP) are taken from the *Amplified*® Bible, © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)).

---

**FREEDOM TO FORGET:**  
**Releasing Pain from the Past, Embracing Hope for the Future**

---

For speaking engagements, you may contact the author at:  
The Lighthouse Church of All Nations 4501 W. 127<sup>th</sup> Street  
Chicago's "Bridging the Gap" Church Alsip, IL 60803  
(708) 385-6020 [www.thelighthousechurch.org](http://www.thelighthousechurch.org)

ISBN: 978-0-88368-222-7  
Printed in the United States of America  
© 2007 by Dan Willis

Whitaker House  
1030 Hunt Valley Circle  
New Kensington, PA 15068  
[www.whitakerhouse.com](http://www.whitakerhouse.com)

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Willis, Dan.  
Freedom to forget : releasing pain from the past, embracing hope for the future /  
Dan Willis.

p. cm.

Summary: "Shows how dwelling on pain from the past can destroy a life, but forgetting past hurts and moving on is possible"—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-88368-222-7 (trade pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Forgiveness—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Attitude change—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Memory—Religious aspects—Christianity. 4. Pain—Religious aspects—Christianity. 5. Suffering—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4647.F55W55 2007

248.8'6—dc22

2007011557

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical—including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system—without permission in writing from the publisher. Please direct your inquiries to [permissionseditor@whitakerhouse.com](mailto:permissionseditor@whitakerhouse.com).

# Credits



- Father God—whom I strive daily to make the Head of my life
- Linda, my life—for supporting me as I fulfill the passion that burns within me
- Melody, Rachel, Holly, and Chad—for making my life worth living
- Christopher—my silk-haired grandson, who loves peanuts in “Papa D’s” office
- Ed and Lill Page—for providing me the sanctuary of their home in upper Michigan to complete this book
- Renee—for all the typing and retyping and retyping and...
- Debbie—above and beyond the call. I thank you so much
- VG and Ken, my editors—I only hope to “have a way with words” like you two someday
- Lighthouse Church—for allowing me to continue my “learning” with you for twenty years

- Mona and Terry—you are beautiful examples of Christian character, and I love you
- David Carney, general manager of All Nations Choir (formerly Pentecostals of Chicago) for loving to push and prod people to excel more than anyone I know
- T.L. & Nicki—for sparking my interest to even begin the first page
- Rod—the miracle of friendship against all odds
- Darius—you are “energy personified”
- J.R.—for always setting the example of “It’ll all work out”
- Tito—a man after God’s own heart... Jonathan to a David
- Finally, I humbly dedicate this writing to you, dear reader—in honor of your attempt to go forward! *May God’s Very Best Be Yours!*

# Contents

Prologue .....	9
1. The First Step.....	13
2. Lose the Details.....	19
3. Understanding Is Not Necessary.....	23
4. Over the Rough Terrain .....	31
5. Does True Forgiving Mean Instant Forgetting?.....	37
6. Smiling in the Funeral Parlor.....	43
7. Keep Hope Alive .....	49
8. The Preventative Medicine of Consistent Gratitude .....	55
9. Exhaustion Causes You to Remember .....	61
10. Endorphins and Five-Minute Facelifts .....	65
11. It Is Funny to Forget Sometimes.....	69
12. Dealing with Jerks.....	75
13. Clueless .....	83
14. Flowers Bloom in the Strangest Places .....	91
15. Reconciliation Goes a Long Way .....	99

16. The Product of Adversity .....	103
17. Discover Your Purpose .....	109
18. Dysfunctional Families .....	115
19. Just Going through the Cemetery .....	121
20. No Wastebaskets in Heaven.....	127
21. Do Not Lie about the Pain .....	133
22. Love Checkup .....	139
23. The Chapter You May Not Want to Read .....	145
24. Follow-Up Therapy .....	149
25. What Eagles and Your Adversary Have in Common .....	155
26. Get Away .....	163
27. Turn the Lights On .....	167
Appendixes .....	177
Appendix 1: Fun Things to Remember .....	178
Appendix 2: Remembering Who God Is .....	182
Addenda .....	187
Addendum 1: Learning to Sing the Hard Songs (For Music Ministers) .....	188
Addendum 2: Do Not Run (For Those in Spiritual Leadership) .....	196
About the Author .....	201



# Prologue

# Prologue



I have purchased many “how to” books in my twenty-eight years as a pastor. *How to Serve. How to Love. How to Improve Your Memory.* Even with that last title, I have forgotten much of what I may have read, and where I put the books when I finished! I haven’t a clue where most of them are today.

However, while encouraging people in self-help skills and ways to improve themselves when dealing with contemporary issues and problems, I discovered something quite amazing: *Most of us do not need as much help **remembering** as we do **forgetting!*** We are locked in a swirling cesspool that holds us hostage to the past and thwarts future progress by reminding us of all that has transpired and brought pain into our life. It may be things such as

- secret sexual sin
- the loss of a loved one
- unforgiveness

Prologue 

Whatever the problem, I pray that within the pages of this book, you will find help and strength to go forward as you find the *Freedom to Forget*.

—*Rev. Dan Willis*  
Alsip, Illinois





## Chapter 1

# The First Step

## Chapter 1

# The First Step



*“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust...”*

*Snow...*

*ice...*

*freezing cold...*

*and a tiny white casket*

*resting softly on a white*

*winter blanket over Chicago...*

**T**his is how I would remember the day, when, as a young preacher, I had to stand before that grieving young couple. She was weak from the birth, weeping and huddled against her husband. He was stoic, hardened, not wanting to show that he was, understandably, hurting.

This was neither their first attempt to have a baby, nor the second, nor even the third, but the fourth. *A baby.* We had all hoped so strongly this pregnancy would be the one. She would make it. We even shared “church” in their living room in the months before

she would give birth. This time they were taking no chances. The fourth month passed—praise God. The fifth month came, farther than ever. The sixth month passed, which meant the baby could now live on its own outside the womb if she delivered early. Even the beginning of a seventh month of pregnancy came. Then, it was over. No amount of tears, trying to see from a bigger perspective, or spiritual guidance would erase the grief.

Now, here we were at the gravesite. I remember weeping as I drove up that winter day, stepping out, seeing that hardened father, and wanting to question God myself, wanting to run. I couldn't run away, though. I was their pastor. I was needed. It was my job to console them and give them the answers to the questions they had. Why

had this happened? Where was God? Words seemed to evade me, and though more than twenty-five years have since passed, my memory is still etched with what happened that day. I closed my Bible, folded my notes into my little black *Star Book for Ministers*, said a short prayer, held their hands, and just cried with them. They didn't need a spoken sermon at that moment; instead they needed a quiet reminder of God's comforting presence and love—and quite honestly, so did I.



Eventually, our unresolved hurts will surface—most likely as bitterness, hardness, and anger at others or even at God.

---

## Freedom to Forget

Later I would reprimand myself for being such an amateur. Surely, an experienced preacher would know just what to say. Now, all these years later, I realize God was just teaching me how to “sing the hard songs.” Sometimes the answers are not enough and you feel you cannot go on. You want to run away and forget, but every detail leaps more vividly from the anguished recesses of your wounded soul the farther you run. That is the time to cry. Just cry.

We cried together, not in self-pity or martyrdom, but a heart-wrenching cry to our Father God for strength to “please, just get us through this horrible moment in time.” We survived. We went to work. We ate again, read the newspaper, took a walk, and cried some more when the grief was overwhelming. Then one day, we smiled, and eventually a laugh came.

From this tragic moment, early in my ministry, I learned that the first step to forgetting the vicious blows that life and others often deal us is realizing that we do not always need to understand—to wrap our brain around the immensity of those traumatic moments. Sometimes, we just need to honestly hurt in the moment. We can find comfort in the companionship of our Lord and quietly hold on to a few close friends or family members who understand we do not need words of consolation or a sermon but rather someone who will just weep with us while we are hurting.

A sure way to engrave a tragic moment into your memory, making it much harder to later put behind

you, is not to hurt in the moment and do the appropriate grieving. If we forcefully stuff our unresolved hurts into the dark alcoves of our minds, they will fester in our psyches like a splinter that gets infected. Eventually, they will surface: most likely as bitterness, hardness, and anger at others or even God.

Today, that grieving mother remains faithful, does numerous clerical jobs for the church, and even organizes special events. Her husband is a pastor's friend, someone who found his way back to a loving God, just trusting His infinite wisdom. He supports the ministry of our church in every way and would probably give up everything to see us survive!

There are pains in this world that we cannot explain in our human understanding. But as this story illustrates, healing is possible. What do you do when your mind cannot be still and the hurt is making it impossible to move on with life? It is very common for us to rehash our hurts rather than letting them go. Instead of letting our wounds heal, we keep picking away at the scabs of memory, making ourselves bleed anew. This is the time we must practice forgetfulness. In the next chapters, I am going to discuss specific steps you can take to forget the pain of the past. It is possible to remember the events of your past without



Comfort can be found in the companionship of our Lord and through friends and family members.

---

## Freedom to Forget

unleashing the debilitating emotions associated with them. Then you are free to move on toward the future.

The first step is to cry, shout, let it out—until He tells you, “Let it go.” Cry until the revelation of “Your will is what’s best for me”<sup>1</sup> assuages the grief. Lean not on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5), but rather lean upon God’s comforting presence as you lament and purge your heart of the pain. You will go on; you will learn to forget the pain!

---

<sup>1</sup> “Your Will,” words and music by Darius Brooks from *Your Will* by Darius Brooks, © 2004, EMI Gospel.