

# Is My Heart Really Unforgiving?

By Sheila Lutz  
Leader's Guide

## Color Key

Purple: Additional comments to the leader and additional Bible passages

Red: Answers/possible answers to questions

Blue: Bible passages with key words (for this study) underlined

Note: All definitions are taken from the Miriam Webster Dictionary (online): [www.merriam-webster.com/](http://www.merriam-webster.com/)

Whether this the first time studying this topic or a review of teachings already learned, God uses lessons to teach and reteach and to touch hearts to know more, to learn deeper, to love more fully.

## Opening Prayer

O most gracious God, You sent Your only Son to die for me, to take *all my sins* — my thoughtless words, my darkest thoughts, the “pet” sin that will not let me go, my senseless deeds, my prideful attitude, my critical nature, my past, present, and future transgressions — and throw them as far as east is from the west so that I may be your child and live with You in heaven. Open my eyes today, O Lord. Teach me anew each day to see what it means to live forgiven and forgiving here on earth so that You may take joy in Your child and so that my joy in life with You may be filled to overflowing. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

At a fall rally years ago, the pastor leading the opening devotions said, “We, as Lutherans, know how to confess our sins, but we don’t know how to live forgiven.” I don’t remember anything from that rally except that statement which God implanted into me. How *do* I live forgiven?

Have a short (2 to 3 minutes maximum) discussion on the What do I Think? sections; look up and list key phrases from the What Does God Say? sections; if those studying are willing to share, have a deeper discussion on the What does this mean for me? sections.

## What Do I Think?

Which of these things hampers me from forgiving?

Irritating people ( <b>friends</b> )	The need to be in charge	Disappointment
Anger	Hurt feelings	Illness
Death	The way I feel today	Not being in the Word
Guilt	Forgetting to praise God	Lack of effort
Failure	My boss	Negative people
Criticism	Fear	Not trusting God
Unwillingness to apologize	Family ( <b>1 or more members</b> )	Other(s)?

Additional causes:

The need to have the last word  
Discouragement

My co-workers  
“I have a better way to do that!”

Any or all of these things can cause an unforgiving heart.

*Define Forgiveness:* to stop or give up feeling anger or resentment toward or about someone who has done something wrong; to stop blaming; to stop requiring (grant relief from) payment of (money that is owed)

Does this describe how I treat others? **Answers will vary.**

Does this describe how I think of myself? **Answers will vary.**

### **What Does God Say?**

Read Christ's words: **Matthew 6:12.** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (NIV)

**We are forgiven as we forgive others.**

**What Does This Mean for Me?** **Answers will vary to all of these.**

When is it hard for me to forgive? **Possible answers:** someone who hurt someone I love; someone who caused you hurt or hardship (gossip; a drunk driver; a thief; a friend who deserted me)

What is hardest for me to forgive? **Possible answers:** death, prolonged illness; infidelity; false imprisonment; being passed over for a promotion; injustice

Who is it hard for me to forgive? **Possible answers:** spouse, children, parents, friend, pastor, God

How do I forgive as others have forgiven me? **Possible answers:** by remembering they are a sinner just as I am; by remembering that God forgives them and loves them, too; by practicing forgiving others (including prayer) as soon as the offense occurs

Why is the ability to forgive a key to living forgiven? **Possible answers:** if I don't have a forgiving spirit toward others, it is hard for me to feel forgiven; God tells us so in His word; if I seek God's face and want to imitate Him, I must have a heart for those who sin against me

### **WHAT DOES GOD DESIRE FOR ME?**

**Micah 6:8** (ESV) He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you

but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**Jeremiah 29: 11–13** (ESV) For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

**John 1:14** (NIV) The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**John 8:32** (NIV) Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

**John 14:6** (NIV) Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

**2 Corinthians 5:17** (NIV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

**John 10:10** (ESV) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

*See also:*

**Matthew 9:17** (NIV) Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

### **WHERE DO I START?**

#### **What Do I Think?**

*Confession is (definition):* a written or spoken statement in which you say that you have done something wrong (that causes embarrassment or

shame) or committed a crime; the act of telling your sins to God or to a priest

What happens first when I'm ready to forgive someone? **Answers will vary.** Possible answers: when someone confesses to me; when God puts it on my heart to forgive; when I love someone enough to forgive them; because it's the right thing to do. My heart is at peace with God and the offender.

What happens first when I'm ready to ask for forgiveness? **Answers will vary.** Possible answers: shame; guilt; embarrassment; fear; God convicts me of my sin; the sin has weighed me down too long and I need and long for freedom from it, and I long for forgiveness

What happens first when I'm ready to forgive myself? **Answers will vary.** Some of the answers may be the same as for the previous question; also, when God reminds me that I am His forgiven child.

### **What Does God Say?**

**Psalm 32:1–5a** (ESV) Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity;

**Proverbs 28:13** (NIV) Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

**1 John 1:9** (NIV) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

**James 5:16** (NIV) Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

**1 Timothy 6:12** (NIV) Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which

you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

### **What Does This Mean for Me?**

When do I confess my sins to God? How often? **Answers will vary.**

When do I confess my sins to others? **Answers will vary.**

When do I hide my sins? Why? **Answers will vary.**

When do I confess my faith? **Answers will vary.**

## **CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL, BUT...**

### **What Do I Think?**

Even after we confess our sins and know we are forgiven, sometimes there's a problem. **Guilt may not be the only problem discussed.** If so the leader can listen to the other problems and then say that the group will discuss guilt as an example.

*Guilt comes when \_\_\_\_\_(definition): the fact of having committed a breach of conduct especially violating law and involving a penalty; the state of one who has committed an offense especially consciously; feelings of blame especially for imagined offenses or from a sense of inadequacy (SELF-REPROACH)*

### **What Does God Say?**

**Romans 8:1** (ESV) There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**Psalm 32:5**(ESV); **6,7** (NIV) Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

**Hebrews 10:19–24** (NIV) Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter

the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, **2 Corinthians 5:21** (NIV) God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **Psalm 103:12** (ESV) As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

See also: **Psalm 69: 5, 29** and **30a** (NIV) You, God, know my folly; my guilt is not hidden from you ... But as for me, afflicted and in pain—may your salvation, God, protect me. I will praise God's name in song.

### **What Does This Mean for Me?**

We should always apologize when a wrong is done to another. Sin cannot be ignored, but how do I deal with any guilt that lingers? **After repenting and confessing a sin to God and to the one(s) we offended we should live our repentance and try, with God's help, not to commit the offense again. We live in a state of grace, not of guilt.**

What has made me feel guilty in the past?

**Answers will vary.**

How does/did Satan use guilt against me?

**Answers will vary. Possible answers: anger; aggressive behavior; critical nature of self and others; withdrawing from society and/or from God; depression; fear**

How long do I remember what harm another has done to me?

**Answers will vary. Possible answers: until they repent and ask for forgiveness (is this the right thing to do?); I don't remember at all—if it's**

**someone I don't know or a business I don't frequent; right away—if it's someone I love; not at all if it's someone I don't like**

How do I react when someone confesses sin to me? **Answers will vary. Possible answers: anger; relief; forgive—for the moment; love; total forgiveness**

Do I trust God to take care of the guilty—even when it's me? **Answers will vary.**

What should I do when guilt overwhelms me again? **Answers will vary. Possible answers: prayer for my actions; confession; new activity; be in the Word; find a new way to serve God; find a way to help the person I wronged; pray for the person I don't care for**

## **IS MY HEART REALLY UNFORGIVING?**

### **What Do I Think?**

In your own words *define:* (answers below are definitions)

**Advice** recommendation regarding a decision or course of conduct; COUNSEL; information or notice given

**Criticism** the act of expressing disapproval and of noting the problems or faults of a person or thing; the act of criticizing someone or something; a remark or comment that expresses dis-approval of someone or something; the activity of making careful judgments about the good and bad qualities

**Condemnation** a statement or expression of very strong and definite criticism or disapproval

**Gossip** information about the behavior and personal lives of other people; information about the lives of famous people; a person who often or habitually reveals/talks about the private details of other people's lives

How can each of these lead to an unforgiving heart? **The more we practice/use something the more developed it becomes. Example: I have both directed and participated in musical presentations. Not only does one need to practice the music in order to sing the correct notes, one must also practice movement**

(choreography), smiling to the audience, not talking between numbers, standing in the correct shoes (even before dress rehearsals), hand placement, and how to stand still properly. The more each member does it, the better the group looks. It is like that with the members of Christ's body: not only do we have to know how to pray, study the Word, and know that it is with God that we have our salvation, we also have to tame the tongue and our hearts of stone, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgiving, for in doing such to each of the people God has placed in the world, we are doing it for and unto Christ.

How can each of these lead to an unforgiving heart? *Answers will vary.*

To whom do I go first when something is wrong — with myself—with a relationship with another? *I have heard people say, "I tried everything to correct it, and then I remembered to go to God."* Some people also tell all their friends their problems so they can work out proper solutions, hoping that someone — or some book — will have the best advice for them without going to God for direction.

### ***What Does God Say?***

**Proverbs 16:28** (NIV) A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.

**Proverbs 26:20** (NIV) Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down.

**Luke 6:31** (ESV) And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

The Golden Rule is one of the best-known of Jesus' sayings. If you and I follow/ed this rule, the world would be a very different place.

**Luke 6:37–38** (ESV) Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.

**James 3:2–12** (NIV) We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they

say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

**1 Thessalonians 1:6** (NIV) And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

**3 John 1:11** (NIV) Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.

**1 Peter 2:9** (NIV) But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

**1 Peter 5:7** (NIV) Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

*See also:*

**Psalms 55:22** (NIV) Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.

**Acts 26:18** (ESV)... to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

**Matthew 7:12** (ESV) So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

**I Corinthians 1:10** (NIV) I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

**Ephesians 1: 3–14** (NIV) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the

redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

**2 Timothy 2:14–19** (NIV) Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

### **What Does This Mean for Me?**

Why is it hard for me to confess sin(s) to another? **Answers will vary. Possible answers: guilt, shame, fear, indifference, embarrassment**  
 How do I react when in the middle of a gossip conversation? **Answers will vary. Possible answers: eager to hear the latest; "It's not gossip if it's the truth."; "It's not gossip if it's about me or my family."; uncomfortable; get up and walk away; confront the gossipier about how bad it is. Knowing truths about someone and sharing them with others can hurt feelings and reputations—even our own. It can put stumbling blocks in relationships, including our own relationships with others. Speaking poorly about yourself can also lead to frustration, feelings of inadequacy, anger, and isolation. It does not enable the body of Christ to function well, because one or more parts are hurting.**  
 How do I stop myself from speaking wrongly? **Answers will vary. Possible answers: bite my tongue; prayer; no reaction at all; tell someone else what you've heard as soon as you can;**

remember how I felt when someone did that to me; desire to help and not harm.

Do I speak in a demeaning way about myself?  
Answers will vary.

Always begin with God. Don't plan without Him. Like so many things in life, we must practice an action to make it our own. It may not be easy at first, but form a good habit. Practice God's plan; extend the plan not to speak adversely to others. Keep on practicing. We have to make sure we're walking with the Lord as we do and not making this a journey of pride ("Look how good I'm becoming!"). As I walked and continue to walk this path, the Holy Spirit nudges me when I'm tempted to say something wrong. I sometimes fail, but, with God's help, I press on and keep trying.

### Closing

Pray together Ephesians 3:20–21(paraphrase): *Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Sing a hymn of praise together before you leave: "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" (LSB #803) or "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" (LSB #790; LW #444; or TLH #39).