

LOVE THE LORD



Lesson Twenty-four - How does suppressed emotional pain harden my heart and lead me to sin?

August 2023

Summary of key points

- God is compassionate and tenderhearted. We are blessed when we follow His ways but we fall into calamity when we harden our hearts.
- We can harden our hearts as a result of pride. Pride before people is different from pride before God. Pride before God focuses on relying on ourselves.
- We can also harden our hearts as a coping mechanism against stressful emotions.
- Emotional suppression is the act of pushing our true emotions, thoughts, and memories out of our conscious awareness. We learn to hide, ignore, or suppress our emotions from childhood.
- Emotions can cause physical sensations. Some emotions are secondary to other primary emotions. Emotional maturity means that we need to be able to identify how we feel and know how to respond in a godly way, by choosing to respond with God's love.
- Subconscious emotional suppression can lead us to develop sinful patterns (with 3 real life examples).
- There are different reasons why we may think that it's better to suppress our emotions (with 6 examples).
- Emotional suppression robs us of joy and quenches the Holy Spirit's soft prompting in our hearts. It hinders our relationship with God and leads us to sinful responses.
- We need to give our emotional burdens to God and be freed to full emotional health through the power of the Holy Spirit in us (with guided prayer).

Watch the lesson online

https://youtu.be/2nCL3g6_SoI

Transcript

Welcome to lesson 24 of Love the Lord where we talk about the dangers of hardening our hearts in self defence against stressful emotions and how this can quench the Holy Spirit's voice in our hearts. Please

give yourself an hour and a half to go through this lesson and prepare something to write your reflections on.

We will begin by inviting God to speak to us personally through this study. Please follow along as we pray together. Click pause at any point if you need more time.

First, let's thank God for His perfect character and His perfect will for us.

Next, please tell Him about the things that have been stressful and ask for His help and guidance.

Let us put down our burdens of sin and confess the ways we have sinned against God and against others, and ask for His forgiveness.

Please confess the ways others have sinned against us, and forgive them in Jesus' name.

Next, let us ask God to purify and open our hearts to receive His teaching.

Finally, please repeat these words, "In Jesus' name, I silence all distractions and voices that are not from God. Amen."

Let's begin the lesson for today. How does suppressed emotional pain harden my heart and lead me to sin?

Father God is tenderhearted to His children. Psalm 103 says, "The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him." We see these qualities in Jesus also, as He ministered to people during His time on earth.

Psalm 103:8,13 The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. (NLT)

We are blessed when we fear God and follow His ways because we can trust that He is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love, but we fall into calamity when we hardened our hearts because we don't trust Him.

Proverbs 28:14 Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity. (NLT)

We often associate a hardened heart with pride and that is true. Pride before God, however, is different from pride before people. We are proud before people when we think we are better than them or we know more than they do.

Daniel 5:20 But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. (NIV)

Pride before God is not necessarily because we think we are better or wider than Him, but because we don't trust and rely on Him to lead us. We resist Him or dismiss His commands. Pride before God is often related to self-reliance, self-defence, self-protection, self-justification, self-determination and self-glorification. All these tendencies oppose the command of Jesus to deny ourselves in order to follow Him.

Let's read Luke chapter 9 verses 23 to 25 together, *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it... And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?"* (Luke 9:23-25 NLT) Following Jesus is all about self-denial. This takes humility.

Let's read 1 Peter chapter 5 verses 6 to 8 together, *"So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour."* (1 Peter 5:6-8 NLT) Notice that humility is related to giving God all our worries and cares, rather than relying on ourselves. These verses show us that if we don't, we will not stay alert to Satan's attacks.

John 10:10 The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. (NLT)

Following our basic emotional instincts and sinful nature only leads us into Satan's trap to devour and destroy us.

Some people harden their hearts against God because they have chosen to reject Him and embrace Satan, but many more harden their hearts against God out of a habitual pattern of self-reliance and self-protection. We often develop such defence mechanisms while we were little children, particularly during our first six years. During this period, our emotional capacity and brains were only beginning to develop, and we would have responded to many things based on our innate sinful nature and childish ways.

Here are some broad generalisations of how this can happen.

As babies and toddlers, we would have been easily overwhelmed by noisy, stressful environments or we were separated from our parents for long periods of time. We would have been especially sensitive to changes but have no way to process the things that we felt. This is because our nervous system would still

be developing. If our parents or families fought often or left us alone for long periods of time, we would have been left easily traumatised. At this stage, we already had the ability to feel fearful, frustrated, embarrassed, and even envious.

We were also able to empathise with others and pick up on their emotions, with the danger being that we can adopt their feelings as if they were our own. We can develop deep-seated fears from this time that we never consciously knew that we felt.

From two to four years, our imagination would have started to become active. We could anticipate and even imagine bad things happening but also have a sense that we are helpless to stop anything from happening. We also began to feel guilt and shame for the first time. Such feelings can make big impressions on one's self-image and self-worth, especially since the part of our brains responsible for courage are not fully developed yet. If our parents were not there to comfort and guide us, we could have formed immature views about ourselves.

From four years onwards, we start to become a little more independent and can express our emotions verbally. This is also a time where we would have become more conscious of favouritism and comparisons between other children and ourselves. We would have wanted to be accepted and might have become aggressive to gain attention or become redrawn. It is a time when we began to be more aware of feelings of anger, bitterness, resentment, and self-rejection.

We will now slow down here and allow you some time to review your own childhood, especially during these vulnerable years.

1. What were some significant family events that had a great impact on you and how you felt?
2. What thoughts did you form about yourself?
3. How did you decide to handle your emotions, going forward?

Invite the Holy Spirit to bring back any memory that He would like to address and heal. Please take as much time as you need and do not be afraid of uncomfortable emotions that may arise. List the events as the Lord shows them to you and take note of your emotions. We will refer to this list during the time of prayer at the end of this lesson. You are welcome to click pause at this point as you sit with the Holy Spirit, uninterrupted.

Welcome back. Were you able to list the emotions that you felt during the events you listed quite quickly?

Little children are capable of feeling many raw and powerful emotions but may not know how to identify or label them. This does not apply to children, but adults too. Just take a look at the physical sensations

that different emotions can cause in a person's body, as shown by these heat maps of 13 emotions studied by researchers at Aalto University. Emotions can send physical signals in our bodies.

What is even more challenging is that some emotions are a response to other emotions. Let's take anger for example. We can feel angry when we feel abandoned, accused, betrayed, helpless, threatened, or unpleasantly surprised. We don't become angry without reason, our anger is triggered by other emotions. Anger is a secondary emotion to primary emotions, such as feeling abandoned and betrayed.

There are other emotions that can be secondary emotions as well. Here are some examples.

Can you think of some possible primary emotions for anxiety? What about feeling overwhelmed?

Now, what about envy? What are some possible primary emotions for envy? We can become envious of other people when we feel inferior to them.

What about grief? We can feel grieved when we feel like we have been misunderstood by our closest loved ones.

Next, what about sadness? What are some primary emotions for sadness? We can feel sad when we feel overlooked by others.

And lastly, what about shame? We can feel ashamed when we feel small and unworthy.

Understanding ourselves is not just about identifying our secondary emotions. We understand ourselves better if we are able to go deeper to understand our core primary emotions. The challenge is that this is not always so straightforward because we often feel several emotions all at once.

What can be even more confusing for some people is when they have a sensitive spirit that picks up on other people's emotions. They can find it hard to distinguish between their own emotions versus the emotions from other people. This is a spiritual gift that God gives us so that we can empathise with how others feel and share their emotional burdens, quite literally.

Galatians 6:2 Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. (NLT)

It is a gift that reflects God's compassionate heart. Above all, the Bible instructs us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Without godly guidance, children may feel overwhelmed by all the emotions they pick up, some possibly not even their own.

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (ESV)

Being able to understand and react wisely to our emotions, however, is essential as a child of God, because God exercises great self-awareness and control over His emotions. He chooses to be led by love.

1 John 4:7-8 Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (NLT)

This is not to say that we don't feel all our other emotions. There is a season for every emotion under the sun. We will, and we should, feel all our emotions, but as children of God, we will make a conscious choice to always respond in love. This takes discipline and emotional maturity. When we fail to exercise emotional maturity and wisdom, we will fall into sins that grieve God and destroy our lives. Here are three examples adapted from real-life situations to demonstrate how this can happen.

Ecclesiastes 3:1,4,8 For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve ... A time to love and a time to hate... (NLT)

A Christian couple were preparing to get married. In preparing for their wedding day, they experienced several disagreements. One time, the young man became so enraged that he threw several objects at his beloved fiancée. Both were surprised by his over-reactions and quickly sought the counsel of another married, God-fearing couple. In a prayer time together, the Holy Spirit brought back a memory for the young man that caused him to believe, "I have to defend myself."

When he was a little boy, his father had publicly scolded and humiliated him for performing poorly in a sports competition. The man's fiancée had said some things that triggered all the suppressed anger and shame he had felt from that incident, although that was not her intention. Because the man had suppressed all his emotional pain from that time, he never healed from the deep hurt his father had caused him — especially since he had rationalised that his father loved him and wanted the best for him. Thankfully, the young man was willing to humble himself before God and be led into a time of forgiving his dad in Jesus' name. The couple eventually reconciled and proceeded with the wedding day. Today, they have two beautiful children.

In our second example, we cover a young lady who had been a Christian for several years but felt that she could not give up her promiscuous lifestyle. She spent most of her weekends living wild even though she knew that this was not pleasing to her Father in heaven. But she couldn't find the strength or the conviction to stop because it was very important to her that she could live freely.

Eventually, through a time of prayer, the Holy Spirit led her to recognise how she had felt extremely manipulated and controlled by her ultra-strict parents growing up. She felt that she never had her own

voice or was allowed to make any decisions of her own. Her promiscuous lifestyle was her way of rebelling against and breaking free from any form of control. As she forgave her parents as well as herself in Jesus' name, she was finally able to turn away from that lifestyle. Today, she is married to a Christian man and serving the Lord.

In our third example, a middle-aged Christian man was deeply addicted to alcohol and had been trying to stop for decades. Each time he succeeded in turning away from stopping, he would slip right back into drinking, because he subconsciously believed that even if he tried his best, it would be useless at the end.

During a time of prayer, the Holy Spirit showed the man a memory of how his father had abruptly left the family when his dad was needed the most. As a boy, he had tried to be on his best behaviour in order to keep his dad from leaving. When that didn't work, he began to think that there was no point in trying to do the right thing for anyone. Therefore, he subconsciously kept sabotaging his own efforts to stop drinking. As he forgave his dad and himself in Jesus' name, he was able to slowly come off alcohol and turn to God for comfort in all areas of his life.

These three examples give us a deeper appreciation of what the apostle Paul tried to explain in Romans chapter 7 verses 18 to 20. Let's read it together, *"And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it."* (Romans 7:18-20 NLT)

The three Christians we described were enslaved to their sinful natures because they were not aware of the inner emotional workings of their hearts. It was only when they humbled themselves and made time to seek the Holy Spirit for the truth that they received much needed revelation, breakthrough and healing. This often involves releasing forgiveness to those who have hurt us or not cared for us enough to help us feel secure and loved. Thankfully, God has sent us the Holy Spirit to heal our invisible wounds.

Let's read this description of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah chapter 61 verses 1 to 2 together, *"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favor has come..."* (Isaiah 61:1-2 NLT)

The Holy Spirit comforted the broken hearts of the three Christians in our examples, and freed them from bondage to their sinful nature as they humbled themselves and forgave those who had caused them deep emotional pain and trauma. They would not have received such freedom and reconciliation with God and other people if they had hardened their hearts.

A hardened heart will resist turning to God and receiving His healing. A hardened heart has difficulty seeing God and hearing the Holy Spirit's promptings. A hardened heart cannot understand God's good and perfect will for us.

Matthew 13:15 For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes— so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.’ (NLT)

When our hearts are tender and compassionate, we can have genuine fellowship with the Holy Spirit, through whom we hear God’s voice, receive words of knowledge, see visions, and dream prophetic dreams. A hardened heart, on the other hand, quenches the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 2:1 Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? (NLT)

In this lesson, we will look at how emotional suppression hardens our hearts. This is where we push unwanted emotions, thoughts, and memories out of our conscious awareness, as the people in our three examples did, to their own destruction.

Emotional suppression is a coping mechanism we use when we are afraid to acknowledge how we truly feel inside and avoid the emotional discomfort or turmoil. We deny, ignore, or forcefully push down our emotions. We may also try to use our minds to rationalise away our feelings. This coping mechanism robs us of truly understanding our own hearts and ultimately, ourselves.

Godly emotional self control, however, is not led by fear. It means that we recognise how we feel inside but have learnt not to react to everything based on our emotions. We will acknowledge and accept our true emotions, and go to God for comfort, counsel, and correction. In this way, we get to understand God’s heart as the Holy Spirit gives us the wisdom to react and express ourselves wisely according to God’s will.

The Bible shows us that “there is a time and a way for everything, even when a person is in trouble.” Emotional suppression, however, doesn’t allow ourselves the time or any way to feel or express anything.

Ecclesiastes 8:5-6 ... Those who are wise will find a time and a way to do what is right, for there is a time and a way for everything, even when a person is in trouble. (NLT)

1. **Social pressure:** We were all born with an inborn instinct to express our feelings very authentically but depending on where we come from, however, we can soon learn that some emotions are considered socially acceptable and some are not. So we learn to hide how we really feel inside and project a socially acceptable facade.

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2. **Trauma:** Other times, we go through such painful or traumatic events in our childhood that the only way to survive is to decide to not feel anything at all. Perhaps we were frequently abused, punished, or bullied. Or perhaps we were neglected or felt deeply unloved. We had wanted to forget the pain of our emotions but only pushed all of it deeper inside us.
 3. **Judgement:** We may have judged our parents for being hysterical, melodramatic, and a source of great embarrassment in public. So we made an inner vow to never be “emotional” like them but ended up at the other extreme of not feeling anything at all.
 4. **Peace-keeping:** We may have also learnt to be the un-emotional one at home in an effort to keep the peace during a time where things were especially unstable, unpredictable, and chaotic.
 5. **Strict upbringing:** Another way we learn to mute our emotions is when we grow up in homes with very strict discipline, where children are told to be seen but never heard. We were expected to be quiet and obedient to our elders, regardless of our own desires or feelings. Because we were never encouraged to express our own emotions, we have learnt to ignore and push them down.
 6. **Self-sacrifice:** Sometimes we suppress our true emotions because we had no choice. Perhaps we had to give up our childhood dreams or began to work at a young age in order to bring in some income. We pushed down our true desires and feelings as a sacrifice for our families.

Remember the three examples from earlier in this lesson? Can you identify the sources of their emotional suppression? Our unhealed suppressed emotions and pain can lead us down paths of sinful behaviour, even though that was the way we have learnt to cope, given our circumstances.

What about you? Do any of these describe your personal experiences? Do you notice any people that you might need to forgive or patterns you might need to renounce? Please click pause here and take as much time as you need to reflect.

Welcome back. The more we suffocate our emotions, the more our hearts go numb and lifeless.

Here is a description of how it can end up feeling for us.

We will find that we go through life without emotional highs or lows. There seems to be a sort of deadness inside us. Some people describe this as feeling numb. We don't know what we truly feel and don't have much enthusiasm for anything. We find it hard to celebrate with others when they are excited and rejoicing. Life, in general, feels wearisome and tiresome. We feel stuck and directionless.

There is an undercurrent of restlessness, low level anxiety, and even despair, and the stress of bottled up emotions can lead to tension in our bodies, manifesting as tightness in the chest, body aches, frequent sighing, insomnia, just to give some examples.

As discussed in earlier lessons, the Holy Spirit comes to live in our hearts and convict us to repent of our sins. Conviction is an emotional response in our hearts. The Holy Spirit's conviction is a soft prompting that can feel as soft as a feather brushing against our skin, just to give an example. A hardened heart will not be sensitive to sense such promptings.

John 16:8 And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. (NLT)

Therefore, the Holy Spirit tells us not to harden our hearts, because a hardened heart will easily turn away from God and refuse to do that He tells us to do.

Hebrews 3:7-8,10 That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested me in the wilderness. So I was angry with them, and I said, 'Their hearts always turn away from me. They refuse to do what I tell them.' (NLT)

1. When we suppress our emotions and harden our hearts, we also suppress God's voice and His work in our hearts.
2. It also makes it harder for us to sense the inflow of God's love.
3. One consequence is that we may know that God loves us intellectually but lack the conviction on a heart level.
4. This will affect our ability to trust Him and therefore, also our faith and our prayer life.
5. A hardened heart is why some people can gravitate towards addictive or self-destructive behaviours just to feel some sort of "high".
6. Or why some people burst out in anger when holding in all their emotions becomes too much.

Unfortunately, emotional suppression is more common than we realise.

1. When we deny our true feelings, we end up lying — both to ourselves and to others.
2. We may not realise it but we are playing into Satan's hands because Satan is the father of lies.
3. God can use our emotions to guide our conscience and to draw us closer to Him, but if we mute our hearts, we stifle our conscience and muffle God's voice. Have you ever noticed how serial killers appear unable to empathise with others and show no remorse?
4. We need our emotional bearings in order to get a sense of what is good and evil. If we only rely on our minds, we would struggle when temptations come our way, because Satan is a deceiver. Satan will fill our minds with lies and arguments about why it is okay to sin once in a while. Satan will bombard us with such arguments until we give in.

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5. Our emotions also show us who we are as individuals, what we like or dislike. God did not create us to be unemotional human beings that behave like robots. But the more we deny our true feelings, the more we lose a sense of who we truly are.
 6. We reject a large part of what makes us unique.
 7. And when we make a practice of rejecting ourselves, we may begin to fear that God will also reject us because we think He will not accept our true emotions. This, obviously, is not true.

Father God knows every heart and already knows everything we feel anyway. He will not turn us away, no matter what emotional state we are in. God is our perfect Father who tenderly listens to us when we are feeling ashamed, distraught, confused, angry, sad, guilty, overwhelmed, or afraid. Thank God that there is no need to be politically correct with our Heavenly Father.

Psalm 139:1-2,7 O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! (NLT)

We see an example of this in King David's life.

When David and his 600 men were away in a battle, the Amalekites raided their town, burnt it down, and carried away everything they had, including their wives and children. When David and his men returned and realised what had happened, they did not immediately go after the raiders — like what we might see in the movies.

Instead, they first “wept until they could weep no more.” Most people might consider this to be a sign of weakness and a huge waste of time — after all, their attackers were getting away — but this is exactly what the battle-hardened warriors did. They did not react impulsively to their emotions, instead they faced their very raw emotions head on.

It was only after they had done so that David went to ask God if they should go after the attackers. This again might be seen as very strange, given that our logical response would have been “of course!”

God honoured David's humble heart to seek Him in every circumstance, and instructed David to go after their attackers because God Himself would ensure that they'd recover everything and everyone safely. Only then did David and his men head out.

David gives us a good example of emotional self control.

He did not push down his emotions or react impulsively. Instead he acknowledged and felt the full force of his emotions and wept. Then he prayed and asked God for his next steps. It is only when God assured him that He would go with him that David went after the attackers.

We see that David went to God with his heavy emotional burdens first and was therefore able to pray and hear from God clearly. He didn't rely on his own understanding or feelings. He trusted God to teach him what to do next.

This is an example of someone who really loved God with all his heart. It is also an example of someone with good emotional self discipline. Will we learn to do the same as well?

As David said in Psalm 55, we can cry out to God in our distress, and trust that God will hear and take care of us. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall.

Psalm 55:17, 22 Morning, noon, and night I cry out in my distress, and the Lord hears my voice. Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall. (NLT)

Let us now go into a time of prayer before our Heavenly Father. Please refer to the list of events that you had prepared earlier in this lesson, together with the emotions you had identified.

Remember that Your heavenly father is compassionate, tenderhearted, and wants to hear you. Take this time to give Him all your emotional burdens and allow Him to heal the broken pieces in your heart and breathe new life into you. Please do not allow Satan to tempt you away from this precious time before your Heavenly Father. Click pause at any point if you need more time.

First, confess the emotions you felt during those childhood events. Did you feel abandoned, betrayed, belittled, manipulated, afraid, terrified, or confused? Give God all your burdens, just like David did.

Next, invite Jesus to come comfort you. As you sit before Him in His presence, begin to receive His comfort and peace.

Next, ask Jesus if there were any lies you had believed. What is His Spirit revealing to you? Did you believe, "no one will ever love me?" "No one will ever understand me?" "No one will ever come to my aid?" "No one wants to help me?" "No one wants to listen to me?" "I'm ugly?" "I'm nothing?" "I will never be successful?" "I came to earth for nothing?" "I should not be alive?" Let God reveal the lies to you.

Now, let us take the time to renounce all these lies and accusations. They are not from God. In fact, you can see, "I am who God made me to be, I can do whatever God says I can do. I am not defined by what has happened to me. I am defined purely by what God says about me." Make sure that you announce each lie, one by one, in Jesus' powerful name. This will break its curse over your heart, mind, and soul.

Next, ask Jesus who He wants you to forgive. Does He want you to forgive a group of people, someone in particular, or even yourself? Who do you still hold a grudge towards? Allow the Holy Spirit to search your heart and show you.

Now, please forgive them or even yourself and release justice back to Jesus. You can pray, “Jesus, just as You have forgiven me, I forgive them or myself too.”

Now, ask Jesus to restore your heart to full health and fullness. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with the Father’s love, and ask God what He thinks of you.

Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to teach and guide you with your emotions, going forward. Ask for His forgiveness for quenching His voice in the past by hardening your heart.

God is faithful and He will lead your heart to safety when you learn to trust Him with all your heart.

We have now come to the end of today's lesson. Here are the reflection questions for you to prepare your answers to before your small group meeting as well as a testimony to watch. We pray that you will be blessed. See you next time.

Time for reflection

1. What emotions have you rejected in the past?
2. How do you react when you feel those emotions?
3. What bad fruit comes out of emotional suppression?

Watch the testimony for this lesson



Personal notes