



# Shaping theFuture

May 2026 ■ 26-5

Lutheran Education Association ■ [lea.org](http://lea.org)

## How Should I Respond to the Ninevites in My School?

By Mark Rockenbach

**T**he elementary school bell rang, and children flooded the halls, collecting items from their lockers and making their way to the parent pickup lane outside. The parent pickup lane operated like a well-oiled machine. School staff directed the flow of traffic while parents seamlessly drove up, stopped, picked up their children, and made their way out of the school parking lot. However, the newly elected president of the Parent Teacher Association decided this was an ideal time to encourage parents to volunteer for the upcoming school fair. Linda aimlessly weaved between cars, aggressively knocking on windows. Once she got the attention of the driver, she promptly launched into her spiel to get parents to volunteer for the school fair. *Knock, knock, knock.* “Hey, I’m going to sign you up for the food stand from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.” Linda then stepped in front of a car to stop it from leaving. “I have three spots open to supervise the bounce house during the fair. Which one should I put you down for?” She rushed over to another car while kids were jumping into the back seat “This is a reminder that you are signed up to make three dozen cookies for the fair. Drop them off at 8 a.m.



©iStock/Inside Creative House

**The people of Nineveh were notorious for their brutality, idolatry, violence, immorality, terror, and pillaging.**

sharp!” Linda’s overzealous behavior was grinding gears among everyone in the parent pickup lane.

Linda’s solicitation for volunteers during the parent pickup lane continued throughout the entire week. The principal’s office was flooded with emails, phone calls, and in-person complaints about Linda and her aggressive approach. However, everything came to a head on Friday when Linda approached Mary’s car.

Mary had been the Parent Teacher Association president for the past two years. Linda had campaigned against her and was elected president by a slim majority. The tension between the two moms was already high, but things were about to go nuclear. Mary had stopped her car in front of the school doors. Normally, a teacher would open the car door and usher the children into the parent's vehicle. On this day, Linda opened the car door and popped her head inside. "Mary! I'm glad I caught you. I signed you up to manage the cake walk at the school fair. Your shift will be..." Before Linda could finish her sentence, Mary put her car into park, got out, rushed around to the passenger side, pointed her finger in Linda's face, and shouted, "You don't get to boss me around. You won't be seeing me at your stupid fair. And get your (CENSORED EXPLETIVE) self out of the parent pickup lane!"

The school principal and pastor arranged a meeting with Linda. They compassionately discussed the situation and encouraged her to apologize. Linda then sent an email to the teachers, staff, and parents of the school. In the email, she confessed that she had not obtained permission to solicit volunteers during parent pickup after school. She acknowledged that this caused frustration and conflict and asked for forgiveness.

A few days after the email was sent, Mary was in the church office dropping off items for the church food drive. The pastor asked for



©iStock/Maria Voronovich

---

**“She is manipulating parents to do her dirty work at the school fair. What an evil woman! There is no forgiveness for such wickedness!”**

a moment of her time. “Did you receive the email from Linda asking for forgiveness?” Without hesitation, Mary replied, “I will never forgive her! She manipulated parents to get elected as president of the Parent Teacher Association and now she is manipulating parents to do her dirty work at the school fair. What an evil woman! There is no forgiveness for such wickedness!”



## Something unfathomable, incredible, spectacular, and radical took place. God forgave them. He did not hold their sins against them.

Jonah felt the same way about the Ninevites. The people of Nineveh were notorious for their brutality, idolatry, violence, immorality, terror, and pillaging. Jonah believed the Ninevites were unforgivable people and did not deserve God's mercy. Yet, God was sending Jonah to Nineveh.

“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before Me” (Jonah 1:2). Jonah refused to listen to the Lord. Instead, he bought a ticket and boarded a ship to Tarshish which is in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Jonah and the crew experienced a violent storm that only stopped once they threw Jonah overboard. Jonah was swallowed by a large fish. After three days in the belly of this fish, he was spit up onto the shore. Only then did Jonah go to Nineveh and preach, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jonah 3:4).

Upon hearing Jonah's brief sermon, the Ninevites repented. All the people, including the king, put on sackcloth, sat in ashes, and called upon God to relent and turn His anger away from them. At that moment, something unfathomable, incredible, spectacular, and radical took place. God forgave them. He did not hold their sins against them.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a forgiving God who has fulfilled all His promises of mercy through His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul proclaimed to the church in Rome, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). He also proclaimed to the church in Corinth, “In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus said, “I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

When the Ninevites repented, God forgave them. However, Jonah pouted in disagreement.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster” (Jonah 4:2).

Jonah did not want God to forgive the Ninevites because he believed the Ninevites were unforgivable because of their detestable sins.

Mary had concluded the same thing about Linda. Mary determined that Linda was unforgivable because of her detestable sins.

### **Who is the Ninevite in your life?**

Which teacher, student, parent, or administrator, have you determined to be unforgivable?

There is a popular saying: “Unforgiveness is the poison you drink, hoping the other person will die.” When you refuse to forgive the sins of others, you fail to understand how forgiven you are in Christ. Mary struggled to forgive Linda because she had forgotten the forgiveness that was hers in Christ. A year ago, Mary was struggling to fulfill all the promises she had made to her family, her work, and her responsibilities as president of the Parent Teacher Association. When she fell short her sins were not held against her but were forgiven because of Jesus. Her husband and fellow school parents forgave her and volunteered to help with the Parent Teacher Association.



©Stock/Nice, Blue

**“Unforgiveness is the poison you drink, hoping the other person will die.”**

### **What sins has God forgiven in your life?**

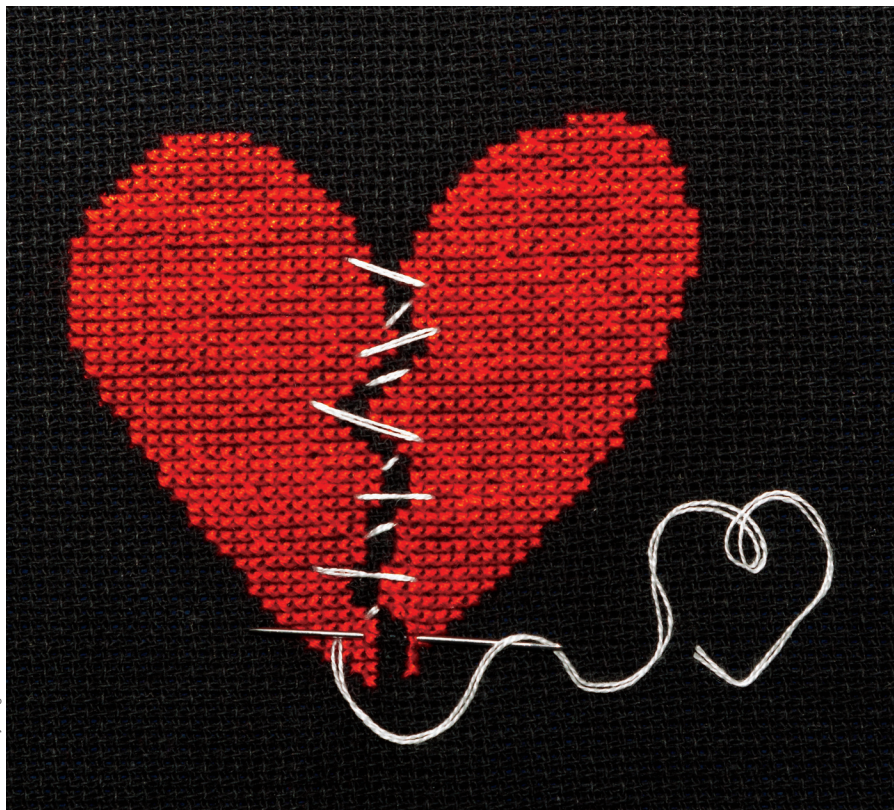
Against whom have you sinned while living among your neighbors? Has God or your neighbors treated you like a Ninevite? Imagine how hopeless you would feel if God declared you unforgivable. According to Romans 6:23a, “For the wages of sin is death.” Unforgivable people deserve death. You deserve death. The Ninevites deserved death. Linda and Mary deserve death. Yet something unfathomable, incredible, spectacular, and radical took place: “But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). The Ninevites, and all who confess and repent of their sins are forgiven. Linda was forgiven by God. Additionally, many at the school also spoke words of forgiveness to her.

After many conversations with the pastor, Mary said, “I know I need to forgive and forget. But I can’t forget what Linda said and did. If I can’t forget it, I won’t be able to forgive it.” This is a common misunderstanding of forgiveness. A popular phrase that many live by is, “You need to forgive and forget.” They often refer to the Bible passage, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). Many interpret this passage as “You need to forgive and forget.” However, this is a misinterpretation of the passage. I propose this translation: “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will no longer take action against their sin.”

God has not forgotten the sins of the past. He recorded the sin of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), the sin of Abraham (Genesis 12), the sin of Moses (Numbers 20), the sin of King David (2 Samuel 11-12), and the sin of the disciples (Mark 9). The Bible documents the sins of God’s people. God did not forget how the Israelites repeatedly sinned against Him through a recurring cycle of disobedience and idolatry. But God does not act upon those sins as they deserve. Instead, God does something unfathomable, incredible, spectacular, and radical! God forgives! When we remember these sins, we remember them as forgiven by God.

“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Psalm 32:1).

“As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12).



©Stock/Natalija Griget

**“I will forgive their iniquity, and I will no longer take action against their sin.”**

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

The key to forgiving others lies in knowing how forgiven we are in Christ. Mary was able to forgive Linda because God in Christ had forgiven her. The Ninevite is forgivable because of the blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7).



©iStock/Antonio Guillem



**Dr. Mark Rockenbach** is a professor of practical theology at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, MO. He has degrees in theology, counseling, and psychology. He co-wrote the book “Unforgivable? How God’s Forgiveness Transforms Our Lives.”

Quoted Scripture: ESV® and NIV

## Review, Reflect, Resolve

- Who is the Ninevite in your life?
- What has God done for the Ninevites?
- How does God want you to treat the Ninevite in your life?



**Shaping the Future** is published monthly by Lutheran Education Association and distributed to members of LEA. All material included in **Shaping the Future** is the property of Lutheran Education Association and may not be reproduced without permission.

Copyright © 2026 Lutheran Education Association, 7400 Augusta Street, River Forest, IL 60305-1499

**Website:** [www.lea.org](http://www.lea.org) **Email:** [lea@lea.org](mailto:lea@lea.org)

Executive Director: Thomas Wrege, Ed.D.  
 Executive Director Emeritus: Jonathan C. Laabs, Ed.D.  
 Editor Emeritus: Ed Grube  
 Director of Educational Resources: Denise Rice  
 Director of Member Services: Julie Klopke  
 Technology Project Director: Paul Piel  
 Design: Kathryn Brewer

To submit copy, letters to the editor or media for review, contact Paul Piel at [ppiel@gmail.com](mailto:ppiel@gmail.com).

We look forward to hearing from you! Send your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions for future STF topics to [lea@lea.org](mailto:lea@lea.org). LEA does not endorse articles cited in **Shaping the Future**. We provide links to connect members with information they might find useful.