

BLESS YOUR HEART

Title: Part 1 – “God Doesn't Pity You”

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As you guys are grabbing a seat would you help me welcome everyone joining us online or on our app later in the week! We think you're part of our church family and we want you to know we are FOR you. If there's any way we can pray for you or walk alongside you, please let us know.

SO, today we are beginning a new collection of messages that I have been looking forward to for a few weeks now. This speaks to something we all wrestle with, but you probably didn't even know there was an alternative! How's that for a tease?

Let's begin with the verses that will anchor us for the next 5-weeks. **Ezekiel 36:26, 2 Corinthians 5:17**, and **Luke 8:15**. I don't want to give anyone carpal tunnel, so instead of flipping or scrolling on your Bible or phone to find all these, let's just look at them together on the screens. First the prophet Ezekiel speaking for God says:

²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Now the Apostle Paul around 700 years later, after Jesus death and resurrection writes:

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

That “new” being what Ezekiel prophesied about. Finally, Jesus in His own words. Luke chapter 8, verse 15. This is Jesus speaking in the Parable of the Sower:

¹⁵ But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

We're going to unpack this, but I wanted you to see it with your own eyes first.

AS I mentioned we are beginning a new 5-week collection of messages called, you ready for this: **“ Bless Your Heart.”**

Everyone say, “*Bless Your Heart.*” Now say it like a Southerner! Some of you cringed when you said that because you know what that phrase really means in the South! In case you are unfamiliar with this colorful phrase. Let me paint a picture for you:

You're at a family gathering, maybe a Super Bowl Party, and your 21-year-old cousin shows up wearing the most questionable outfit you've ever seen. You didn't even know they sold NFL gear that scandalous. Now what does your sweet aunt say as she walks by? *"Well, bless your heart..."* OR maybe you're at church—this has never happened here, but hypothetically—someone shares an opinion that is just... wildly off base. And what does everybody say as soon as that person walks away? *"Well, bless their heart..."* OR how about this one. You tell someone about your big dream, your passion project, the thing you've always wanted to do, and they look at you with that patronizing smile and say, *"Well bless your heart, honey. That's sweet."*

"Bless your heart" is the South's favorite weapon of passive-aggressive judgment! It's NEVER actually a compliment, is it? It's code for:

- You're a disaster, but I'm too polite to say it directly.
- I feel sorry for you, you poor naïve thing.
- You tried your best, but you're still a hopeless mess.
- You're an idiot, but I was raised better than to call you one.

Right? It's always delivered with this tone of pity. This condescension. This head-shaking disappointment wrapped up in Southern charm.

AND HERE'S THE PROBLEM—and this is why we need to talk about this—I think a lot of us have assumed that's how God talks about us too! We think when God looks at our mess, our struggles, our failures, our secret sins, our broken relationships, our anxiety, our depression, our addictions... we think He's up in heaven going, "Bless their heart, they're trying so hard, but they're still such a wreck..." Like He's pitying us. He's tolerating us. He's putting up with our desperately wicked hearts while shaking His head in divine disappointment, just waiting for us to mess up again.

But what if we've got it completely backwards?

What if when God says, "Bless your heart," He doesn't mean it like your passive-aggressive aunt from Texas. What if He means: "I'm about to TRANSFORM your heart. I'm about to give you a NEW heart. I'm about to take that stone-cold, dead, broken heart and REPLACE it with a heart of flesh! I'm about to perform spiritual open-heart surgery on you, and when I'm done, you will be a new creation!"

That's not pity, that's not condescension, that's not God rolling His eyes at your mess. That's God rolling up His sleeves to give you a brand-new identity! AND that's what we are going to unpack over the next 5 weeks together.

Today, I want to preach a message I'm calling:

God Doesn't Pity You

And here's where we need to start. Because if we don't address this lie head-on, nothing else I say over the next few weeks is going to make sense. But most of us have been taught—whether explicitly or implicitly—that even after we become Christians, our hearts are still fundamentally wicked. Desperately wicked. Deceitful above all things. Untrustworthy. A tool of the enemy. The desires of your heart are evil.

How many of you have heard this?

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can understand it?

That's Jeremiah 17:9, and you've been told that verse describes your heart. My heart. This is why as Christians we don't follow our heart... Because even though Jesus saved you, even though you've been forgiven, even though you go to church and read your Bible and try your best—deep down, at your core, your heart is still wicked.

And if that's true—if your heart really IS desperately wicked—then of course you can't trust your desires! Of course you have to suppress your passions! Of course you second-guess every motivation! Because your heart is the enemy! Your heart is trying to destroy you and sabotage the work of the Holy Spirit!

So, what do we do? We live in this constant state of suspicion toward ourselves. We apologize for existing. We hide who we really are. We're afraid to be fully alive because we think being fully alive means being fully wicked.

Here's what's fascinating though. Jesus Himself tells a parable that completely contradicts this idea that our hearts are only wicked. Maybe you have heard the Parable of the Sower? Jesus told a story about a farmer (who is not very good at his job from our perspective) because he goes out and scatters seed, and it falls on four different types of soil. Some falls on the **PATH** and gets eaten by birds. Some falls on **ROCKY** ground and can't take root. Some falls among **THORNS** and gets choked out.

You see what I mean about not being very good at his job. He scatters seed everywhere! We later learn the seed represents the Word of God. BUT some seed falls on **GOOD** soil. And what does Jesus say about that good soil? Luke 8:15—we read it a minute ago—Jesus says:

¹⁵ But the seed on good soil stands for those with a **NOBLE** and **GOOD HEART**, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Did you catch that? Jesus—not me, not some self-help guru, but JESUS—explicitly uses the words “noble and good” to describe the heart of a believer.

Noble and GOOD! Not “desperately wicked but trying really hard.” Not “still fundamentally broken but covered by grace.” NOBLE and GOOD! Come on, how many of you would ever dare describe your heart as “noble” and “good”? BUT Jesus says there are people with good hearts. And when the Word of God falls on that good soil—that noble and good heart—it takes root, it grows, it produces fruit.

So, which is it? Is your heart desperately wicked like we've been taught? Or is it noble and good like Jesus said? You can't have it both ways.

Here's what happens when we believe our hearts are fundamentally wicked even after salvation: we try to manage the mess. We develop what I call “behavior modification Christianity” or “sin management theology.” Right? How do I control this wicked heart? How do I keep it in check? How do I make sure it doesn't destroy me?

So, we create rules. Systems. Accountability groups where we confess the same sins over and over again. We white-knuckle our way through temptation. We try to deny every desire. We suppress every passion. We think if we can just control our behavior enough, if we can just manage our sin effectively enough, if we can just keep our wicked hearts on a short enough leash, THEN we'll be okay.

But here's the problem: It doesn't work. Not long-term anyway! Behavior modification might create temporary change, but it never produces lasting transformation.

Because if you believe your heart is the enemy, then you spend all your energy fighting against yourself. And that's exhausting! That's why so many Christians burn out. That's why people walk away from faith. Not because they stopped believing in Jesus, but because they got tired of fighting a civil war inside themselves.

You try to white-knuckle your way through porn addiction, but it keeps coming back. You try to force yourself to be more patient with your kids, but you keep losing your temper. You try to manufacture joy and peace and contentment, but underneath it all you feel empty.

And every time you fail—every time the behavior modification doesn't hold—you think, “See! That's my heart. That's proof I'm still desperately wicked. God tolerates me, but He doesn't delight in me. He saved me, but He doesn't actually LIKE me.”

And this creates a cycle that's so destructive:

1. You believe your heart is wicked.
2. So, you try to control your behavior through rules and willpower.
3. But you fail (because behavior modification doesn't address the heart).
4. So, you feel shame and guilt.
5. Which confirms your belief that your heart is wicked.
6. So, you try harder to control your behavior.
7. But you fail again...

And round and round you go. Getting more exhausted. More discouraged. More convinced that you're just not cut out for this Christian life.

Some of you are living in that cycle right now. You've been on that hamster wheel for years. Maybe decades. And you're wondering, "Is this really what Jesus meant by abundant life? Is this really what it means to follow Him? Because if this is it, I don't know how much longer I can keep going."

Listen to me carefully: That is a LIE from the pit of hell!

AND it's a lie that has crippled more Christians, destroyed more joy, and robbed more people of the abundant life Jesus came to give than maybe any other theological error in the modern church.

Because here's what that lie does: It makes God's promises feel like cruel jokes. God says:

- "I want to give you abundant life!" And you think, "Yeah, but my heart is wicked, so I'll probably mess that up."
- God says, "I have plans to prosper you!" And you think, "Sure, but my heart will sabotage those plans."
- God says, "You're my beloved child!" And you think, "Yeah, but if You really knew my heart, You wouldn't say that."

Do you see what's happening? The lie about your wicked heart becomes a barrier between you and every beautiful thing God wants to give you. AND I'm here to tell you today: It's time to stop believing that lie!

Here is the truth I hope you walk away from here understanding today:

You got a new heart (not just a forgiven one).

AND I'll prove it to you. Let's go back to Ezekiel 36 for a minute. Look at what God promises over 600 years before Jesus. God says:

²⁶ I will give you a NEW heart and put a NEW spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees.

Here's the question we have to wrestle with: Is God talking about renovation or replacement?

Is He saying, "I'm going to take your old, wicked heart and try to make it a little better"? Or is He saying, "I'm throwing out your old heart completely and giving you a brand-new one"?

The answer is right there in the text: He REMOVES the old heart. He GIVES a new heart. This isn't renovation, church. This is REPLACEMENT. This isn't a tune-up. This is a TRANSPLANT.

The Hebrew word for "new" here doesn't mean "refurbished." It doesn't mean "slightly improved." It means brand new. Fresh. Like a baby who's just been born. For the ancient Jews when the moon went through its cycle and it disappeared for 3 days every month and then reappeared they believed it was a "NEW" moon. Same word used here in Ezekiel 36.

God is saying, "I'm not patching up your old heart. I'm giving you a NEW heart. A heart that's alive. Responsive. Good. A heart with my DNA at its core." Which is why the Apostle Paul could come along after Jesus and say in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the NEW creation has come: The old has gone, the NEW is here!

Paul doesn't say, "The old has been forgiven but it's still hanging around making you miserable." He says the old has GONE. Past tense! Done! Finished! AND something NEW has come. A new creation. A new identity. A new heart.

SO, here's what I need you to understand, and this might be the most important thing I say all day:

When you placed your faith in Jesus, you didn't just get forgiveness for your sins. You got a complete heart transplant.

Your old heart—that stone-cold, dead, rebellious heart that Jeremiah 17:9 describes—that heart died with Christ on the cross. And by faith you got a new heart—a heart of flesh, a heart that's alive, a heart that actually wants what God wants—that heart was resurrected with Christ when He rose from the grave.

Meaning you're not a sinner trying really hard to be good. You're a SAINT learning to live from who you already are. Let me say it again because that was a nugget. You're not a sinner trying really hard to be good. You're a saint—a holy one, a new creation—learning to live from who you already are.

That's different isn't it?

Now, I know what some of you are thinking: "But Pastor, I still struggle with sin. I still mess up. I still have bad days where I don't feel very 'new creation-y.' Are you saying I'm like holy now? Because that doesn't match my experience." Come on be honest, who had that thought as I was talking?

AND you are right; this doesn't match our experience and that is where we need to make a crucial distinction that the Bible makes but we often miss.

When Scripture talks about your ongoing struggle with sin after salvation, it's not talking about your HEART. It's talking about your FLESH. Look at Romans 7:18. Paul says this:

¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my **FLESH**. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

Did you catch that? Paul distinguishes himself from his flesh. He says, "Nothing good dwells in me—THAT IS, in my flesh." He's saying, "The flesh? Yeah, that's still a problem. But the flesh is not WHO I AM. The flesh is what's being defeated as I grow in Christ."

Here's the difference:

Your HEART = your core identity, who you fundamentally are (good, new, alive).

Your FLESH = remaining sinful patterns, habits, inclinations (being defeated).

Think of it like this: Imagine you won a dream house in a contest. Brand new, never been lived in, beautiful location, luxury finishes—it's yours now, legally and fully. But when you unlock the doors for the first time you discover that when the construction crews left, they

never cleaned up! SO, even though the house is brand new and spectacular, there is trash and dust and debris from construction everywhere. New house, it is in your name, but there's still junk that needs to be cleaned out.

That's what theologians call sanctification. It's not God trying to make your fundamentally wicked heart a little less wicked. It's God cleaning out the junk from your fundamentally good heart so you can live in the fullness of who you already are.

Your heart isn't the problem. The flesh attacking your heart is the problem. AND that changes everything about how you fight.

Because when you believe your heart is wicked, you're constantly at war with yourself. And that's a war you can't win. But when you understand your heart is good and the flesh is the enemy, now you're fighting for who you truly are. In other words:

You're fighting FROM victory, not FOR victory!

BUT what difference does this actually make in your daily life? Is this just theological hair-splitting, or does it change how you live on a Tuesday afternoon when life is falling apart? Let me give you three massive shifts that happen when you truly believe that God has blessed your heart:

1. Your desires become compass points, not landmines.

When you believe your heart is wicked, you're terrified of your desires. You want something? That's probably sin. You're passionate about something? That's probably pride. You dream about something? That's probably selfish ambition.

So, you spend your whole life trying NOT to want things. Trying to kill your desires. Trying to become some emotionless robot who only does "spiritual" things and never gets excited about anything. AND you end up miserable. And numb. And you call it "holiness."

But here's what happens when you believe you have a good heart: your deepest desires—not your surface cravings, but the longings underneath the longings—those become clues to your calling. God put those desires there! They're breadcrumbs He's leaving to lead you to your purpose!

Now, I'm not saying every desire you have is pure and perfect and should be followed without discernment. We still need Scripture. We still need community. We still need the Holy Spirit's guidance. BUT your core desires, the things that make you come alive, the

passions that won't go away no matter how hard you try to suppress them, those are FROM God, not AGAINST God.

Because God gave you His heart. It is no longer I who live but... what does Paul say? Christ in me! And His heart is full of desire—desire for beauty, for justice, for connection, for creativity, for restoration.

So, stop apologizing for what makes you come alive. Here's another way this matters:

2. Sin becomes acting against your nature, not revealing it.

This is huge. When you believe your heart is wicked, sin makes sense. Of course you sin—that's just who you are! Your wicked heart is doing what wicked hearts do.

BUT when you believe your heart is new and good, sin becomes a violation of who you are. It's not your heart operating normally. It's your heart being attacked by the old flesh.

Think about Romans 7:14-15. This is how the Message paraphrases what Paul famously said:

¹⁴ Yes. I'm full of myself—after all, I've spent a long time in sin's prison. ¹⁵ What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise.

If Paul's heart was still wicked, that verse wouldn't make sense. He'd be doing exactly what his heart wanted—wicked things. But instead, Paul's heart wants what God wants, and he's frustrated when the flesh gets in the way.

That's your experience too if you're a Christian. When you sin, there's something inside you that says, "That's not who I am. That's not what I want. I hate this." That's your new heart speaking! Your good heart! Your redeemed heart!

AND here's what that means practically: You can stop making excuses for sin. You can't say, "Well, that's just who I am." No, it's NOT who you are! You're a new creation! The old has gone! Sin is you acting like someone you're NOT anymore!

One more, this is huge for someone today:

3. You can actually rest in God's love.

This might be the biggest shift of all. Because when you believe your heart is wicked, you never feel safe with God. You're always waiting for Him to give up on you. You're always afraid He's going to finally see the "real you" and reject you. You can never fully rest in His love because you think His love is conditional on your performance.

But when you believe God gave you a new heart—when you understand that He doesn't just tolerate you, He treasures you—everything changes.

- You stop performing for approval you already have.
- You stop working for acceptance you already possess.
- You stop trying to earn what Jesus already purchased.
- You start living from a place of security instead of insecurity.
- Freedom instead of fear.
- Love instead of law.

Listen to me: God doesn't look at your mess of a life and say, "Bless your heart, you poor thing, you're trying so hard." NO! He looks at your new heart—the heart He gave you—and He says, "That's My child. That's My beloved. That's My masterpiece. I'm so proud of who they're becoming."

Brennan Manning (a theologian, author and former Franciscan priest) once said:

"Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion."

That word "radically" is so important. Not casually. Not partially. **RADICALLY**. At the root of who you are, you are beloved. Rest in that!

Some of you walked in here today feeling like you need to apologize for existing. Like you're a burden. Like if people really knew you, they'd reject you. Like your heart is such a mess that God can barely stand you.

AND I'm telling you: That's not the truth about who you are!

You have a GOOD heart! God gave it to you! He placed His Spirit inside you! He wrote His law on your heart! He made you a new creation!

SO, here's what I want you to do this week:

First, stop apologizing for who you are. God made you on purpose. Your personality isn't a mistake. Your passions aren't selfish. Your dreams aren't stupid. You are God's

workmanship—His masterpiece—created in Christ Jesus for good works that He prepared in advance for you to do.

So, stop shrinking. Stop hiding. Stop making yourself small because you think that's what "humility" looks like.

Second, start exploring your desires. What makes you come alive? What gets you excited? What would you do if failure wasn't possible?

Don't dismiss those questions as selfish or worldly. Ask them! Because those desires might be the very things God placed in your good heart to lead you toward your calling.

Third, reframe your sin struggle. The next time you mess up—and you will, because we all do—don't say, "That's just who I am." Say, "That's NOT who I am. That's my flesh attacking my true heart. That's me acting against my new nature." AND then run to Jesus for grace, not away from Him in shame.

Because here's what shame does: It makes you hide. It makes you perform. It makes you fake it.

But grace? Grace makes you honest. Grace makes you vulnerable. Grace sets you free.

Let me close with this, because I want to make sure the Gospel is crystal clear. Some of you are here today, and you've never given your life to Jesus. You've never experienced this heart transplant we're talking about. And if that's you, here's what I need you to understand:

Right now, Jeremiah 17:9 DOES describe your heart. Not because you're a bad person or because you've done worse things than other people. But because you're still separated from God. You're still in your sins. You still have that heart of stone.

And God wants to give you a new heart.

BUT it's not something you can earn. It's not something you can achieve through being a good person or trying really hard. It's a gift that you receive by faith.

Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins. He was buried. He rose from the grave on the third day. And when you place your faith in Him—when you say, "Jesus, I trust You as my Lord and Savior"—God performs a spiritual heart transplant. He removes your heart of stone. He gives you a heart of flesh. He places His Spirit inside you. He makes you a new creation.

AND you become someone who doesn't just try to follow God out of obligation or fear. You become someone who wants to follow God because He changed your heart.

That's the gospel. That's the good news.

AND if you've never experienced that, today can be the day. Today can be the day you stop living with a stone heart and start living with a heart of flesh.

For those of us who ARE Christians, here's what I want to leave you with: you have spent way too much time believing the lie that your heart is desperately wicked. You've spent way too much energy fighting against yourself, suppressing your desires, apologizing for your existence, and trying to earn love you already have.

And it's time to stop!

It's time to start believing what God says about you. That you're a new creation. That the old has gone. That you have a good heart. NOT because of what you've done. But because of what Jesus did.

And when you start believing that—really believing it, not just intellectually agreeing with it—everything changes.

- Your anxiety starts to decrease because you're not performing anymore.
- Your joy starts to increase because you're free to be yourself.
- Your relationships start to deepen because you stop hiding.
- Your emotions start to flourish because you're operating from fullness, not emptiness.

You start living the abundant life Jesus came to give you. Not someday. Not when you finally get your act together. Not when you stop messing up. TODAY. Right now!

Because God doesn't look at you and say, "Bless your heart, you poor thing." He looks at you and says, "I gave you a blessed heart. I gave you MY heart. I made you new. You're My beloved child, and I delight in you."

Church, you have a good heart. Believe it. Live from it. And watch what God does when you finally stop fighting against yourself and start living from who you truly are.

Next week, we will begin learning to trust the desires of our blessed hearts, but for now let's pray together.

[PRAYER TIME]