

Strong at the Broken Places

3. *A New Want To*

August 1, 2021

Welcome to Crossroads! I'm glad you are here today. My name is Christy and I'm one of the pastors on staff. We are in week 3 of *Strong at the Broken Places*! In this series we are taking a look at the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was a prophet who spoke to people who were down and out, living in exile in Babylon. If you read through this Old Testament book, you will find, to put it plainly, that this guy had some weird ways to get his message across. He had to be very dramatic to capture the attention of these obstinate people that God was trying to speak to. These were people who God loved very much, but they really did not love him back very well. They disobeyed Him and their hearts were far from Him. Because of this, God allowed the powerful Babylonians to capture them.

They were homeless, powerless, had no freedom, and were unable to worship God in their temple. Their lives were in ruin. In spite of the bleak circumstances, God gave Ezekiel an encouraging word for the people to bring them hope and strength in the midst of their brokenness.

Turn with me to read **Ezekiel 11:17-20**. ¹⁷ *“Therefore say: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again.’* ¹⁸ *“They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols.* ¹⁹ *I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.* ²⁰ *Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.*

Today we are going to talk about matters of the heart! The heart is important to God. If you look it up in a concordance, you will see that the heart is mentioned over 800 times in the Bible.

The heart is important to us physically and spiritually. If you think about your physical heart; it's truly a prophetic image. Your heart pumps blood with nutrients and oxygen to power your physical body. If you have a sick heart, that's a major systemic problem for your body. If your heart is sick, you will eventually experience death. It's a very similar picture with your spiritual heart. A healthy spiritual life flows from a heart that follows God.

The heart is a kind of a big deal! Poets talk about the heart. Song writers sing about the heart! We even have a number of expressions that discuss the heart. They give us an idea of how someone is doing!

- Break someone's heart. (It's not good. They are in pain.)
- Cross my heart. (I'm telling you the truth!)
- Eat your heart out! (Be jealous!)
- From the bottom of my heart. (I'm being so sincere)
- Get to the heart of the matter. (I'm about to be frank with you.)
- Have a change of heart. (They changed their mind.)
- Half-hearted. (Meh)
- They had a heart of gold. (Such a great person.)
- Take heart. (Have courage)

In **Ezekiel 11:19**, God's message to Ezekiel to give the people is, *"¹⁹ I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh."*

As followers of Jesus, this is important for us. Hardened hearts can't resemble the heart of Jesus. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to grow to know Him and be like Him. In other words, a disciple is one who loves and obeys Jesus.

This happens by God's spirit. **The Spirit of God gives us the desire to know and be like Jesus.** The Spirit of God changes our "want to." Our desires change when God leads our heart.

When I was a teenager, a pastor said, "You have a call of God on your life." My answer was, "I hope not." My heart was hard. God loved me, but I certainly did not love Him back. I had no, "want to." I didn't know God, really and I did not want to know Him either. I had to go to my own place of exile. My own Babylon, if you will. For me, it was a rock bottom divorce. I was far from home, far from God, and my head felt an emotional pain that was so bad that I felt like I had woken up for the first time in my life.

I didn't have this "Come to Jesus" moment. I just prayed a simple prayer at my kitchen table in my apartment, "God, I don't know much about you but if you are who I think you are, you can fix this. I want you to fix this." And little by little, as I gave more of my heart over to Him to heal, deal with, and restore, He put a new Spirit within me. My heart was softened...not completely soft, but workable. He didn't fix my marriage; but He fixed me. He is still "fixing me," shaping me to be more and more like Jesus.

The people that Ezekiel was called to speak to were people who belonged to God, but lost their way. God, however, had a good promise for them that He would bring them back. God describes beautiful individual and collective benefits and features of giving our whole hearts to God.

Frist, **hearts given wholly to God create Unity.** Unity sets us apart from the world. We act differently and we keep the main thing, the main thing. We have one singular purpose as the Church (God's people): we want to advance God's kingdom through obeying Jesus by making disciples.

We can look to the book of Acts to see what a healthy, united body of believers looks like. **Acts 4:32-33** describes, *"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all."*

Those of us who follow Jesus should be bringing peace to places we go. Unity should be our priority as followers of Jesus. Our unity mirrors Christ's character. When we get unity right, it's so attractive to those who do not yet know Jesus! The funny thing about unity is, I can't debate or argue my way into it. I am responsible for me. **Romans 12:18** tells us, *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."*

A heart given to wholly to God has a new "want to." A new *want* to have unity with other believers. Let's say this short prayer together, "God, I want you to have my whole heart, give me a new "want to."

Secondly, **hearts given wholly to God gives us a new Spirit.** When God has your heart, you will not have to "white knuckle" it to do the things He wants you to do. He will give you a new "want to." You will be able to say things like:

I go wherever I want to go...He just has changed where I want to go.

I spend my money on whatever I want...He has just changed how I want to spend it.

I watch what I want to watch...but He has changed what I want to watch!

I do whatever I want to do...He has just changed what I want to do!

The people in Ezekiel were people who were self-led. Self-led people do not look anything like Jesus. The more we follow our own lead, rather than allowing the Spirit of God to lead our hearts, we grow colder and further from Jesus. Without God's Spirit, we are susceptible to being critical, cynical, suspicious, unloving, you name it. God can't work in critical or cynical.

But with God's Spirit at work in us, we set the tone around us. We prime the pump for good things to happen. We can know if we have a new spirit. **Galatians 5:22-23** describes the evidence of a new spirit within us. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."*

This is a good way to measure if we are modeling Jesus. With a new spirit, we *want* to be loving. We *want* to be kind. We *want* to offer goodness. We *want* to be

faithful. We *want* to be gentle. We *want* to operate in self-control. Kindness, and gentleness, and peace are not things that are culturally celebrated but they should be celebrated and pursued by followers of Jesus because this is what Jesus looks like!

One thing we need to be aware of is that just because we mess up in one of these areas doesn't mean we do not belong to God. A heart that has a new "want to" will get right back on track because God is leading you to do so.

Third, **hearts given wholly to God softens our hearts.** Verse 19 describes removing a heart of stone and giving the people a heart of flesh. This was dead hearts coming to life.

This could mean a couple of things for different people in the room. It could be a first-time decision to be open to what God might want to do in your life, like that prayer I prayed at my kitchen table, "God, I don't know much about you, but if you are who I think you are, you can fix this." It wasn't the typical sinner's prayer. I mean, I really wasn't aware I would have to change anything, but what happened was, God's Spirit gave me a new "want to."

And a new "want to" is essentially repentance. To repent means I am changing my mind. I wanted to learn more about Him...a change of mind/repentance/new want to. I wanted to be discipled. I wanted to be with others who knew about God. I wanted to read my Bible...eventually. I wanted to pray.

You might be in the room today in your own personal Babylon, feeling no life, locked up, and needing a new heart and spirit within you. God will soften your heart if you ask Him to meet you where you are.

The other thing this might mean, for God to soften your heart, is that you are on your way with Him, but need healing in some area of your life. You might need to allow God to deal with the parts of your heart that have been wounded so you have put up a wall. You can't really be transparent with people and grow to be more like Jesus without healing. Some area of your life may signal that you need healing if you have said things like, "I'll never let anyone get that close to me again," "I don't need friendships," "I won't let people let me down." Or, you might need to be set free from a pattern or addiction.

I see a picture of hearts that need His healing balm; places where your heart has been broken; people who are being held captive and need freedom. God wants to meet you and make you strong at the broken places.

Our **Encounter Retreat** is a great start. The last one we had was right before Covid happened. Encounter is an important part of our healing ministry here at Crossroads. God meets people in a unique way. You can let us know if you are interested through the Communicator Card on our app. Also, look for more details as we get this vital part of our ministry re-launched again this fall.

Finally, we need to **be alert for distractions**. We have to ask the question, is this something that hurts my heart or helps my heart? Will paying attention to this bring me closer or further from being like Jesus?

When we get to the heart of the matter, the enemy of our soul wants to use distractions to keep us from becoming more like Jesus. If we let them, distractions will discourage and defeat the purposes God has for your life.

The enemy of our soul loves when we give in to sideways energy. We can put too much emphasis or attention on things that are harmful to our hearts. A recent example of this was the buzz surrounding decisions of the ultra-rich and their plans to go to space. We heard questions. Good questions and comments such as, "Why are the ultra-rich spending money that way?" and "Using their money in a different way could change the world, feed people, bring healing to the sick." But the problem with those thoughts is that we make their money the world's savior. The world's answer to big problems. We are off the hook if the problems of the world are solved by someone else's money.

God has a much better plan than using one guy who is trying to get to space. The world already has a savior: One who came 2000 years ago, whose name is Jesus! And He wants to do something so personal and transforming in us that we will change the world. No matter how much we have in our bank account, we are not off the hook if we follow Jesus. It's up to us to show generosity. It's up to us to bring healing. It's up to us to give our hearts over to Him. God in all His wisdom and genius has this plan to shape us into people who more fully reflect Jesus in order that others will know Him. His plan brings healing to us and salvation to a lost world as we allow God to give us a new heart and a new spirit.

He wants to do something so amazing in us and through us. It begins with us saying, "Here is my whole heart." I believe we are in a time that if we will put off distractions; "keep our eyes on our own paper" so to speak, that people will experience Jesus like never before. Picture this with me, every person in this room, saying, "Jesus here is my whole heart. Give me an undivided heart. I want to know and be like Jesus."

When God has our heart, we act like Jesus. When we act like Jesus: people get healed, the lost get found, the addicted are set free, relationships are restored and disciples are made. By allowing God to work in us and through us we are stirring a movement to make disciples who make disciples.

Today, as we worship with this last song, I encourage you to make the words of this song your prayer, "You can have my heart God."