



## New Hearts

**Ezekiel 11:17-20** *“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.’ They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. 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. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.”*

Have you ever pushed someone you love and who loves you so far that you could never get back to where you were again? I have. I had a childhood friend growing up. We were best buds since kindergarten. We hung out all day at school and talked on the phone at night. We called back and forth all summer long. But then one fall morning in seventh grade he and I were on opposite sides of the football field. My team was losing and trash talk was happening and in my frustration I lashed out with a comment that was sure to stab by best friend in the heart. And it did, and even though I was sorry with tears, our friendship was never the same again. Eight years ruined in five seconds, unable to get back.

In a similar way the people of Judah thought they had pushed the Lord past the breaking point with their persistent idolatry and sins. They came to this conclusion because God had made good on his threat to send the Babylonian army to besiege Jerusalem. After being surrounded for 30 months the city fell. The leaders were executed, the temple was pillaged, and everyone, except for the poorest people, was carried away into exile. The people of Judah thought this event meant the end—that God was now breaking off his relationship with them and abandoning them forever.

Do you ever worry that you've gone too far against God for too long? Has your guilt ever overwhelmed you to the point where you think, “God could never want me back again!”? When we think that we have outrun God's grace, may we remember how he dealt with the nation of Judah: he promised not only to return them to their own land, he promised to fix what had been the cause of this calamity in the first place: their unrepentant hearts. Before the exile their hearts had been set in their sinful ways, as hard and unyielding as stone, but having been broken, God would now do a miracle for them: he would give them new hearts of flesh, that is, hearts that were spiritually sensitive and alive with love for God. Hearts pulsing with fervor for him for his faithfulness and infinite mercy for forgiving their sin and restoring them once again. This spiritual heart transplant would reinvigorate their minds and actions, making their whole being eager to obey God's will and cleanse their lifestyle and their lands from the worthless idols they had known.

The cross of Jesus Christ is God's evidence to us and to all the world that he always wants us back. There God forgave us and reconciled us to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). He has forgotten our sins and remembers them no more (Isaiah 43:25). So now there is no more friction, no more hurt feelings, between us and God. Through faith in Jesus God gives us new hearts and new lives in love with him. Embraced by his grace we are his people, and he is our God.

Prayer: Faithful Father in heaven, in Christ you have given me the gift of a new heart. Through your word and sacraments keep my faith supple and my conscience tender so that I may always serve you with a repentant heart and an undivided mind. Amen.