

Devotional 4

The Heart That Must Be Created

You Cannot Renew What Only God Can Replace

The Awakening

The most common misunderstanding of the Christian life is that it is a self-improvement project with divine assistance. God begins it; we maintain it. God forgives the past; we manage the future. It sounds reasonable. It is catastrophically wrong — and the consequences are visible everywhere: exhausted Christians who have been trying to sustain what only God can produce, managing a heart that was never theirs to manage in the first place.

Ezekiel 36 will not allow this misunderstanding to stand. God does not offer heart renovation. He offers heart replacement. The stone is not softened — it is removed. The flesh is not improved — it is given. This is not a contract in which God provides resources and humans supply effort. It is a sovereign act in which God does what only God can do: create a heart capable of knowing and loving Him.

Daily renewal, rightly understood, begins with this recognition: the heart you bring to God each morning is not the product of your maintenance. It is the product of His creative act. And it requires daily return to the Creator to remain what He made it to be.

EZEKIEL 36:26–27 — FOUNDATIONAL TEXT

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. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

What the Text Reveals

The Grammar of Divine Initiative

Count the first-person verbs: I will give. I will remove. I will give. I will put. I will move you. Five divine actions. Zero human actions. This is not a cooperative project in which God provides the materials and Israel supplies the labor. It is a unilateral act of sovereign grace. The structural point of Ezekiel 36 is that Israel's history of failure has conclusively demonstrated that they cannot produce the obedience God requires. So God stops waiting for them to produce it and acts to create it.

Stone and Flesh: The Nature of the Problem and the Solution

'Heart of stone' is not merely a metaphor for stubbornness. In the Hebrew anthropology of the text, the heart (*lev*) is the seat of will, desire, thought, and moral orientation. A stone heart is one whose fundamental allegiance is fixed against God — not through isolated acts of rebellion but through a constitutive orientation that cannot turn toward Him. It is not that the stone heart makes wrong choices. It is that it cannot make the right one.

The heart of flesh (*lev basar*) is not a heart of weakness — it is a heart of responsiveness. Flesh, in this context, is the living tissue that receives impressions, that moves, that responds. The new heart is one that can be marked by God's Word, moved by His Spirit, and oriented toward His purposes. This is what daily renewal is renewing: not a good intention but a God-given responsiveness.

The Spirit Who Moves, Not Just Empowers

Verse 27 adds what is perhaps the most staggering promise in the passage: 'I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees.' The Hebrew *wehithalaktem* — 'move you to walk' — is almost physical. The Spirit does not merely empower obedience from the outside. He motivates it from the inside. Daily renewal includes the renewal of desire, not just the renewal of capacity. You want to follow God because God has moved you to want it.

The Biblical Architecture

Psalms 51:10 supplies the prayer that corresponds to Ezekiel 36:26 as its human complement: 'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.' The Hebrew *bara* — 'create' — is used exclusively of divine action in the Old Testament. David does not ask God to improve his heart. He asks God to create one. The recognition that heart-renewal requires divine creation, not human effort, is the theological foundation of every genuine renewal throughout the biblical narrative.

Jeremiah 31:33 foreshadows the same reality from a different angle: 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.' The external law written on stone tablets has failed to produce obedience because the problem was never the content of the law — it was the heart of the recipient. The new covenant solution is to move the law from outside to inside, from stone to flesh, from command to desire.

John 3:3–8 confirms that this heart-creation is not a progressive achievement but a new birth — sudden, sovereign, from above. 'The wind blows wherever it pleases... So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.' Daily renewal does not create the new heart. It maintains the orientation of the new heart toward the One who gave it. And that orientation, left to itself, naturally drifts — not because the new heart was poorly made, but because the old patterns of the flesh remain until glorification.

CORE THESIS

The heart God renews daily is not the product of human maintenance — it is the product of divine creation. Daily renewal is not the sustaining of a spiritual discipline you began. It is the daily return of a created heart to the Creator who made it and whose Spirit alone can keep it responsive, alive, and moving toward God.

THE QUESTION THAT MATTERS MOST

Are you approaching your spiritual life as a maintenance project — trying to sustain what you once received — or as a daily creation event, returning to the One who alone can give you a heart capable of knowing and following Him? What evidence distinguishes the two in your actual practice?

A PRAYER FROM THE AWAKENING

*Father, we confess that we have been trying to maintain what only You can create. We have approached the spiritual life as management when You intended it as miracle. We have worked to sustain the desire for You when You are the only one who can produce it. We have tried to keep our own hearts soft when only Your Spirit can remove the stone. ***Create in us a pure heart today — not improved, but new. Put Your Spirit in us and move us to follow Your ways, not because we have decided to try harder, but because You have moved us from within.****

We return this morning to the One who alone can do what needs to be done. “Bara”- Create. Begin again. Amen.

Scripture Treasury

CATEGORY	REFERENCE	SCRIPTURE
Divine Heart Creation	Ezekiel 36:26–27	<i>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.</i>
	Psalms 51:10	<i>Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.</i>
The New Covenant Promise	Jeremiah 31:33	<i>I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.</i>
	Hebrews 8:10	<i>I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.</i>
Born of the Spirit	John 3:5–6	<i>No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.</i>
	Titus 3:5	<i>He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.</i>
Spirit-Motivated Obedience	Philippians 2:13	<i>For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.</i>
	Romans 8:14	<i>For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.</i>