

Ezekiel 12:1-16—Ezekiel Acts Out The People Of Jerusalem Going Into Captivity

Memory Verse

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NKJV

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Background to Ezekiel—The big picture

Here are the events surrounding Ezekiel's prophecies: In 605 b.c. Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem for the first time, taking the royalty and the best of the people back with him to Babylon (including Daniel and his friends). Although the leaders of Jerusalem submitted initially, they eventually rebelled. So Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem a second time in 597 b.c. and took 10,000 Jews (including Ezekiel), back to Babylon. He hoped this would teach Jerusalem to submit to him. But as we have been reading, there were many false prophets who believed that God would deliver them from Nebuchadnezzar, and many of the people, including the leaders, believed them. This resulted in them rebelling again, causing Nebuchadnezzar to come down a third time in 586 b.c., when he destroyed the city and temple completely. This last invasion in 586 b.c. is what Ezekiel has been prophesying about, as he dramatises and predicts exactly what would happen when Nebuchadnezzar attacked for the third time. Ezekiel started prophesying about 5 years before the final invasion, in about 591 b.c..

Revision: Last week we learned that God told Ezekiel that God's people would be scattered in various countries, but He also gave them a promise that He would be a sanctuary for them to protect and keep them wherever they were. An interesting fact is that the "Jews are the only ethnic group in world history who have survived over three generations apart from their homeland. For over 2,000 years, they kept their identity, their culture, their system of belief because God was indeed a sanctuary to them" (Jon Courson). This is yet another amazing proof that Israel are God's covenant people, and that God did, is, and will keep His promises to them.

This week: God told Ezekiel to pack his belongings and prepare to move. But he wasn't to leave through the door of his house. He was to leave at twilight through a hole in the wall with his face covered. This would be what Zedekiah would do when he tried to escape when Nebuchadnezzar broke through the wall and entered the city.

Ezekiel 12:1-16 NKJV

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ² "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house.

³ "Therefore, son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight. You shall go from your place into captivity to another place in their sight. It may be that they will consider, though they are a rebellious house. ⁴ By day you shall bring out your belongings in their sight, as though going into captivity; and at evening you shall go in their sight, like those who go into captivity. ⁵ Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry your belongings out through it. ⁶ In their sight you shall bear them on your shoulders

and carry them out at twilight; you shall cover your face, so that you cannot see the ground, for I have made you a sign to the house of Israel.”

⁷ So I did as I was commanded. I brought out my belongings by day, as though going into captivity, and at evening I dug through the wall with my hand. I brought them out at twilight, and I bore them on my shoulder in their sight.

⁸ And in the morning the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ⁹ “Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, ‘What are you doing?’

¹⁰ Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are among them.”’ ¹¹ Say, ‘I am a sign to you. As I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall be carried away into captivity.’ ¹² And the prince who is among them shall bear his belongings on his shoulder at twilight and go out. They shall dig through the wall to carry them out through it. He shall cover his face, so that he cannot see the ground with his eyes. ¹³ I will also spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there. ¹⁴ I will scatter to every wind all who are around him to help him, and all his troops; and I will draw out the sword after them.

¹⁵ “Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I scatter them among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. ¹⁶ But I will spare a few of their men from the sword, from famine, and from pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the Gentiles wherever they go. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.”

Israel is described as a house of rebellion (1–2)

Ezekiel 12:1-2 NKJV

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ² “Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house.

v 1 **Now the word of the Lord came to me:** This begins another section of Ezekiel’s prophetic work, consisting mainly of a series of announcements of judgment coming against the kingdom of Judah.

v 2 **You dwell in the midst of a rebellious house:** Ezekiel was *among* a rebellious people, meaning those who had been carried into exile by the Babylonians, as well as those still living in the kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem, which was facing imminent judgement.

Application: We are to be in the world but not of the world. We are not to be like the world (conformed by the world into its mold—see Romans 12:1-2), nor isolated from the world (e.g. live in a monastery), but rather be separate from the world so that we can be salt and light in the world (see Matthew 5:13-14). How do we do this?

John 17:13-18 AMP

And now I am coming to You; I say these things while I am still in the world, so that My joy may be made full and complete and perfect in them [that they may experience My delight fulfilled in them, that My enjoyment may be perfected in their own souls, that they may have My gladness within them, filling their hearts].

14 I have given and delivered to them Your word (message) and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world [do not belong to the world], just as I am not of the world [this is what happened with Ezekiel].

15 I do not ask that You will take them out of the world, but that You will keep and protect them from the evil one.

16 They are not of the world (worldly, belonging to the world), [just] as I am not of the world.

17 **Sanctify them [purify, consecrate, separate them for Yourself, make them holy] by the Truth; Your Word is Truth.**

18 Just as You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

How are we made holy (separated from the world in the sense that we don't act or think like the world) and protected from the evil one? By knowing and understanding and obeying the truth—the Word of God. It's very simple, the more we are in the Word of God, the less we will be in the world (the less I will think, talk, and act like the world). Instead our thinking, and therefore our behaviour, will be influenced by the truth of God's Word. It's the world or the word—will I waste an hour in front of the TV, or invest an hour reading the Word of God. Always remember that there is no neutral ground; I'll be influenced for either good or evil, to become more like Christ, or more like the world.

Ezekiel was a lot like one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He had prepared his heart to seek God by choosing to spend time with God, prayerfully reading Scripture and praying according to scripture, and obeying what God showed him to do. He received God's message, and the people hated him because of it. However, because he was faithful to keep himself in the love of God (meaning he prioritised his relationship with God above all else), God protected Ezekiel and he also experienced delight and fullness of joy as he abided in God (to walked in agreement with God—see Amos 3:3).

Consider the consequences of this choice—the Word or the world. Misery will result if I choose to find pleasure in the world, but perfect joy, gladness, and delight will be mine if I choose to find pleasure in Christ, "...so that My joy may be made full and complete and perfect in them [that they may experience My delight fulfilled in them, that My enjoyment may be perfected in their own souls, that they may have My gladness within them, filling their hearts]" (John 17:13).

Ezekiel was someone who chose to spend time in the Word of God, and as a result he was someone that God could use. Ezekiel prepared his heart to seek the Lord, and as a result, he became a vessel of honour. What will our choice be? Do I want to be used by God? Do I love God enough that I am willing to give up what I want, so I can do what God wants?

2 Timothy 2:21-22 NLT paraphrase

If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honourable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.

²² Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.

v 2 **Which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house:** This is such a tragedy—Israel was given so much and therefore had so much potential, "...to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises" (Romans 9:4)—yet it all went to waste. The *could have* seen and heard, after all it was all there for the receiving and enjoying, but they *chose not to*; the same can be true for us.

Application: He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Luke 8:8)

This was one of Jesus' favourite sayings, but what does it mean? I believe it is talking about the condition of our hearts. Do you remember the parable of the sower? Did you realise that this parable explains what Jesus meant when He said, "He who has ears, let him hear."

Matthew 13:3-23 NKJV

³ Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶ But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. ⁸ **But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.** ⁹ **He who has ears to hear, let him hear!**” [*It’s only the soft, repentant heart that is able to hear and understand*]

¹⁰ And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

¹¹ He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³ **Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.** ¹⁴ And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,

And seeing you will see and not perceive;

¹⁵ **For the hearts of this people have grown dull.**

Their ears are hard of hearing,

And their eyes they have closed,

Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,

Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,

So that I should heal them.’

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; ¹⁷ for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

¹⁸ “Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone **hears the word** of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who **hears the word** and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²² Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who **hears the word**, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³ But he who received seed on the good ground is he who **hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces:** some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

The seed is the word of God, and the four different types of ground represent the four different potential conditions of our hearts:

1. A soft heart that receives, obeys, and hungers after the Word of God (the good soil)
2. A hard heart that rejects the truth because they can’t understand it (the path)
3. An uncommitted heart that gives up when the going gets hard (the rocky ground)
4. A compromising heart that refuses to separate itself from the world (choked by the weeds).

We can apply these four conditions of the heart to both believers and non-believers. As unbelievers, the only ones who will be saved are those with a soft heart. For believers, I believe that our hearts can be in any one of these conditions at any given time, all depending on whether or not we are preparing our hearts to seek the Lord (see 1 Samuel 7:3, 2 Chronicles 12:14, 19:3, Ezra 7:10).

Remember that the condition of my heart is completely up to me—it doesn't matter how smart I am, whether or not I like reading, how much I can remember, how I feel when I'm reading the Word, or how much I think I understand—***it's all about having an attitude of submission to God.*** Will I allow God to speak *truth* to me and guide me, or do I think (like most of the Israelites did) that I know best and therefore don't need God's wisdom, and therefore choose to sin by neglecting His word.

Please carefully consider what Jesus said in Matthew 13:15, "***For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed....***" This hardening of their hearts happened over a period of time, as did the closing of their eyes. It was their choice, "...and their eyes ***they*** have closed..." *This is the sin of neglecting my relationship with God—the time and affections I once had given to God are reassigned to other, sinful (as in not God's best for me) activities.* As I do this my heart grows harder and harder. This can be so subtle, so gradual—a little less of God's Word here, a little more of the world there; and before I know it, my once soft heart has become hard towards God. "It's a slow fade when you give your life away" (casting crowns lyric)

Hebrews 3:13-15 NLT paraphrase

You must warn each other every day, while it is still "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. ¹⁴ For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ. ¹⁵ Remember what it says:

"Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled."

How do I prevent this from happening? How can I prevent ending up like the Israelites? ***I need to guard my heart.*** I need to deliberately and purposefully choose those things which are: pure, lovely, honourable, true etc (see Philippians 4:8), things which will help me grow in my relationship with God. At the same time, I also need to deliberately and purposefully choose to avoid those things which will hinder my walk with God. If I am not deliberate and intentional in my quest to keep myself in the love of God (see Jude 21), to continue to choose to draw near to God so that God will draw near to me (see James 5:8), then I will slowly but surely drift away from God.

Proverbs 4:23 AMP

Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life.

Just imagine if I didn't purposefully and intentionally seek to improve my marriage, and just let things drift, just doing things as I felt like it, having the attitude of, "it will be okay, she'll be right." If I did that, there would be other things that would slowly but surely steal the affections of my heart, and they would slowly become more important than my wife, and my marriage would die a slow death. The same is true concerning our relationship with God. We must treat it like a marriage, and invest time and energy into it, whether we feel like it or not, because we must, because if we don't our hearts will become hard. The only remedy for a hard heart is for God to break it, which hurts.

The command to act out captivity (3–7)

Ezekiel 12:3-7 NKJV

“Therefore, son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight. You shall go from your place into captivity to another place in their sight. It may be that they will consider, though they are a rebellious house. ⁴ By day you shall bring out your belongings in their sight, as though going into captivity; and at evening you shall go in their sight, like those who go into captivity. ⁵ Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry your belongings out through it. ⁶ In their sight you shall bear them on your shoulders and carry them out at twilight; you shall cover your face, so that you cannot see the ground, for I have made you a sign to the house of Israel.” ⁷ So I did as I was commanded. I brought out my belongings by day, as though going into captivity, and at evening I dug through the wall with my hand. I brought them out at twilight, and I bore them on my shoulder in their sight.

v 3 **Prepare your belongings for captivity:** Ezekiel was already in exile in Babylon, with the many others who had already been taken. This message was to let all the people know that those who were still in Jerusalem would go into captivity. This was an important message because of the lies that were being told by the false prophets.

“It is important to remember that there were many false prophets in Judah, Jerusalem, and likely among the exiles in Babylon who promised that God would *rescue* His people from the Babylonians. These false prophets spoke smooth words of certain deliverance. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel strongly warned them that this deliverance would not come, and that God had appointed them to be conquered. (David Guzik)

“Rival prophets were foretelling a speedy return to a flourishing Jerusalem (Ezekiel 24; 13:16; Jeremiah 28:1–4; 29:8, 9, 15, 21).” (Wright)

v 3 **Your belongings:** “The article in question is illustrated in a series of neo-Assyrian monumental reliefs that portray captives being led away in procession with large bags slung over their shoulders. The packs were made either of durable cloth or skin, and loaded with such bare necessities for survival during the long trek as could be salvaged from the ruins of a conquered city.” (Block)

v 5 **Dig through the wall in their sight:** This pictured how desperate the people in Jerusalem would be to escape the siege. However, as we will see later, this is also specific to King Zedekiah who would sneak out of the city by night and try to escape (see v 12 and 2 Kings 25:4).

v 6 **Cover your face, so that you cannot see the ground:** This speaks of the shame that they would experience as they left the city behind.

v 7 **So I did as I was commanded:** Once again, Ezekiel did as he **was commanded**. No wonder God continued to use him—he was consistently submissive and obedient.

v 7 **As though going into captivity:** The people Ezekiel was communicating to already understood what it was like to be taken into captivity. This would have made them understand that those left in Jerusalem would shortly be joining those who had already been exiled to Babylon.

The message to the princes and people of Jerusalem (8–14)

Ezekiel 12:8-14 NKJV

And in the morning the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ⁹ “Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, ‘What are you doing?’ ¹⁰ Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are among them.” ’ ¹¹ Say, ‘I am a sign to you. As I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall be carried away into captivity.’ ¹² And the prince who is among them shall bear his belongings on his shoulder at twilight and go out. They shall dig through the wall to carry them out through it. He shall cover his face, so that he cannot see the ground with his eyes. ¹³ I will also spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there. ¹⁴ I will scatter to every wind all who are around him to help him, and all his troops; and I will draw out the sword after them.

v 9 **What are you doing?** God’s strategy had worked. He had gotten their attention. They knew exactly what Ezekiel was doing; now they wanted to know what it meant.

v 10 **This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are among them:** Here Ezekiel tells them what it means—those still in Judah and Jerusalem, including Zedekiah the prince (just a puppet king) would go into captivity.

v 12 **The prince:** This refers to Zedekiah. But why wasn’t he called King Zedekiah?

“The subject of the message was King Zedekiah, who was always spoken of by Ezekiel as prince, never king. Jehoiachin was regarded as the true king (Ezekiel 17:13) ... In ration tablets found by archaeologists in Babylon, Jehoiachin was still referred to as the king of Judah.” (Feinberg)

v 12 **The prince who is among them shall bear his belongings on his shoulder:** This prince would be brought low. He would be humbled and have to try to escape like any other person. His riches and power could not save him.

v 12 **He shall cover his face:** Again, this is shame. Either he was so embarrassed that he didn’t want people to see him or he was trying to disguise himself in an attempt to escape. Either way, it was a shameful and humiliating experience for the prince/king.

v 13 **I will also spread My net over him:** Again, this refers to king Zedekiah of Judah, who tried to escape but was caught, captured, and taken captive to Babylon (Jeremiah 39:2–4 and 2 Kings 25:4). As predicted, his soldiers would be powerless to help him, Why? Well, just as God had promised to **scatter to every wind all who are around him to help him, and all his troops** (v 14), so it happened.

“The destruction of the king was like the dropping of a net over a snarling wild beast that the hunter then drags away to an inevitable slaughter.” (Vawter and Hoppe)

v 13 **Yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there:** This amazing prophecy was fulfilled in 2 Kings 25:7, Jeremiah 39:6–7, and 52:11. Though the Babylonians were not as cruel as the Assyrians, they still knew how to make someone suffer. The last thing Zedekiah saw before the Babylonians put out his eyes (blinded him) was the murder of his sons. What a painful memory!

Application: our choices to follow or not follow God affect those we love

Just like Sampson, Zedekiah's spiritual blindness led to his physical blindness (see Judges 16:18-21). And just like Lot, Zedekiah's bad decisions severely affected his family—his sons were murdered because they rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar. If Zedekiah had obeyed God and surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar, they would have lived.

Prophecy: This prophecy also shows just how both *specific* and *accurate* prophecy is, God tells Ezekiel that Zedekiah would go to Babylon as a captive and die there, but also that he would never see it. We'll read only one of the Scriptures above to see what happened:

Jeremiah 39:4-8 NKJV

So it was, when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, that they fled and went out of the city by night, by way of the king's garden, by the gate between the two walls. And he went out by way of the plain. ⁵ But the Chaldean army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. And when they had captured him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced judgment on him. ⁶ Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes in Riblah [a town on the border between Syria and Israel]; the king of Babylon also killed all the nobles of Judah. ⁷ **Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon [Yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there—Ezekiel 12:13].** ⁸ And the Chaldeans burned the king's house and the houses of the people with fire, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem.

The events recorded in Jeremiah 39:6-8 fulfil several prophecies:

1. Ezekiel 12:13, 17:20—Zedekiah never did see Babylon, but he did die there (this has been used by antagonists of the Bible as a contradiction because they hadn't bothered to read the whole story)
2. Ezekiel 11:1-13—All the nobles or princes of Judah were killed by Nebuchadnezzar at the border of Israel (they didn't die in the siege).
3. Ezekiel 10:2, Jeremiah 21:10, 38:18—The Babylonians burned Jerusalem
4. Ezekiel 12:12-14—Zedekiah would try to escape through "a hole in the wall" but would be captured, (his soldiers were also scattered from him—fulfilled in 2 Kings 25:4).

"All the prophecies from this to the twentieth chapter are supposed to have been delivered in the *sixth* year of Zedekiah, *five* years before the taking of Jerusalem. How accurate the prediction! and how exactly fulfilled!" (Clarke)

Then they shall know that I am the Lord—The purpose of God's judgement is to reveal Himself to His people and the nations (15–16)

Ezekiel 12:15-16 NKJV

"Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I scatter them among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. ¹⁶ But I will spare a few of their men from the sword, from famine, and from pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the Gentiles wherever they go. Then they shall know that I am the Lord."

v 15, 16 **Then they shall know that I am the Lord:** “Ezekiel often used this phrase to explain *why* God allowed such great and devastating judgment to come against His people. In the end, it was to reveal Himself to them, even if it were in His judgments.” (David Guzik)

“God’s people would be scattered in order that the heathen might know that He is the Lord. In other words, the heathen would see that when God’s people get out of line, He corrects them. Peter tells us that judgment always begins at the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17). Therefore, before He corrects this country, it shouldn’t surprise us when the Lord corrects us, His own people.” (Jon Courson)

v 16 **I will spare a few of their men from the sword, from famine, and from pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the Gentiles wherever they go:** This is a short version of of Ezekiel 6:8-10. In these verses we see God’s end game, God’s big picture, what He’s ultimately trying to achieve; “And they shall know that I am the Lord; I have not said in vain that I would bring this calamity upon them” (Ezekiel 6:8). Remember that everything that God allows in our lives has a good purpose; *it is never in vain!* Submit to God’s discipline, confess and forsake your sin, and you will find yourself back in relationship with God, which is what God means when He keeps on repeating, “And they shall know that I am the Lord.”

It’s important that we read Ezekiel 6:8-10 as it shows what true repentance is—the kind of repentance that God was seeking from His people Israel, and the same kind of repentance that He wants from me and you—where we come to hate or loathe ourselves because of our sin, and we will be genuinely sorry that we broke the heart of our loving God and Father. In the history of Israel, there had been a lot of fake revivals (e.g. under the rule of the godly kings Josiah and Hezekiah). God is seeking true relationship with His people, where their love for Him is genuine. These verses in Ezekiel show us what genuine love looks like—when we love God enough to actually be concerned about how our sin affects God.

Ezekiel 6:8-10 NKJV

“Yet I will leave a remnant, so that you may have some who escape the sword among the nations, when you are scattered through the countries. ⁹ Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations where they are carried captive, **because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me**, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; **they will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed in all their abominations.** ¹⁰ And they shall know that I am the Lord; I have not said in vain that I would bring this calamity upon them.”

Application: Motive—it’s one thing to know what to do, but what if we are not motivated to obey?

We have been talking a lot today about our relationship with God, and how we must guard our hearts, be proactive in growing in our love for God, and being willing to genuinely repent (turn from our sin); it’s for God’s sake, not our own. It won’t just happen. As believers in an evil world, we are like a fish swimming upstream; if we stop swimming, then we are being swept downstream. Again, there is no neutral ground. My love for God is either growing or dying. My heart is either becoming softer or harder. This is my choice. Making the choice to do nothing, or to just do what feels good, is in reality me making the choice to backslide, to harden my heart.

But having talked about what we should be doing, having described our responsibility in our relationship with God (to draw near to God or keep ourselves in the love of God by guarding our hearts), what is going to motivate me to sacrifice all for the sake of my relationship with God? First let's consider the right, indeed the only motive that we should have.

2 Corinthians 5:14 AMP

For the love of Christ controls and urges and impels us, because we are of the opinion and conviction that [since] One died for all, then all died;

15 And He died for all, so that all those who live might live no longer to and for themselves, but to and for Him Who died and was raised again for their sake.

Notice here that it's the love of Christ that controls, urges, and impels us. And what does it urge us to do? No longer live for ourselves, but rather live for Christ. Also notice in the next verses why should be so grateful and appreciative of what God has done for us.

1 John 4:17-19 AMP

In this [union and communion with Him] love is brought to completion and attains perfection with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment [with assurance and boldness to face Him], because as He is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love [dread does not exist], but full-grown (complete, perfect) love turns fear out of doors and expels every trace of terror! For fear brings with it the thought of punishment, and [so] he who is afraid has not reached the full maturity of love [is not yet grown into love's complete perfection].

19 We love Him, because He first loved us.

Most importantly, we must understand that we don't have what it takes to love God. We can only choose to return His love—"We love Him, because He first loved us." And why do we love Him? Because He gave His life as the payment for the sins of the whole world.

Romans 5:6-10 AMP

While we were yet in weakness [powerless to help ourselves], at the fitting time Christ died for (in behalf of) the ungodly.

7 Now it is an extraordinary thing for one to give his life even for an upright man, though perhaps for a noble and loveable and generous benefactor someone might even dare to die.

8 But God shows and clearly proves His [own] love for us by the fact that while we were still sinners, Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One) died for us.

9 Therefore, since we are now justified (acquitted, made righteous, and brought into right relationship with God) by Christ's blood, how much more [certain is it that] we shall be saved by Him from the indignation and wrath of God.

10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, it is much more [certain], now that we are reconciled, that we shall be saved (daily delivered from sin's dominion) through His [resurrection] life.

Q) Why should I repent—because if I love God then I will be concerned about how my sin affects Him. Any other reason or motive is selfish and self-centred.

Q) Why should I obey God—because if I love God then I will genuinely desire to please Him and honour Him by the way I live, meaning everything I do, say, and think.

Q) Why does God hate external religion? See Colossians 2:16-23 and James 1:26-27.