

# Cultivating a Spirit of Newness

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## I. Introductory Remarks.

Let's face it, we all desire new things. They inspire us until the newness begins to wear off. God's desire for our lives is to give us a new heart that is constantly springing forth with a sense of newness that thrusts us forward in His purpose for our lives.

***Ezekiel 36:26-27*** *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. <sup>27</sup> I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgements and do them.*

The problem is, our hearts are constantly being trampled on by the world and worldly desires as well as the circumstances of life. Our hearts become hard as a result.

If we are to remain fresh with a constant sense of newness, our hearts will need to be cultivated on a daily basis.

***Hosea 10:12*** *Sow to yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till He comes and rains righteousness on you.*

In other words, we must cultivate our hearts. The word cultivate means to prepare for the raising of crops, to loosen or break up the soil, to foster growth, to improve by labor, care or study.

The next verse in Hosea explains why our hearts get hard from being trampled on. It says, we partake of the fruit of lies and trust in our own ways. The worldly system of thought is full of lies because it is controlled by Satan who is the father of all lies. Yet we find ourselves attracted to his lies and ways of thinking by trusting in our own ways rather than God's ways.

If we are to bear much fruit as Jesus instructs us and have been called to in John 15, we must be constantly cultivating our hearts by breaking up the fallow ground so that the seed of God's word can grow and bear fruit that remains.

## II. Preparing our Hearts for Newness to Come.

### 1. We Must See the Condition of our Hearts.

As seen in the opening Scripture, God's desire is to remove the heart of stone from us so that the newness will come.

When John the Baptist arrived on the scene, he came with the message, "Prepare the Way for the Presence of Jesus." He essentially came to plow the ground or to cultivate it so that those who heard him would be prepared for the newness that was about to come for the Nation of Israel.

**Luke 3:4-6** ...as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; and the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "

The message of John the Baptist is just as relevant today as it was over 2,000 years ago. Before Christ can come and fill our lives with newness and His fullness, there must first be a preparation in our hearts. Our hearts must be cultivated or prepared for the newness that is to come forth.

John the Baptist came out of the desert boldly announcing God's word and challenging his hearers to a complete change of heart. Their hearts needed to be cultivated before they could receive what God had to offer them.

As Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah, much of Israel was in a state of in which their hearts had become like stone to the extent they couldn't see or perceive what God was desiring to do in their midst.

**Matthew 13:14-15** "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; <sup>15</sup> For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, 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.' "

These are the people John was dealing with as he came preaching, "Prepare the Way." He had to have a message that immediately got their attention.

**What was the message John used to get their attention? How did he go about cultivating their hearts so that they could hear the message?**

- **John used Shock Treatment to get their Attention.**

He begins his message by using shock treatment to get their attention by calling them a brood of vipers. This helped them to see the condition of their hearts and their need for repentance.

***Luke 3:7*** Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Without Christ and what He can do for us we are all a brood of vipers walking in the wickedness of our sins.

Notice, he didn't use the feel good approach that so many are using in today's world of a watered down gospel. He made them see their wretchedness. It's important that we understand and see our wretchedness.

***Isaiah 64:6*** But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

***Romans 3:23*** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

- **He Began to Strip Away their Protective Shields.**

***Luke 3:8*** "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

What is John doing? He's tearing away at everything that was secure to them. "We're good Jews." "We obey the commandments." "We're God's chosen people".

He first attacks their sense of righteousness and now he attacks their sense of belonging and who they are in God's sight.

Many Jews expected that in the judgment, God would deal very hard with Gentile sinners, but that the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, the friend of God, would be safe.

John denounces this attitude and removes the presumed security. He is stripping away their protective shields so that they can identify with their need for a savior. This allowed them to see the true condition of their hearts.

- **What kind of protective shields do we have around our hearts that need to be torn away to reveal our true condition before the Lord?**

Works – stay so busy we don't have time to listen to our hearts, loyalty, basic commitment to church family etc., basically a good person.

- **He then Evokes the Fear of God into their Lives.**

**Luke 3:9** *"And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."*

All of this together reveals the conditions of their hearts and produces a conviction of their genuine need before God.

**Luke 3:10** *So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"*

**Their hearts are being cultivated to hear the message.**

This is what it takes to come to genuine repentance in our lives. The Father is looking for those to whom He can draw unto Jesus and this can only happen as a person's heart is properly prepared through brokenness. It must be cultivated.

## **2. The Need for Genuine Repentance.**

John now hits hard on the theme of repentance that had already been introduced earlier in the passage, "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." This is a theme that Peter picked up on as well, when the Jews came to him on the Day of Pentecost (See Acts 2:36-38), and then again in Acts three.

**Acts 3:19** *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*

John goes on to reveal that in every walk of life there are temptations that people give into of which must be repented of.

- **To those who have been blessed with abundance his message was to give.**

**Luke 3:11** *He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."*

To continue to hoard when there are needs is sin that needs to be repented of.

- **To the tax collectors or those who in charge of collecting various fees, his message was to be honest.**

**Luke: 3:12-13** *Then tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"<sup>13</sup> And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."*

- **To soldiers, policemen and those in places of authority, the message was don't intimidate, accuse falsely and be content.**

**Luke 3:14** *Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."*

## **John's message was simple.**

There must be a change in your hearts – God is about to act – Judgment is coming –And you must have a new life!

**Luke 3:3** *And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins...*

- There must be forgiveness first - all have sinned and are vipers.
- There must be a choice to run from sin.
- And then there must be a whole new lifestyle – a new life that is lived in harmony with God and with holiness, a new life that breaks completely with sin.

## **III. Concluding Remarks.**

What are the special temptations in your sphere of life and influence that you must continually watch out for?

God is calling all of us to repent and turn to Him so that the times of refreshing will come. He desires each of us to experience the wonderful newness that enables us to walk with a sense of fervency and zeal that brings us into the fulfillment of all of our hopes and dreams.

Begin to prepare the way now for the presence of the Lord by asking Him, “What areas of my heart have been hardened by the pressures of the world and the circumstances of life?” Then begin to break up the fallow ground by applying His word to those areas that have become hardened and beaten down.

May God bless you as you break up the fallow ground of your heart! You will be blessed and encouraged with a sense of newness as you press into all that He has for you.