

YOUR CHEATING HEART

EZEKIEL 16:4-16

As for your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born.

"And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'

I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord GOD.

Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry

of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty.

Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord GOD.

But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. You took some of the your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them.

Such things should not happen, nor be."

On a list of [The Recording Industry Association Of America's](#) top songs from the 20th century, #34 is a country classic... Hank Williams' "[Your Cheatin' Heart.](#)"

Here's a little sample of [a great country song...](#)

My dad is a huge country music fan, and his favorite singer was Hank Williams. When I was growing up, there were nights when he would pull out his guitar and sheet music, and practice, "*Your Cheatin' Heart.*"

I guess you could say, I grew up singing "*Amazing Grace*" on Sunday mornings, and "*Your Cheatin' Heart*" on Monday nights. What a combination that was!

Yet that's the contrast we find in Ezekiel 16. The first 14 verses are all about *God's amazing grace*, while the rest of the chapter is about *Jerusalem's cheating heart*.

Isn't it interesting how many country songs are about cheating hearts? Ever hear the riddle, "What happens when you play a country music song backwards?"

Answer, "A guy sobers up, gets rehired at the factory, his dog stops howling, and his wife comes home."

Here's a collection of actual lines from country songs that will help describe for us *a cheating heart*...

"You're out doing what I'm doing here without."

"Does my ring hurt your finger when you go out at night?"
"Where are you spending your nights these days?" "I was flushed from the bathroom of your heart."

"If fingerprints showed up on skin, wonder whose I'd find on you?" "You're so cold, I'm turning blue."

"Loving here, living there, and lying in between." "There ain't no queen in my king-sized bed." "It's sad to go to the funeral of a good love that has died."

"She got the goldmine, I got the shaft." "You must think my bed is a bus stop, the way you come and go."

"You're a hard dog to keep under the porch."

These are all songs God could've sung about the Jews of Jerusalem in the days of Ezekiel. **They had a cheating heart.** God married the Hebrew nation when He brought her out of Egypt. He made her His bride, and then showered upon her riches untold - only to find out his bride was an adulteress - a spiritual harlot.

Judah was unfaithful to God, *her husband*, and she followed after idols. As Hank Williams would say, the Jews and Jerusalem had a *cheatin' heart*.

Another line from a country song that also describes the first 16 verses of Ezekiel 16. Dierks Bentley sings, “[I bought the shoes that just walked out on me.](#)”

God’s benevolence was the reason Judah became a great nation, but she took the riches He gave her and used them against Him to finance her harlotry.

Notice chapter 16 begins, “[Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying...](#)” Understand Ezekiel’s word picture in this chapter was not his own creation.

God was expressing His own heart toward the Jews and Jerusalem. And it’s full of emotion, longing, desire, feeling. It’s a powerful depiction of passion and pathos.

God describes what he did for His people in a moving account. Chapter 16 sounds like a page from a romance novel, or a script from a Broadway play, or the storyline from a dramatic movie. It’s a vivid portrayal.

In fact, if you’ve ever envisioned God as stern and emotionless - as a heavenly judge, perched behind a cold, wooden bench, with a blank-stare on his face - forget that image. It couldn’t be further from the truth.

Ezekiel 16 proves that God is never distant or detached from His creation. He’s emotionally invested in our plight. God is personally involved in His people.

God really does love us and care for us. He’s so wrapped up in us, He’s made Himself vulnerable.

Think of it, *you can actually break God's heart.*

Hosea 11:8 is one of the most stirring verses in the Bible. It deals with the same theme as Ezekiel 16.

In Hosea, God knows His people need to be judged. Their blatant backsliding needs to stop. A ferocious army will do the job - but the thought of the harm that will befall Israel, breaks God's heart. *He cries out...*

"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim?" Admah and Zeboiim were cities destroyed years earlier with Sodom and Gomorrah. Hosea 11:8 ends with God saying, "My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred."

Author Philip Yancey comments on this verse, "In the very act of delivering a series of threats, God seems to break down, and a cry of love escapes... "

What a strange thought, *God Almighty breaks down?*

His heart churns? But that sounds odd to us only because we underestimate His care and compassion.

The Bible says that "God is spirit." He has no physical body. But if He did share a human feature with mankind, I believe it would be *tear ducts*.

God hurts. He gets angry. He grieves. He weeps.

His heart churns, and loves, and thrills, and rejoices, and cries for joy, and weeps with sorrow. And He does it all more passionately than anyone you've ever met. He even keeps a diary. He's a *feeling* kind of person.

As a matter of fact, you're reading a page from God's diary here in Ezekiel 16. This chapter in Ezekiel proves once and for all that God has the heart of a lover.

When He found the Jewish people they were like a baby girl abandoned and left for dead. Found in a field, Judah was still covered with blood and goo and fluid.

Her umbilical cord was still attached to her mother's placenta. Obviously, no nurse had attended her birth. There was no one to clean out her eyes and ears and throat - stimulate her breathing - wash her - bundle her body - check her vital signs - cuddle her close.

As verse 5 says, "No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born."

In fact, when God found His people, Judah, the feeble tribe was struggling - fighting to stay alive.

I love verse 6, "And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'"

Check out this scene... The God of the universe stooped over a tiny baby hanging on to life. He's calling, coaxing, encouraging her, "*Live, Live, Live, I tell you,*" Literally, He wills this hopeless child to survive.

And this is exactly what God has done for us.

When he found me I was bloodied, and hopeless, and abandoned. But God beat back spiritual death, and picked up

the walking corpse called Sandy Adams, and called me to *“Live, live, live, I tell you!”*

By the force of God’s own will He saved me. He *willed* me to live - *filled* me with His Spirit - *thrilled* me with His hope and love. It reminds me of John 1:12-13, *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

This little girl survived not because of some family connection, or because of the strength of her own will, or because of anyone else’s assistance - there was no one else around - *a loving God willed her to life!*

But that was just the beginning of all God did for this young girl. He provided her every need and created an environment where she would grow and mature.

And under His gentle nurturing this rejected child became a beautiful woman. God says in verse 8, *“When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness.”*

That’s a Hebrew idiom for a marriage proposal.

God had saved her from certain death. He oversaw and funded her development and education. *Now He asks her to marry Him...* He wants to bless her the rest of her life. He says to her, *“Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,” says the Lord GOD.* God made a promise.

Peter Graves was the original star of Mission Impossible, before Tom Cruise came along. When he and his wife celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary, they attracted considerable attention.

For a Hollywood marriage to last 50 years was indeed a *mission impossible*. Reporters wanted to know the secret of their marriage's incredible longevity.

I love Grave's response. His reply was simple, "[We promised.](#)" *And God promised Judah*. He took an oath and pledged to this girl His allegiance for all eternity.

Imagine, the King of the universe taking a solemn vow to provide the Jews all a husband is suppose to provide a woman - *heart, and home, and happiness...*

And after the wedding, God went further - Ezekiel describes how His grace became *more extravagant*.

He showered her with riches - fed her fine foods, and sweet pastries - exalted her to royalty - pampered her with body oils and perfumes - designer clothes and leather sandals - linen gowns - silk stockings - hip and expensive jewelry (bracelets, chains, studs, earrings, even a tiara). Hey, the Lord God literally took this woman from the brink of *hell* to the door of *Zales*.

It reminds me of the father talking to his perspective son-in-law. He questioned the boy as to what he planned to do with his life. The young man answered, "[Be a Bible scholar, study the Bible.](#)" The father asked him, "[Yes, but how will you provide for my daughter?](#)"

The boy answered, "[God will provide.](#)"

“But how will you buy her the expensive wedding ring that my daughter deserves?” “*God will provide.*” “And how will you afford a nice house?” “*God will provide.*” And educate my grandkids?” “*Sir, God will provide.*”

Later that night, his wife asked him how the conversation went. The father said, “Well, He has no job and no plans, but the good news is he thinks I’m God.” Well in Ezekiel’s story, God Himself did indeed promise to provide for this bride all the very best.

And this could also be a page from every Christian’s diary. Ephesians 1:3 tells us God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.”

If you belong to Jesus you possess an incredible cache’ of spiritual riches. God brought us from *the brink of hell to the Brink’s truck*. He’s unloaded it in our lives.

In Christ God has showered us with forgiveness, acceptance, joy, love, peace, power. He’s restored our honor and dignity. He’s given us a new identity and eternal purpose. He’s infused meaning into our relationships, and installed hope into our future.

God sums it all up for both us and Judah in verse 14, “Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you...” Our salvation was a Cinderella story. God fitted us with the silver slipper.

I noted earlier that Ezekiel 16 could be turned into a novel or Broadway play - *well it has*. In 1956 a musical comedy debuted called, “*My Fair Lady.*”

It's based on this theme. An English professor takes in a lowly, flower girl, Eliza Doolittle. Eliza is an ill-mannered, uncouth, uncultured little street urchin.

But the professor invests time and goes to great expense to train Eliza, and as the years roll on she becomes a poised and polished, noble and beautiful, young lady. And to the professor's utter surprise he falls in love with "*My Fair Lady*." He ends up marrying Eliza Doolittle, and the two live happily-ever-after.

And that's how Ezekiel 16 should've ended!

That's how it was suppose to end. If the nation Judah had just appreciated God's grace - been content with the best - she too could've lived happily-ever-after.

But the silver slipper God fits on these people becomes "[the shoes that just walked out on me.](#)"

From verse 15 onward, God's Eliza Doolittle turns out to be *a flirt*, rather than *fair* - and *a whore*, rather than *a lady*. God's "*My Fair Lady*" gets *bored with the best*, and ends up a hooker. *How could this happen?*

Rather than thank God for His benevolence, Judah uses her beauty and reputation to play the harlot.

Read again the last line of verse 16 - it's like an editorial note, "[Such things should not happen, nor be.](#)"

Verse 15 says of God's wayward bride, "[You trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would](#)

have it.” She went off the deep end. She didn’t just rebel, she threw dignity overboard.

Ezekiel reveals her problem, she **“trusted in her own beauty...”** She forgot what God had done for her. How much she needed him. She became proud and self-sufficient. She listened to all the flattery. She assumed her beauty and blessings were due to her own efforts.

And this is the attitude that leads to a cheating heart.

Judah didn’t deny God per se, they just no longer thought Him necessary, and chased after other gods.

Once, there was a Spanish knight who had no food.

He scavenged for his next morsel. But every evening he’d walk through the town picking his teeth, as if he’d just finished a feast. This is the picture Ezekiel paints of Judah. *They needed God, but pretended not to...*

And this is the attitude that even invades some churches. Rather than glorify God, our prosperity is chalked up to our own genius, or abilities, or a pattern.

Like the church in Laodicea, **“You say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked...”** When there’s pride in our heart, our success goes to our head. And as in the case with Laodicea, it created a lukewarmness toward God.

Pride eventually produces *a cheating heart!*

The rest of the chapter tells us how Judah took God's blessings - the gold, silver, fine clothes He had placed in her wardrobe - and used it to finance idols.

God's bride became a spiritual slut. The Jews set up a different idol at the top of every street in Jerusalem.

Even after all God had done for her, she made no attempt to be faithful to Him. She cared little about loyalty. The nation followed after *Egyptian gods*, then *Assyrian gods*, then *Babylonian gods*. She went to bed and gave her heart to any god, but the one true God.

Verse 25 sums up her attitude in bold, brazen language, "You offered yourself to everyone who passed by, and multiplied your acts of harlotry."

The Jews were willing to jump in the bed with any new idol that appeared on the scene. They traded in the *tried and true God*, for worship that was *novel, and exotic, and mysterious*. They were lured in by curiosity.

And what about you - do you wait on the Lord, or run to whatever's new that promises to ease your pain?

The New American Standard version renders verse 25 in phrases that offend most people's sensibilities.

God says of his former bride, "You spread your legs to every passer-by to multiply your harlotry." This is not what you expect to hear from God! It sounds crude.

But realize, God has been jilted - *this is how He felt!*

A rabbi named Eliezer ben Hycranus wrote in the Jewish Mishnah that Ezekiel 16 should never be read in public. The

rabbi was embarrassed by the risqué' language. But I believe it's God's intention to shock us.

One commentator explains it, "God uses the method employed, as indelicate, as it may seem to people of refined tastes and clean minds, to portray the filthiness and repulsiveness of sin... No carefully chosen words or guarded expressions can make wickedness any less repulsive than it really is in the sight of a holy God."

If you're shocked or offended by God's analogy then apparently, God has accomplished His purpose.

Quite frankly, we need to be shocked! For there are good folks, modest folks, fine Christian folks - who would never spread their legs in public - but they too have given their hearts to idols - to other gods. There are influences in their life that rival their love for God.

Some folks have opened their minds and hearts and affections to evil influences... Other people have simply gotten preoccupied with attractions that might be good and wholesome, but they've pushed God to second place... Either way, *theirs is a cheating heart...*

Rather than love God with *a pure love, a first love, a reserved love* - you've gotten into the habit of giving God the leftovers. After you've looked here and been there, then you give a little time and attention to God.

Passion and excitement for God has deteriorated into obligatory service and mechanical worship.

Let me ask you, when God looks into your heart, does He see *My Fair Lady*, or *a cheatin' heart*?

Realize, idolatry isn't just a relic of the OT, or a far-away phenomena. It doesn't just happen overseas.

DL Moody put it, "You don't have to go to heathen lands today to find false gods. America is full of them. Whatever you love more than God is your idol."

Idol worship occurs when our heart gets too attached to anyone or anything other than God. You can park an idol in the driveway, or watch one on television, or wear its jersey, or listen to its CD, or log on to its website.

Possessions, people, popularity, position, profession, prosperity, pleasure, philosophy can all become idols.

Modern idols come in many forms, and go by many names, but mostly we just call our idols, "toys." It sounds so innocent - *that's just one of my toys.*

An *idol* can be an *item*, or *icon*, or *itinerary*, or *idea*, or *ideal*. Oliver Wendall Holmes put it this way, "Men are idolators, and want something to look at and kiss and hug and throw themselves down before; they always did, they always will; and if you don't make it out of wood, you must make it out of words."

A good cause - world peace, or save the earth, or save the whales - can all be turned into an idol.

What really matters to you? What's important to you? *Is it the recognition of your efforts? Status among your peers? The accruements that come with success? Is it the good life? Physical pleasures? Ease and comfort?*

What's your drive, your desire, your passion? Are you in all-out pursuit of God and godliness?

You use to be. What's happened? Have you cooled?

Here's another Hank Williams song. Listen to the opening line. In fact, *if you can hear God with a country twang*, imagine God singing this to you... (play it)

Think about that in regards to God, "Why don't you love Him like you use to do?" Is your love cold? Has God been crowded out - overshadowed by other stuff.

When my relationship with Jesus begins to play second fiddle... when He takes a backseat... it's a sure sign that there's an idol in my life. 1 John 5:21 is a warning to *NT* believers, "keep yourselves from idols."

Recall what Jesus said to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love." And every married person knows how easy this can happen. A marriage gets busy...

A couple starts to ignore each other - take each other for granted - stop communicating and nurturing the relationship - allow little unresolved differences to drive a wedge. One day you wake up to a cold, frosty love.

And this can happen in our relationship with Jesus.

Once Mark Twain was asked about the reason for his success in life. He replied, "I was born excited."

And so were you! Remember the feelings you had when you first embraced Jesus? The joy and gratitude and relief you felt when it dawned on you that all your sin had been instantly

washed away by the blood of Jesus. An enormous weight rolled off your shoulders.

For days afterwards, there was a smile on your face, a bounce in your step. Your heart grinned for months...

But what about the state of your heart today, is God asking you, *why don't you love Me like you use to do?*

Author Max Lucado writes these sobering words, "Satan won't steal your salvation; he'll just make you forget what it's like to be lost. You'll grow accustomed to prayer and thereby not pray. Worship will become commonplace and Bible study optional. With the passing of time he'll infiltrate your heart with boredom and cover the cross with dust so you'll be 'safely' out of the reach of change. He'll take nothing from you, but will cause you to take everything for granted."

Here's why a heart grows cold - why love and loyalty fade... **We take God for granted.** His amazing grace becomes commonplace. We lose the wonder of it all.

Paul writes to his friend Titus (2:11-13), "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age ..." What is it that teaches us how to *deny ungodliness* and avoid *worldly lusts*?

It's grace! By staying fixated on the love that Jesus showed us, we're more inclined to love Him in return.

It's grace that keeps my heart from growing cold.
Grace keeps me mesmerized with God's great love.

Grace is the drink that quenches my spiritual thirst.
Grace fans the flame of my passion for God.
Grace keeps me humble and makes me thankful...
Grace reminds me that God gave me *His best* when I was at *my worst*. It's grace that guards my heart from the world's intrusions, and keeps it patiently waiting on the gentle shaping and whispers of my Lord Jesus.

What keeps other interests from coming in and crowding out the Lord? It's the humility that comes with an understanding and appreciation of His grace!

God made me a promise!

Am I keeping my promise to Him?

Always remember, idolatry is not *a statue*, but *a state of heart*. It happens when I allow other things to crowd God out of His rightful place in my life. Suddenly, He's no longer the primary reason I'm doing what I'm doing.

And it's such a subtle thing - *when an item becomes an idol...* Whenever it happens I'm sure the Holy Spirit alerts us. He nudges us. He whispers a warning.

But often the momentum toward that thing is rolling so strong, it tends to drown out everything else. Sometimes we don't know what's happened until later.

This is why James sends a wake-up call to his readers. In James 4:4, **“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”**

Just the act of enjoying this world *without God* is enough to insult the God who loved us and died for us.

You wouldn't go to an important event without your spouse, why would you engage this world without God!

As believers committed to God it's our responsibility to remain *internally loyal*. If we flirt with the world, and pursue its thrills and lusts, we're betraying our allegiance to God. *He* wants to be the love of our life!

We all need to remind ourselves that every human heart has a throne - and that throne is *a single-seater*.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other..." Your heart has room for only one master!

Whenever I officiate a wedding I make it a habit to tell the couple, "We don't expect you to be perfect. We all no better, but we do expect you to be faithful."

And that's God's expectation of us. He knows we're not perfect. As the psalmist (103:14) said, "He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust." God is well aware that there'll be moments when we'll fail Him.

But even in our failures, God expect us to be faithful.

He wants *our heart* - *our allegiance*. He wants us to desire Him and His will **above all else**. *God made you a promise. Are you keeping your promise to Him?*

When you think it through the only thing I possess that God doesn't already own, **is my heart**.

He doesn't *need* my service, or sweat, or sacrifice...

He has angels to serve Him... He is an all-powerful God... And the only sacrifice that really matters was made by Jesus... The one thing God wants that I can really give Him is my heart - my love and my loyalty.

And when I come to God holding in my hands a bunch of other stuff it disappoints Him. He wants me to love Him with *all my heart* - with an unrivaled devotion.

John Ruskin once said, "Christ will put up with a great many things in the human heart, but there is one thing He will not put up with, and that's second place!"

The tragedy in Ezekiel 16 is that Judah reacted to God's *amazing grace* not by returning love for love, but they responded to God's love with a *cheatin' heart*.

The chorus of Hank Williams' song actually holds out hope for a cheating heart. Here're the lyrics he sings, "Your cheatin' heart will make you weep. You'll cry and cry, and try to sleep. But sleep won't come the whole night through. Your cheatin' heart will tell on you."

Hank is the jilted lover who's counting on the troubled conscience of the woman he loves to keep her up at night. He hopes she cries and cries the whole night. He's trusting her cheatin' heart will rat her out!

Tragically, Judah and the Jews, slept just fine. The conscience of God's people had become seared.

But not so with us!... If you're a Christian, the Holy Spirit lives in you. He convicts, and warns. When I take God's grace for granted, and forget how good He's been. When my heart

strays... and I turn a toy into an idol... An alarm goes off. God shock me to my senses!

And if He's doing that in your heart today, I pray you'll take heed! Confess your self-sufficiency, your pride. Remind yourself of how good and gracious God has been. How much you *owe Him* and *need Him...*

Here's the conclusion, if you want to protect against a *cheatin' heart* - then keep on singing *Amazing Grace*.