

BFF391 By Every Word #5 Nuggets from Ezekiel

**Scott Moore:** Welcome to the "Building Faith Families" podcast, with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

**Steve:** I am well. How are you?

**Scott:** Uh, I'm good. Had to think about it for a second.

**Steve:** Is that a good by faith, or you feel good?

**Scott:** I'm good.

**Scott:** It's the middle of the Christmas chaos.

**Steve:** Today, I'm going to talk about some nuggets from Ezekiel.

**Scott:** Sweet. Let's do it.

**Steve:** Father, thank You for this holy-day season that we're celebrating. Thank You that we are not anxious to X-out Christ in Christmas, but we want to fully embrace Jesus, and His birth, and His coming, and His incarnation. There's so much packed into it that the more we follow You, the longer we meditate on what's happened that day when eternity entered Earth and space.

I don't know how to describe but it's awesome. Thank You for helping us not to get all wrapped up -- oh, bad pun -- wrapped up in presents, but see Jesus. Help us today as we listen to Your Word, to be fed, to be encouraged, to be inspired in Jesus' name, amen.

**Scott:** Amen.

**Steve:** Boy, I'm even telling puns in my prayers now. :-)

**Scott:** I'm sure God has a sense of humor.

**Steve:** I'm sure He does too, and He messes with me sometimes. I forget what it was the other day, and I cracked up and said, "That was good."

**Scott:** He doesn't like your puns, Steve.

**Steve:** You know how we dads laugh at our kids' jokes even if they're bad and we've heard them 500 times, right?

**Scott:** That's true. That's true.

**Steve:** That's true. God knows our puns even before we think them. He starts smiling even before they reach our lips. Anyway, here we go.

When I was in seminary, I think this was my third year because I was in charge of the school retreat as the school chaplain. The seminary was in Massachusetts and we went to a small church in New Hampshire, and it was not a fancy setting. The guys slept in the sanctuary on pews. Either that or on the floor. I don't know where the girls

slept. It was a special retreat in the sense that God's spirit moved among us, except in my heart. I went home from that retreat nonplussed.

I thought, "What happened?" I could see my brothers and sisters were being encouraged, and the spirit of God was moving, and the worship was amazing, but I was like a bump on a log. I started searching my heart. Have I sinned? Is there something I haven't confessed? I was only a couple years into my walk with God.

Dr. Christy Wilson was the missions professor, but he was more than that at the seminary. He was a trusted advisor and a godly man.

I made an appointment to see him the first chance I had, and said, "I don't know what to do. I can sense that God's spirit has been moving, but I'm just not with the program."

He recommended I read a sermon by Charles Finney entitled, "Breaking Up the Fallow Ground." He even gave me a book with the sermon in it. I read this message, and it was good and right on target. It was based on Hosea 10:12, "Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek Jehovah, that He may come and rain righteousness upon you."

I looked up in the dictionary, this is back before computers, and I found out that "fallow ground" was hard ground after a harsh winter. A farmer goes out in the spring, the snow is gone, and that ground is crusty, and needs to be plowed several times and then you have to harrow it.

It's a process in order to make that fallow ground, which is hard, unyielding, and crusty, to make it soft and pliable so that it can receive seeds. I thought, "That's me." I have a hard heart.

It was the Scripture and the sermon combination that God used by His Spirit to show me that I had a hard heart. I made an appointment in my head that the next weekend, I was going to take some time to seek God. When Saturday came, I locked the door, knelt by the bed, and asked God to break up my hard heart.

At the time, one of the things that God did, was show me my own sinfulness, and it was too much to take, and I began to sob. Tears were shed, but I received a soft heart. I received a repentant spirit. Then about this same time, God led me to this wonderful passage of Scripture in Ezekiel 36:26.

"I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." Isn't that a great scripture? I remember from that point for a month or so, I used to wake up in the morning, and the first prayer I would pray is, "Father, take out anything stony in my heart and give me a heart of flesh."

He said He was going to do that in His word, and I was holding Him to His promise. That's how I began each day, and God answered my prayer. As I remember, that was an amazing spring for my walk with God because He had given me a heart of flesh. He not only revealed my issue through the passage in Hosea, He even gave me a prayer to pray from Ezekiel.

Whenever possible, when I am praying and not telling puns in my prayers, I like to use God's word as I'm praying. "Father, give me a new heart and a new spirit, remove the heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh." The more I'm saturated in Scripture, the more cognizant I am of God's Word, the more it's interwoven into my very being.

**Scott:** I think that's one of the most important prayers a believer can pray because we, in our sinful nature, have, or at least are on our path to having hard hearts. I see so many Christians who like to quote the verse about "The heart is desperately wicked, who can trust it?" and believe that their hearts are no good.

However I'm like, "No, Jesus gave you a new heart." It's not perfect yet, but you're growing in that. Not everything in your heart is evil. Not by a long shot. Not if Jesus is there.

**Steve:** Amen. I don't know about you, but that's how I first heard the gospel expressed, that I would receive Jesus into my heart. Here is that wonderful promise that He'll give us a new heart. Amen. Good exhortation.

This is one of many times that the Word of God convicted me, for the Bible "is living and active" as it says in Hebrews 4:12. "The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Sometimes we don't even know what's going on, but as I just talked about, it was the Word of God that penetrated my spirit and mind and showed me that I have a hard heart. That was God searching me and dividing the thoughts and intentions of my heart. Conviction is one of the many works of the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit is the one that authored the Word of God, we shouldn't be surprised when the Word of God convicts us of sin.

I'm going to talk about how I was convicted of sin, by a passage in Leviticus 6:1-5. "Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, 'If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against Jehovah by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor or has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely, in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby.

'If he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery, or what he got by oppression, or the deposit that was committed to him, or the lost

thing that he found, or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt."

People who have sinned by robbing one another need to not only acknowledge their sin but to make restitution and, "Restore it in full." They have a responsibility to pay back what they've stolen, "and add a fifth," or 20 percent.

When I was convicted by this passage, God brought to my memory three places where I had stolen. The first one was when I was a teen, around 12 or 13. We used to go to a little drugstore on the way to baseball practice with our baseball gloves. I would hide a Mallo Cup in my glove and leave without paying.

I feel badly even saying this, but I did. I figured out to the best of my ability how many Mallo Cups I'd taken. I was in New England at the time, but when I returned home to Pittsburgh for a break, I went to the store, found the owner, asked his forgiveness, and paid him what I had taken plus 20 percent. He thanked me. It wasn't easy, but God helped me.

Then I thought of some clothes I had stolen. This is full confessions today. [sighs] Did the same thing. Except this time the manager said, "Wait, I'm going to call the police."

**Scott:** Yikes.

**Steve:** I was thinking he was going to be like the first guy and say, "Oh, I appreciate your honesty," because I had paid him back plus 20 percent. I just stood there thinking, "This is not going how I scripted it in my mind," but he didn't end up doing that. However I had a clear conscience. I'd paid it back.

The last event I paid restitution occurred when I was in college as a basketball player. The team had this lovely white cloth tape, which we called jock tape, for taping up your ankles and any injuries you had. Even though we used it when we needed to, most of us took more than we needed. At least I did. I can only speak for myself.

I figured out how many rolls of tape and what the value was. This time I didn't wait till I was home instead I wrote a letter to the athletic department and enclosed a check, apologized, and added 20 percent. I did it. I made restitution. I did what the scripture said. It was hard, but it was good.

Let me just say that most of the times when I've experienced conviction, it is not a happy feeling. At the same time, conviction is infused with an element of hope because I know that when I confess and make restitution, and do what I need to do to make restoration, then I'm going to feel good when I'm done.

If you want to talk about emotions, conviction feels lousy, but a clear conscience feels great. There's a passage in 2 Corinthians that talks about what I call conviction, except it uses different words. It refers to conviction as "godly grief."

2 Corinthians 7:9–10, "I rejoice not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret."

As we mentioned once before, I was walking in the light that God revealed to me. I had read Leviticus, these sins come to my mind, and I applied the Scripture, and did what I was supposed to do. 1 John 1:7. "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin."

Scripture has amazing examples of people who have sinned badly and yet been restored wonderfully. One of them is Peter. When Peter denied Jesus three times, just after he had said, "I will never deny you," that was awful. Jesus looked at him, and he knew, and Peter knew, and Peter went out and wept.

I can't help but think it's pretty special how Jesus prepared breakfast for the fishermen on the seashore, and invited them to join Him for breakfast. There was an elephant at the campfire between Jesus and Peter. Peter's denial had not been settled between them. Probably Peter didn't know what to do.

Jesus took the initiative. He said, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord, You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord, You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Lord, You know everything. You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep." This occurred in John 21.

Pretty special. It would have been nice if Peter had just run up to Him and thrown himself and said, "I'm sorry," and Jesus said, "I forgive you," but Jesus knew what Peter needed. There's a whole bunch of stuff going on here, but perhaps Peter needed to affirm Him three times.

I like the fact that He didn't say, "OK, now you get in the back of the line because you're faulty. You screwed up." He said, "No, I have a commission for you. Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep. Feed My sheep. I want you to be back in My service at My side." Peter became one of the heads of the early church.

There are lots of examples in the Bible where we can talk about sin. We serve an amazing, amazing God Who not only convicts us of sin but then points us back to Jesus. He restores us. He sets us on our feet, and then we move on.

Instead of spending the rest of eternity beating ourselves up, we get our eyes back on Jesus like Peter did. We enter back into the fray, and we take our place besides other believers. What do you think of that?

**Scott:** I don't like conviction much. It's one of those things, man. You feel the Holy Spirit tugging at your heart. You better follow Him in that or it'll get ugly because the opposite of that is running away and the Jonah thing. That verse has hit me a few times recently for some reason when Jesus said that this generation will have no sign but Jonah.

**Scott:** That's terrifying. Jonah was so angry at God for being merciful. That's where your heart leads if you don't go with the Holy Spirit on the conviction part. Sorry, that got really serious really fast.

**Steve:** That's OK. That's what we pray for when we have these things, that God will lead us into on our podcast. I'm glad that He convicts us, but I'm glad the conviction is infused with hope as opposed to condemnation, which I know I've spoken about this before. Judas knew that he also had denied Jesus. He'd given Him up. He'd betrayed Him.

**Steve:** He wept, but it was different because he ran out of hope. He moved into despair, and hung himself. Condemnation is when you feel like, "Oh, God can never forgive me." Condemnation is not from God. Condemnation is from the devil. He is the accuser of the brethren.

God is the encourager of the brethren. Romans 8:1, "There's no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus." We need to make a distinction between conviction, which has similar emotions, Peter wept, but condemnation doesn't have the hope component, whereas conviction does have the hope component.

**Scott:** Amen.

**Steve:** If anybody's listening, If you need more sin stories, we could talk about David who sinned grievously, and yet Jesus called Himself the son of David.

Thank You, Father, that You love us enough to convict us. Thank You for Your Word that's living and active and points out our needs. Pointed out my need for a heart of flesh, pointed out my need to make restitution. Thank You for light that You give us to walk in so that we can be fully restored.

Thank You, Father, for what You've written in Your Word to encourage us in the instances of Peter. Thank You for passages from Ezekiel, and Hosea, and Leviticus, and John, and 2 Corinthians today that have encouraged us. Truly, the sum of Your Word is truth, and we worship You for it in Jesus' name, amen.

**Scott:** Amen. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at [spdemme@gmail.com](mailto:spdemme@gmail.com). If you have a question for me, you can reach me at [scott@unsocializedmedia.com](mailto:scott@unsocializedmedia.com). Have a great week.