

DRY BONES

Lenten Preparation | Dry Bones | Ezekiel 37:1-14

Ezekiel 37:4-6

‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’

Deeper Dive

During this time, the nation of Israel was in exile. The Babylonians were one of the most feared and ruthless armies, and they had seized Judah. Through a series of sieges they had leveled Jerusalem, and sent all the Jewish people into exile. This was a time of great despair as Israel had disobeyed the Lord, and the Lord had allowed a foreign nation to overtake them. In Chapter 37 those in exile had just received the news that Jerusalem had fallen, and they losing hope that God was ever going to save them. Ezekiel, a prophet during this time, received this vision from the Lord about a valley of dry bones, which is where we pick up in our reading this week.

Day 1 - How did we get here?

After reading the “Deeper Dive” section for context, we can only imagine the deep despair Israel must have been feeling after hearing from friends and family about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The entire nation of Israel was scattered in exile. Scripture emphasizes that this was a direct result of their unfaithfulness to God, and their worship of other gods. Even after many warnings and predictions of their destruction, Israel hardened their hearts and refused to turn towards the Lord.

Before we judge Israel too harshly, don’t we all have moments where we knowingly turn away from God? We might not build golden statues to bow down to, but we can easily get caught up in worshipping power, control, money, people, careers, and all sorts of other influences that can take the place of God in our lives. God warns us against these influences in His word, just as He did Israel. He knows that following anything else but Him will ultimately lead to our destruction. God is the only influence in our lives that is perfect, always working for our good, holy and worthy of our worship.

Can you think of a time in your life where following something other than God lead to a crisis or a season of despair? Many times this can start as a subtle “drift”, and we may not even realize the severity of our counterfeit worship until it feels too late. Have you ever thought to yourself, how did I even get here? Maybe you felt like all hope was lost, and you weren’t even sure how to ask for help.

We can easily become overwhelmed by shame or guilt, and begin to believe the lies that God won’t help us or that we have to figure it out ourselves. This is exactly the place of hopeless despair that the people of Israel were in when we start chapter 37 in Ezekiel. They assumed that God was done with them, and that they were as good as dead. It’s in that moment that God shows Ezekiel through prophetic visions that it’s never too late for God. God is ready to meet us where we are and breath new life into those dead areas with His mercy & grace.

- Are there areas in your life where you are worshipping something other than God? Are there areas that feel spiritually lost, dead or hopeless? Prayerfully name it and begin the process to surrender it to the Lord today.

Deeper Dive

Scripture to meditate on:

- **Ezekiel 37:1-2** ~ The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.
- **1 John 1:9** ~ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
- **1 Corinthians 4:5** ~ He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart
- **Psalms 90:8** ~ You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.
- **Luke 12:2** ~ There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.
- **Ecclesiastes 12:14** ~ For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.
- **Jeremiah 16:17** ~ My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes.

Day 2 - Can you see the valley?

While the prophet Ezekiel was living in a refugee camp as an exile, he sat by the river to pray. Suddenly, the Lord began to give him visions. In Ezekiel 37:1-2 the Spirit of the Lord takes Ezekiel to a valley of dry bones. In ancient Mesopotamian warfare it was a common practice to leave unburied corpses in the battlefield as a mark of utter shame for their enemies. This valley of dry bones represented the spiritually defeated and dead nation of Israel as they bore the consequences for their sin in utter defeat from the Babylonian Empire.

Have you ever had an “ah ha” moment where your eyes were suddenly opened to a broken or dead place in your life? Sometimes it’s a moment that is as unmistakable as the “snap” and sudden pain of a broken bone, where you suddenly see the trajectory of where your decisions are taking you. However, many times it’s more subtle, like a numbness inside that you try to fill with all sorts of other things.

During Ezekiel’s vision it says “He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.” The Spirit of the Lord didn’t just let Ezekiel see the dry bones, he led him around to examine them. He allowed Ezekiel to see the vastness of the bones, and the level of dryness in the bones. This is exactly what the Lord does for us. If we will allow Him, His Spirit will reveal to us the depth of the dry bones and valleys in our lives. This is the first step in the process of surrender, reconciliation and forgiveness. We have to know what we need forgiveness for, before we can ask for it. We have to know and understand the depths of our brokenness, spiritual dryness, or even death before we can regain life.

Sometimes we get so used to the dry bones, or the mess & brokenness in our lives that we don’t even “see” it. Like a messy desk, or a pile of laundry in the corner, if you ignore it long enough you may begin to completely overlook it. Sometimes it’s not until you have guests over with fresh eyes that you suddenly notice those dirty dishes in the sink. Sometimes it takes being in someone else’s spotless home that makes you concerned about that overflowing trash in your kitchen. Spiritually speaking it might be a moment when you share something with a Godly friend, and their concerned reaction opens your eyes. It could be a moment while studying the Word when seeing the “spotlessness” of Christ shines a light on what you’ve been ignoring. As painful and humbling as it can be, it is critical for us to allow God to lead us through the valley, and to truly see the dry, dead and broken places in our lives.

- Spend time in silent prayer today. Ask God to bring to your mind the dry, broken, and messy places in your life. Ask Him to guide you as you truly examine just how dry your valley might be. Ask yourself how you got here?
- Pray and ask Him to speak life into those areas this week.

Deeper Dive

Scripture to meditate on:

- **Ezekiel 37: 3** ~He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."
- **Romans 7: 15-24** ~ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.[c] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Day 3 - Can dry bones live?

Have you ever felt like something was beyond hope? Maybe it was in a season of financial hardship or job loss, a crisis in your marriage, working through a broken friendship, a season of being stuck in an addiction cycle, or battling with mental or physical health issues. It can be easy to believe the lie that "there's no way out", or the lie that "it's all up to me". Ezekiel could have easily sat down in that valley of dry bones in utter despair and stopped right there. He could have given up, and given into the idea that there was no way Israel would ever turn back to God and be free from this powerful foreign nation. How could one person turn an entire nation around? Who would listen to him? We can only imagine that these thoughts may have been on his mind when God asks him in verse 3, "can these bones live?"

This question is powerful! What happens in our lives when we are led into the valley and our eyes are opened to our spiritually dead & broken places? What do we say when God asks us if we have hope in finding new life in the valley? Our natural first reaction is often to use our own human abilities to try and figure a way out. Many times we don't even reach out to friends or loved ones because of the shame that surrounds the brokenness. We can allow hopelessness to overwhelm us as we attempt to find our way out alone. Even when we pray about the situation, we can be tempted to tell God how we're going to solve it. We can mistakenly ask God to join us, verses truly following Him. Have you ever tried to micromanage God, or given God a "to do" list in your prayers? What about a "schedule" for when and how he should resolve this issue in your life? This can lead us to believe the lie that "God doesn't hear me" or "God doesn't care" when He doesn't answer our prayer in the exact manner or timing that we have directed Him.

Ezekiel thankfully gives us a wonderful example of what we should do in the valley. He answers God by saying "Sovereign Lord, you alone know.". He lays the answer, the solution, the "to do" list and the timing all in God's hands. He has faith that God knows best, and that God can do anything, including bringing dry bones to life. This is the place that we must all get to in the valley in order to allow God to work. This is the place of fully surrendering the rescue plan to God, and recognizing that He alone has the power to breath life into any of the dry, dead, or broken bones in your life.

- Where in your life have you lost hope in your dry bones? What would you say to God if He asked you today, "can these bones live"?
- Are there areas where shame and disappointment have made you feel alone in your journey to find new life? Are you trying to figure it out on your own, or are you surrendering it the Lord? What would it look like to say, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know"?

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- **Ezekiel 37: 4-10** ~Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.' So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.
- **Isaiah 55: 8-9** ~For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts

Day 4 - What if it seems crazy?

Ever done something crazy for God? Something that didn't make sense logically, physically, or even to other people? In this dry valley moment, God asks Ezekiel to speak to the wind & dry bones, as an act of obedience. Ezekiel obediently does exactly as God commands, before the first bone rattles, before he knows the plan, and before he can see the outcome. Throughout scripture we see this pattern of God calling for faith, surrender and obedience before He moves.

1. **Noah** - God asks Noah to build an ark for protection from a flood, at a time when they had never seen rain. Noah obeys and was saved along with his family from the death and destruction of a devastating flood. (Genesis 6)
2. **Moses** - God asks Moses to stretch out his staff before He parts the Red Sea for Israel to cross. Moses obeys, God parts the seas, and it says the Israelites crossed on "dry land" while their enemies were swallowed up by the waves behind them. (Exodus 14)
3. **Joshua** - God asks Joshua to march around the city of Jericho for 7 days, and shout loudly to tear down heavily fortified city walls. Joshua obeys and God causes the walls of Jericho fall to the Israelites along with the entire city. (Joshua 6)
4. **Gideon** - God told him to go to battle against an army of 135,000 with only 300 men armed with only a pitcher, lamp and horn. He obeyed and they praised God for their victory. (Judges 7)
5. **Philip** - God asked him to leave a thriving ministry to go walk down a desolate road to talk to one person. That one person was an Ethiopian eunuch that God worked through to spread the Good News farther than Philip could have imagined. (Acts 8)
6. **Peter** - Jesus asked Peter to go catch a fish and look in it's mouth for a coin they needed to pay their taxes. Peter obeyed and miraculously retrieved the coin they needed. (Matthew 17)

Are there areas in your own valley of dry bones that God is calling you to move in obedience to Him? Maybe it seems pointless to speak over dead bones, build an ark when you've never seen rain, wave a stick over a giant body of water, look in a fish's mouth for money, fight an army with a lamp, or tear down walls by shouting, but God isn't asking for us to understand, comprehend or figure things out. He is asking for our faith, surrender and obedience. His ways are not our ways, His logic is not our logic, and His timing is not our timing. God never says "figure it out", He says "follow me".

- Is there a step of obedience that God is asking you to do in faith before you understand how He's going work in your situation?
- Pray and ask God to show you what that first right step is today, even if it seems crazy, humbling, or hard.

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- **Ezekiel 37: 11-14** ~Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'"
- **Galatians 5:16** ~So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.
- **Psalms 143:10** ~Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.
- **Proverbs 3:5-6** ~Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Day 5 - Bones + Obedience + Spirit = Life

How do we move from dry bones to a renewed life in Christ, filled with the Spirit, alive, awake and free?! Ezekiel's vision, as strange as it seems, gives us an amazing framework for the true revival & renewal that God calls each of us towards.

1. **See the Bones** - (Ezekiel 37:1-2) - Allow Jesus to shine a light on those spiritually dry, dead, and broken places in your life. Write them in your journal today and honestly tell God what you see.
2. **Surrender** - (Ezekiel 37:3) - Surrender your hopelessness, your plan, your human attempts, your shame & guilt, your goals, your "to do" lists, and your timeframe over to the Lord. Truly spend time listening to God in prayer today. How does He want you to move forward in giving those dry bones over to Him?
3. **Do the Crazy** - (Ezekiel 37:4-10) - What is God calling you to do? No matter how crazy or illogical it seems, even if it's talking to dry bones, DO IT! Is it a gut wrenching apology, is it seeking therapy, is it asking for help, is it giving until it hurts, or is it just inviting someone to join you in prayer over this broken place? We don't have to know the full plan or to understand it all, just take the first step, and He will meet you there!
4. **Breath = Life** - (Ezekiel 37:7-14) - In verse 7, the bones had miraculously formed together with tendons, muscles, and skin. The bodies had everything in place that they needed to live, however, it says there was no breath in their lungs. Once we get to the place that we have formed the structure and spiritual practices in our lives, it doesn't end there. We still need the breath of life.

Pray today, and ask yourself where you are in this process of awakening dry bones? Are you in the valley looking at the dry bones, are you at the stage of surrendering, are you beginning to take crazy big steps of faith, or are you already like the fully formed bodies in verse 7? This is the space we so often get stuck in. We can look alive on the outside, but inside we are still dead. In Ezekiel's vision, the Lord specifically calls him to speak to the Spirit and ask for the breath life in this final step of awakening for the people of Israel. This word for "breath", Ruach, is the same word used when God breathed life into Adam in Genesis 2. It means both physical and spiritual renewal and revival. We need the Holy Spirit inside of us to truly live a life with Christ. Maybe you are weary from striving to do everything right on your own, but struggling to hear God's voice or to sense His Spirit? Pray and ask God for Ruach today!

Remember God's revival isn't just for you personally. Just like it wasn't just for one Israelite. This restoration has a greater purpose: a testimony of God's faithfulness and power for the world to see. **5**