

What Do You See?

An Invitation to the Valley

Chapter 1

The Valley We Never Expected

“What Do You See?”

There are places in life we never expect to visit.

As children, we imagine futures filled with possibility. We dream of marriages that last forever, families that remain close, careers that flourish, friendships that endure, and bodies that remain strong. We assume that life will move steadily upward, carrying us toward our hopes and dreams.

Then life happens: a diagnosis arrives; a marriage struggles; a child becomes distant; a parent dies; a friendship fractures; a job disappears; a dream collapses; a habit becomes an addiction; a grief settles deeper than expected, and before we realize it, we find ourselves standing in a valley we never intended to enter.

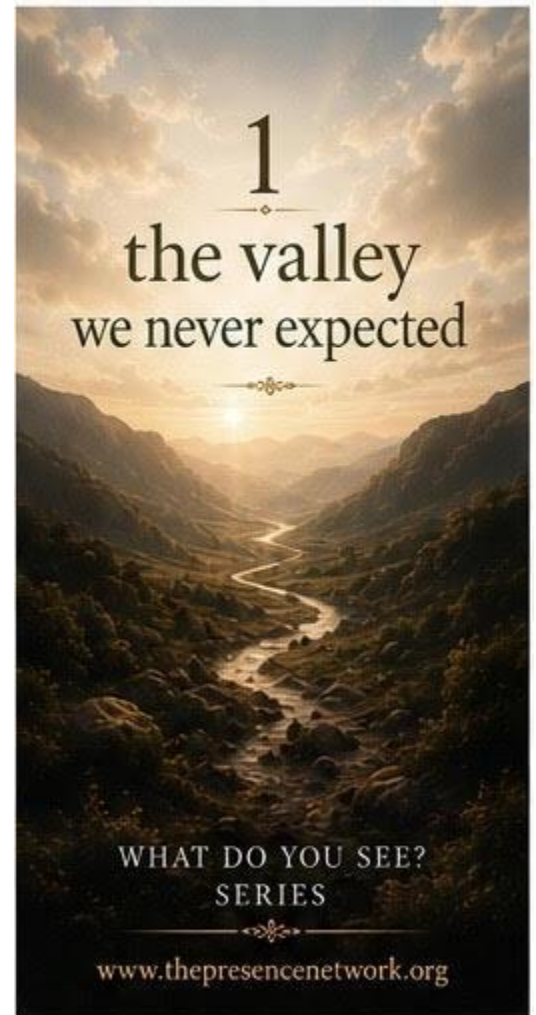
The people of Israel knew that valley well. Ezekiel’s vision emerges during one of the darkest chapters in Israel’s history. Jerusalem had fallen, the temple had been destroyed, families had been separated. The people had been carried away into exile in Babylon, everything that once gave them identity, security, and meaning seemed lost.

Imagine the questions they must have asked: *How did we get here? Will things ever be normal again? Has God abandoned us? Can anything good come from this? Will our future ever be different from our present?* These were not theological questions, they were human questions, the same questions many of us still ask today. For some, the valley is grief, for others, it is depression, for others, it is betrayal, addiction, burnout, loneliness, financial hardship, family conflict, illness, or spiritual exhaustion. The names may change, but the experience remains remarkably similar. We find ourselves standing among the ruins of what once was, and we wonder whether anything can ever live again.

The Valley of Dry Bones

Ezekiel writes: “*The hand of the Lord was upon 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.*” (Ezekiel 37:1)

Notice where God takes Ezekiel, not to a mountain, not to a palace, not to a place of victory, He brings him into a valley. Valleys are interesting places in Scripture, they are often places of



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testing, uncertainty, struggle, and transformation. The valley is where we confront what we would rather avoid, where our illusions are stripped away. The valley is where we discover what remains when everything else has been taken from us, and this valley is full of bones, not a few bones, not scattered remains here and there. The text emphasizes an abundance, a plethora of bones. Bones everywhere, evidence of death everywhere, evidence of loss, of hopelessness everywhere. It's there, Ezekiel adds an important detail: *"They were very dry."* These were not recent deaths; these bones had been exposed for a long time. The sun had baked those bones, the wind had stripped them, and time had erased any visible sign of life. If there had ever been hope, it appeared long gone. This is not a difficult situation, this is an impossible situation, and that distinction matters.

Many of us still *hold hope* when something is difficult, but what do we do when something feels impossible? What happens when enough time has passed that restoration seems unrealistic? What happens when we have prayed for years? Waited for decades? Tried repeatedly? Failed repeatedly? What happens when the bones become very dry?

The Voice of Despair

Later in the chapter, God tells Ezekiel exactly what the people are saying: "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." What a painful statement. Notice what they do not say, they do not say: *"Our circumstances are difficult."* They do not say: *"We are struggling."* They do not say: *"We need help."* Instead, they declare a verdict: *"Our hope is gone."* Not weakened, not wounded, gone. Hope gone is one of the deepest wounds any person can experience, because hope is what allows us to endure the valley. When hope disappears, despair begins writing the story. When hope disappears, we stop imagining possibilities and stop believing that tomorrow can be different than today. The people had become convinced that their future was over; many of us know that feeling, perhaps not intellectually, but emotionally. We may smile in public while quietly carrying hopelessness within. We may continue functioning while secretly believing nothing will ever change. We may appear strong while feeling completely exhausted.

The valley often looks different from the inside than it does from the outside.

The Question

And then God asks a question; not to the people; to Ezekiel. Standing among the bones, surrounded by evidence of death, God asks: *"Son of man, can these bones live?"* At first glance, it seems like a strange question. Of course they cannot, everything Ezekiel sees seems to declare a resounding "no". The bones are disconnected, scattered, dry, ancient, dead, yet God asks anyway. Why? Because the question is not really about the bones, the question is about vision. The question is about perception; the question is about whether Ezekiel will interpret reality solely by what he sees or whether he can remain open to what the Eternal One sees.

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The same question confronts every one of us. What do you see? Do you see only failure? Or possibility? Only loss? Or growth? Only endings? Or beginnings? Only death? Or the potential for life? The answer to that question often shapes the direction of our journey.

Reflection Questions

1. What valley are you currently walking through?
2. What losses have most affected your sense of hope?
3. Have there been seasons when you felt emotionally, spiritually, or relationally “dried up”?
4. What circumstances in your life currently feel impossible?
5. If The Presence asked you today, “Can these bones live?” how would you honestly respond?

Journal Exercise

Take a few moments to complete the following statements:

- The valley I did not expect to enter is _____.
- What feels lost to me right now is _____.
- The area of my life that feels most like dry bones is _____.
- What I fear most about this situation is _____.
- If hope were possible, it might look like _____.

Presence Practice

Sit quietly for five minutes, without trying to solve anything, simply notice what valley you are carrying today. Name it honestly, do not minimize it, do not exaggerate it. Just acknowledge it. Then ask yourself: “*What do I see?*”

Write whatever comes to mind, there are no right answers, only honest ones.

Closing Meditation

Every journey of restoration begins with an honest look at reality. The Eternal One does not ask Ezekiel to pretend the bones are not there. The Presence does not ask him to deny the loss or to manufacture optimism. The Eternal Presence simply invites Ezekiel to look, to stand in the valley, to tell the truth, and then to consider a possibility larger than his own conclusions.

The valley is not the end of the story, but before we can discover what comes next, we must first answer the question that echoes across the centuries: *What do you see?*