

What Do You See?

An Invitation to the Valley

Chapter 3

Can These Bones Live?

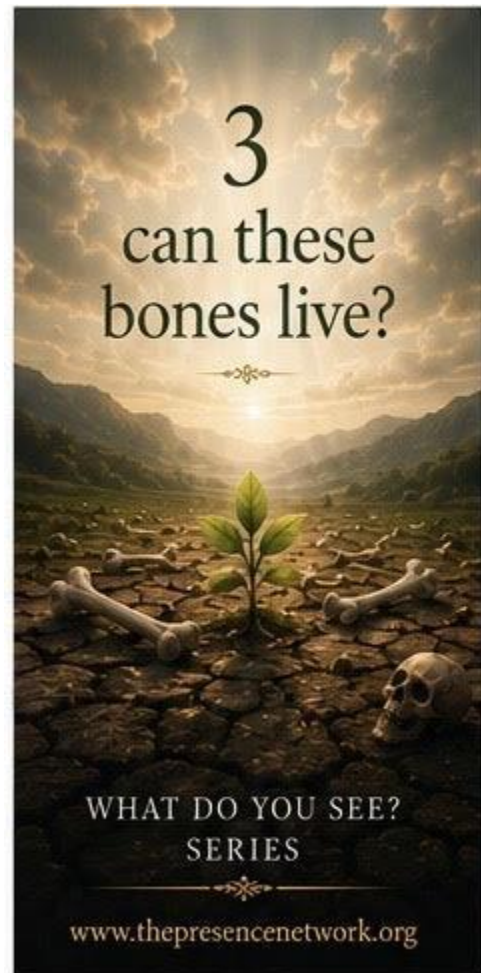
There are questions that seek information, and there are questions that reveal the heart; God's question to Ezekiel belongs in the second category. Standing in a valley surrounded by dry bones, God asks: "*Son of man, can these bones live?*" At first glance, the answer seems obvious: No. Absolutely not. The bones are disconnected, scattered, lifeless, dry. Time has already rendered its verdict; death has already spoken. The evidence is overwhelming, and yet God asks the question anyway, not because He needs an answer, because Ezekiel does. 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 allow the visible to become the final reality.

The Tyranny of Appearances

Most of us live by what we see, that seems reasonable, after all, our eyes provide information, our experiences provide evidence, our memories provide context. But there is a danger in allowing appearances to become absolute truth. Appearances tell us what is. they do not always tell us what can be. A marriage may appear dead. A relationship may appear beyond repair. A child may appear unreachable. A dream may appear finished. A person may appear hopelessly addicted. A family may appear permanently fractured. A church may appear lifeless. A nation may appear divided. A heart may appear exhausted, and sometimes all those observations are accurate. The problem arises when we assume that what is visible today determines what is possible tomorrow. The valley tempts us toward conclusions; God invites us toward curiosity. The valley says: "*This is over.*" God asks: "*What if it isn't?*"

Ezekiel's Remarkable Answer

Ezekiel's response may be one of the wisest answers in all of Scripture, he says: "*Sovereign Lord, You alone know.*" What an extraordinary reply. He does not deny reality. He does not pretend. He does not manufacture optimism. He does not say: "*Of course they can live.*" He doesn't even say: "*No, they can't.*" Instead, he acknowledges his limitations. In essence he says: "*Everything I see suggests death...but You may see something I do not.*" This posture or "place"



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is the birthplace of humility, and perhaps the birthplace of hope; not certainty; not confidence; not positive thinking, simply the recognition that God's perspective may be larger than our own.

The Difference Between Faith and Denial

Many people confuse faith with denial. Faith is not pretending the valley isn't there. Faith is not ignoring reality. Faith is not closing our eyes to suffering. Faith does not require us to call dry bones healthy bones. Faith tells the truth: The bones are dry. The losses are real. The wounds are painful. The grief exists. The addiction exists. The betrayal exists. The loneliness exists. Faith simply refuses to believe that those realities possess the final word. Denial says: "*There is no problem.*" Faith says: "*There is a problem, but perhaps there is more to the story.*" Denial *ignores* the valley. Faith *walks through* it. Denial *avoids* pain. Faith *faces* pain while remaining open to possibility... this distinction changes everything, because many people have abandoned hope, not because reality is difficult, but because they mistakenly believe faith requires pretending. God never asks Ezekiel to pretend; He asks him to remain open.

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Perhaps the central question of this book is not: *Can these bones live?* Perhaps the deeper question is: *What do you see?* Two people can stand in the same valley and see entirely different things:

One sees only *loss*, another sees *lessons*.

One sees only *failure*, another sees *growth*.

One sees only *endings*, another sees *beginnings*.

One sees *punishment*, another sees *transformation*.

The circumstances we encounter may be identical; the interpretation is different, and ***interpretation shapes experience***; this is true in grief, in marriage, in parenting, in caregiving, in ministry, in recovery, and in every human life.

The stories we tell ourselves become the lenses through which we experience reality, that is why God's question to Ezekiel matters: before He changes the valley, He challenges the lens.

Seeing Ourselves Correctly

Many of us have spent years defining ourselves by our failures: our mistakes, our wounds, our regrets, our disappointments. We have become experts at cataloging what is wrong with us, yet God rarely speaks to people according to their current condition, He speaks according to their deeper identity.

Abram becomes *Abraham* before becoming a father of nations.

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Simon becomes *Peter* before acting like a rock.

Gideon is called a *mighty warrior* while hiding in fear.

The prodigal son *remains a son* even while living among pigs.

Israel is called God's people even in exile.

God consistently sees beyond the present moment; He sees potential where others see limitation, purpose where others see failure, possibility where others see impossibility, and perhaps the greatest challenge is learning to see ourselves through that same lens.

The Valley as a Classroom

Most of us want escape, God often offers formation. We want immediate rescue; God often offers transformation. We want the valley removed; God sometimes uses the valley to teach us how to see, because valleys reveal things mountains never can.

Valleys expose assumptions, uncover fears, reveal dependencies, show us where our hope truly resides, and teach us that life is sustained by something deeper than circumstances, perhaps that is why Ezekiel is led through the valley before he witnesses restoration: he must learn to see differently before he can participate in what comes next, the same may be true for us.

Reflection Questions

1. What circumstances in your life currently seem impossible?
2. How do you typically interpret difficult situations?
3. Do you tend toward optimism, pessimism, or realism?
4. Have there been times when what appeared hopeless eventually changed?
5. What might God see in your situation that you currently cannot?

Journal Exercise

Complete the following statements:

- The dry bones I struggle most to believe can live are _____.
- The evidence that causes me to doubt is _____.
- What I currently see is _____.
- What God may see that I cannot yet see is _____.
- One area where I need a larger perspective is _____.

Presence Practice

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Sit quietly for several moments, bring to mind a situation that feels impossible. Without trying to fix it, simply hold it before the quiet, still Presence of God, then ask: *“What do I see?”*

Write your answer. Next ask: *“What might God see?”* Write whatever comes to mind, do not worry about being right, the purpose is not certainty, the purpose is openness.

Closing Meditation

The valley tells a story; the bones tell a story; your wounds tell a story; your losses tell a story, but they do not tell the whole story.

The visible world is real; the pain is real, the evidence is real, yet there is a wisdom deeper than appearances: a perspective larger than our conclusions, a possibility hidden beneath what seems impossible, that is why Ezekiel does not answer with certainty, he answers with humility, *“Lord, You alone know”* ...and perhaps that is enough for now. Not certainty; not answers; not guarantees, just the willingness to admit that God may see more than we do, because transformation often begins the very moment that we stop assuming we already know how the story ends.