

What Do You See?

An Invitation to the Valley

Chapter 6

Alive, But Not Living

There is a moment in Ezekiel's vision that should stop us in our tracks: The bones have come together, the skeletons are formed, tendons appear, muscles develop, skin covers the bodies, everything looks complete. Everything looks healthy, everything looks alive, yet Ezekiel makes a startling observation: *"But there was no breath in them."* No breath, no life, no movement, no vitality, no animation, no Presence. From a distance, they appear alive, but up close, they are still lifeless, and perhaps that is one of the most important lessons in the entire chapter.

It is possible to have the appearance of life while lacking the experience of it.

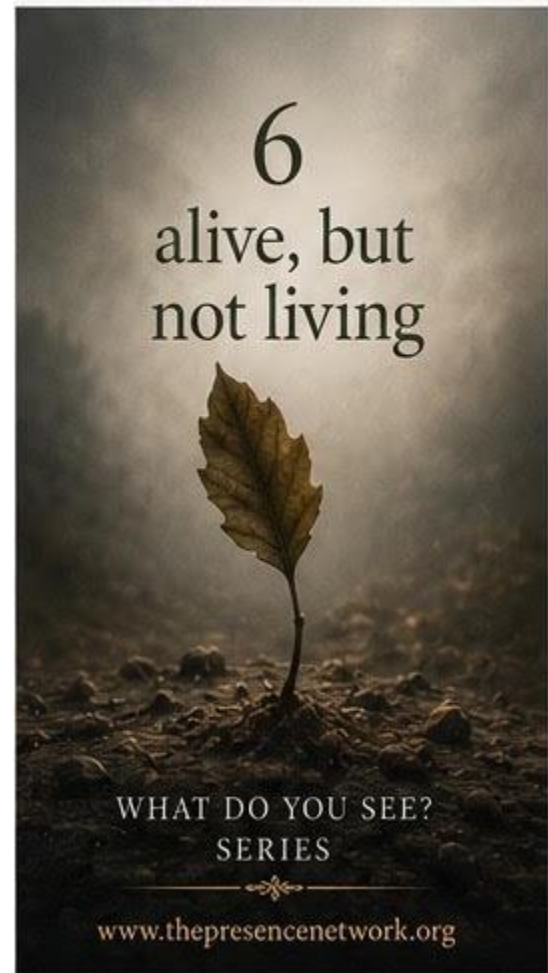
Looking Alive

Many people know how to look alive: We learn early, we learn how to smile, how to perform, how to answer, "I'm doing fine." We learn how to keep functioning, how to meet expectations, how to survive. Some become very good at staying alive, looking alive, they go to work, attend church, temple or synagogue, raise children, care for parents, pay bills, meet obligations, fulfill responsibilities. From the outside everything appears healthy, yet internally something feels absent. The spark, the joy, the wonder, the peace, the vitality, the breath, people often describe it differently: *"I feel numb."* *"I feel disconnected."* *"I feel empty."* *"I feel like I'm just going through the motions."* *"I don't know who I am anymore."* *"I feel lost."* What they are describing is not necessarily failure, often they are describing the absence of breath.

Structure Without Spirit

Notice the order of the miracle: God first restores structure, then He provides breath. This is important, structure matters, healthy habits matter.

- Boundaries matter.
- Counseling matters.
- Education matters.



What Do You See?

An Invitation to the Valley

- Support systems matter.
- Relationships matter.
- Physical health matters.

The skeleton is necessary, but structure alone cannot create life. A perfectly formed body still requires breath. Many people spend years improving the structure of their lives, they organize, plan, achieve, accumulate, build, succeed, yet still feel empty. Not because structure is wrong, but because structure was never intended to replace spirit, the body requires both, so does the soul.

The Danger of Performance

Perhaps nowhere is this more visible than in religion, a person can know Scripture, attend services, serve faithfully, pray publicly, lead ministries, teach classes, volunteer tirelessly, and still feel spiritually exhausted.

The problem is not necessarily hypocrisy, sometimes it is simply that performance has replaced Presence activity has replaced intimacy, duty has replaced connection. The exterior looks alive, but the breath is missing. Jesus often confronted this reality, not because He opposed religion, but because He opposed anything that substituted appearance for authenticity. He consistently invited people beyond performance and into relationship, beyond obligation and into communion, beyond external compliance and into inner transformation.

Breath in the Hebrew Scriptures

The Hebrew word used here is *ruach*, it is a fascinating word, it can mean breath, wind, Spirit, life, movement, energy, vitality. The same word appears throughout Scripture, in Genesis, God breathes life into humanity, at creation, the Spirit hovers over the waters, throughout the prophets, the Spirit renews and restores. The image is consistent. Life does not ultimately originate from human effort, life is received, the deepest things cannot be manufactured, they can only be welcomed.

The Myth of Self-Sufficiency

One of the great myths of modern culture is that we are entirely self-made. If we work hard enough, learn enough, earn enough, control enough, manage enough, we can secure life. But Ezekiel challenges that illusion, the bodies in the valley possess structure, yet structure alone cannot generate breath. There are dimensions of life that remain gifts: love, joy, peace, meaning, purpose, Presence, these cannot be forced, they emerge when we become receptive to something beyond ourselves. The valley reminds us that human effort has limits, and perhaps that is not bad news, perhaps it is freedom. We do not have to carry the weight of being our own source of life.

What Do You See?

An Invitation to the Valley

Presence Versus Performance

This distinction may be one of the most important lessons we ever learn.

Performance asks: “What must I do to prove my worth?”

Presence asks: “Can I receive what is already being offered?”

Performance strives; *Presence* receives.

Performance anxiously measures; *Presence* quietly trusts.

Performance fears failure; *Presence* welcomes growth.

Performance asks: “Am I enough?” *Presence* whispers: “You are already loved.”

Much of our exhaustion comes from confusing the two; we spend our lives trying to earn what can only be received, trying to achieve what can only be welcomed, trying to manufacture breath, yet breath has always been a gift.

Where Is the Breath?

Perhaps that is the question this chapter invites us to consider. Where is the breath?

Not in theory, not in theology, not in appearances, but in your actual life.

What gives you life? What restores your soul? What awakens gratitude? What deepens connection? What helps you remember who you truly are? For some, it may be silence, for others, prayer, nature, music, relationships, service, creativity, worship, stillness, compassion. The answer may differ; the principle remains the same. Life requires breath, and breath cannot be substituted.

Reflection Questions

1. Have there been seasons when you looked alive but felt empty inside?
2. What responsibilities or activities consume most of your energy?
3. Where have you confused performance with Presence?
4. What practices help you experience life more deeply?
5. What does “breath” represent in your current season?

Journal Exercise

Complete the following statements:

- The areas where I feel most alive are _____.
 - The areas where I feel like I am merely functioning are _____.
-

What Do You See?

An Invitation to the Valley

- I often seek worth through _____.
- What truly restores me is _____.
- One way I can create space for breath this week is _____.

Presence Practice

Today, spend fifteen minutes doing nothing productive. No goals; no agenda; no tasks, simply be present. Sit quietly, walk slowly, listen, notice, breathe. Pay attention to what arises within you. Observe how difficult or natural this feels. Sometimes the first step toward receiving breath is simply creating room for it.

Closing Meditation

The bones had come together, the tendons had formed, the flesh had appeared, the skin had covered them. Everything looked complete, yet something essential was still missing: the breath. Perhaps you know what that feels like; perhaps your life appears successful while your soul feels weary. Perhaps your schedule is full while your spirit feels empty; perhaps you have structure but long for vitality. If so, take heart, the story is not over. God is not discouraged by incomplete restoration, He knows exactly what is missing, and the same God who gathers bones is also the God who breathes life.

The next movement of the story is not about effort; it is about invitation, not striving, but receiving. For the God who formed the body is also the God who supplies the breath, and where breath enters, life begins.

The next chapter may be one of the most beautiful in the entire book: **“Come, Breath, Come”**—where Ezekiel is told to prophesy to the four winds. It shifts from personal healing to divine participation, showing that restoration is not ultimately something we accomplish but something we welcome.