

What Do You See?

An Invitation to the Valley

Chapter 8

An Exceedingly Great Army

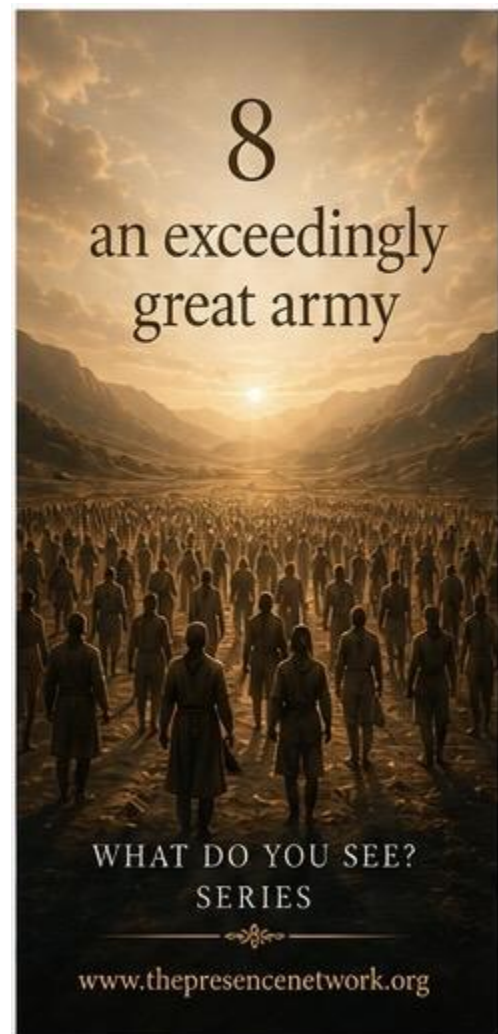
There is a phrase in Ezekiel 37 that is often misunderstood. After the breath enters the bodies, Ezekiel writes: “They came to life and stood up on their feet—an exceedingly great army.” An army, for many readers, that word immediately creates images of warfare, conquest, power, and conflict, but I do not believe that is the heart of the vision, because the story did not begin with soldiers. The story began with sufferers, with exiles, with grieving people, with traumatized people, with hopeless people, with those who believed their story was over. And when God restores them, He does not simply return them to existence, He returns them to purpose. Perhaps the greatest miracle is not that they lived again; perhaps the greatest miracle is that they discovered they still mattered.

More Than Survival

Many people spend years trying to survive, and sometimes survival is enough. When a person is drowning, we do not ask them to swim across an ocean, we help them reach the shore. When grief is overwhelming, survival may be the goal. When depression is crushing, getting through the day may be a victory. When trauma is fresh, breathing may be enough. There are seasons when survival is sacred, but eventually a deeper question emerges. Once the crisis passes, once the healing begins, once breath returns, the question becomes: *What now? What is life for? Why am I still here? What purpose remains?* The vision of Ezekiel answers that question. The bones are not restored merely to exist, they are restored to stand, to participate, to contribute, to become part of something larger than themselves.

Wounded Healers

One of the most beautiful truths in life is that our deepest wounds often become our greatest sources of compassion: The grieving person understands grief; the recovering addict understands addiction; the lonely understand loneliness; the caregiver understands exhaustion; the betrayed understand heartbreak; the wounded understand wounds. This does not mean suffering is good, it means suffering can be transformed.



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The very valley that once threatened to destroy us can become the place from which we learn how to accompany others, this is one of the great mysteries of healing. The scar remains, but the scar begins serving a different purpose; instead of merely reminding us where we were hurt, it reminds us what we survived, and what we survived becomes part of what we offer.

The Ministry of Presence

Most people assume that helping others requires expertise. Sometimes it does. Education matters, training matters, wisdom matters, but there is something even more fundamental: Presence.

The restored people in Ezekiel's vision are not first described by what they accomplish, they are described by the fact that they stand, they are present, available, alive, engaged. Many of the most meaningful moments in human life have little to do with solutions: a hand held at a bedside, a friend sitting quietly beside another, a spouse listening without trying to fix, a caregiver remaining present through suffering, a chaplain standing in sacred silence. These moments may appear small, yet they often become transformative, because healing rarely occurs through information alone. Healing often occurs through connection, through accompaniment, through Presence.

Why Were You Restored?

This may be one of the most important questions we ever ask. *Why were you restored? Why did you survive? Why are you still here?* Not in a grandiose sense, not in a way that creates pressure, but in a way that creates meaning. The answer will differ for each person. Some will mentor; some will teach; some will create; some will encourage; some will serve; some will advocate; some will care; some will simply love well. The form varies, the purpose remains: life is meant to be shared. Healing is meant to flow outward; love is meant to circulate. What we receive was never intended to stop with us.

The Army of Compassion

Perhaps the “exceedingly great army” is not an army of conquest, perhaps it is an army of compassion: An army of caregivers; an army of encouragers; an army of listeners; an army of restorers; an army of peacemakers; an army of people who know what it means to walk through valleys and therefore refuse to leave others alone in theirs. Imagine what the world would look like if people viewed their healing this way, not as a personal achievement, but as preparation for deeper service. Not as proof of superiority, but as an opportunity for empathy. Not as a reason to boast, but as a reason to accompany, that is a different kind of army entirely, and perhaps it is exactly the kind our world needs.

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The Gift of Shared Humanity

One of the lessons exile taught Israel was humility, they discovered they were not immune to suffering, not immune to failure, not immune to loss. The same is true for us: Pain has a way of leveling the ground beneath our feet, it reminds us that every person carries wounds.

Every family faces struggles, every heart experiences loss, every life contains valleys. Our shared humanity becomes the foundation for compassion. We stop approaching others from above, we begin walking beside them, we stop offering answers from a distance, we begin offering Presence from nearby, and often that is enough.

Standing Again

Notice that Ezekiel says they stood on their feet. Standing is significant, not running, not conquering, not dominating... standing. There are seasons in life when standing is a miracle: after grief, after addiction, after depression, after trauma, after betrayal, after loss. Simply standing again can be holy. Simply remaining present can be courageous. Simply refusing to surrender to despair can be an act of faith. Do not underestimate the significance of standing, many miracles begin there.

Reflection Questions

1. How have your wounds shaped your capacity for compassion?
2. What valleys have prepared you to help others?
3. Where do you feel called to contribute or serve?
4. How do you define purpose in your current season of life?
5. What would it mean for you to “stand again”?

Journal Exercise

Complete the following statements:

- One experience that has deeply shaped me is _____.
- What I learned from that experience is _____.
- Someone I may be able to encourage because of that experience is _____.
- The gifts that have emerged from my struggles are _____.
- One way I can share those gifts this week is _____.

Presence Practice

Think of someone currently walking through a valley. Do not try to solve their problems; do not prepare advice. Simply ask: “How can I be present for them?” Then take one small step: A phone call, a visit, a note, a prayer, a conversation. Remember: *Presence is often more powerful than answers.*

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Closing Meditation

The bones did not rise merely to exist, they rose to stand, to participate, to belong, to contribute, to become part of a larger story. The valley was never the destination; the valley was preparation. What once seemed like an ending became the beginning of something new. The same may be true for you. Your wounds are not the entirety of your story. Your losses are not the entirety of your story. Your failures are not the entirety of your story. Your valley is not the entirety of your story. The breath has come, life has returned, now comes the invitation: Stand. Stand, not because you are perfect, not because you are finished, not because you have all the answers. Stand because life still flows through you. Stand because hope still matters. Stand because someone else may need the compassion your valley has taught you. Stand because restoration was never meant to end with you, and as you stand, you may discover that what God restored was not only your life... **He restored your purpose.**