

What Do You See?

An Invitation to the Valley

Chapter 9

The Two Sticks Become One

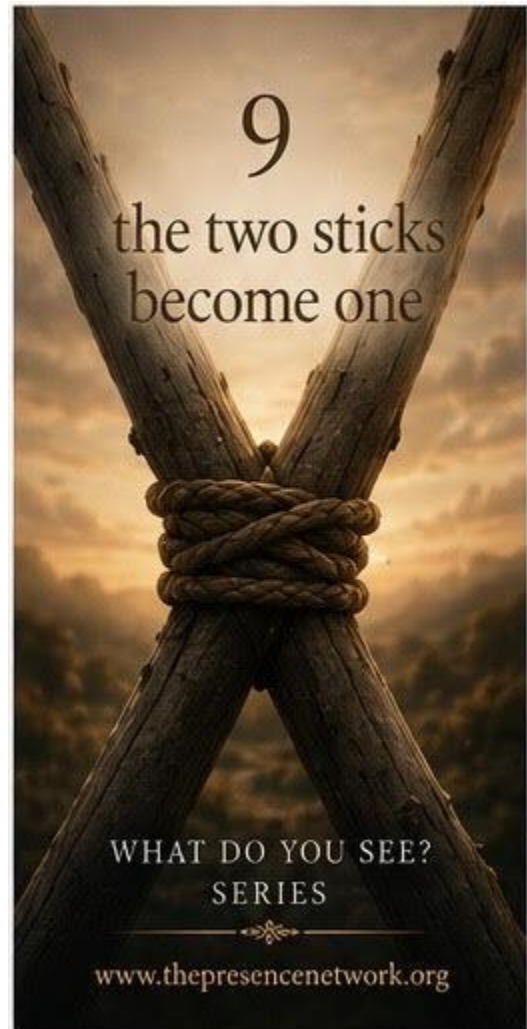
Most people stop reading Ezekiel 37 too soon, the beginning narrative and imagery is so compelling, it draws you in with fascination. It's easy to remember the valley, the bones, the breath, the army, and miss what comes next. Yet the second half of the chapter is as important as the first, because God is not only concerned with restoring individuals, He is concerned with restoring relationships. The Creator of all things is concerned with healing divisions, with reconciliation, with bringing together what has been torn apart. After the vision of the dry bones, God gives Ezekiel another object lesson, He tells him to take two sticks. On one stick he is to write: "For Judah." On the other: "For Joseph (Ephraim)." These two sticks represented a painful reality: A divided people; a fractured family; a broken nation. What was once one had become two, and God tells Ezekiel to bring them together in his hand: One stick; one people, one future; one restored identity. The valley was about life; the sticks are about relationship, and perhaps that is no accident.

The Pain of Division

Few things wound the human heart more deeply than separation: Broken marriages; estranged children; divided siblings; fractured friendships; church conflicts; political hostility; cultural divisions; family feuds. We were created for connection, which is why disconnection hurts so much. The pain in separation is often intensified because the people involved still matter, if they did not matter, the wound would not hurt, the ache itself reveals the value of the relationship. Many of us carry names in our hearts: people we miss; people we love; people we wish things were different with; people whose absence continues to echo through our lives. The divided kingdom of Israel carried that same ache we oftentimes encounter. What was intended to be one had become fragmented, and fragmentation always carries a cost.

Dry Bones and Broken Relationships

Perhaps there is a reason these stories appear together, because many dry bones are relational. Many people feel spiritually exhausted not because of circumstances alone, but because of



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unresolved separation: a conversation never had; a wound never addressed; a forgiveness never offered; a reconciliation never pursued; a grief never acknowledged. Sometimes our deepest valleys are not found in events, they are found in relationships. Relationships are the places where love was interrupted, the places where trust was broken, the places where connection was lost, and often those wounds remain long after the original conflict has ended.

Unity Is Not Uniformity

One of the beautiful truths hidden in this passage is that God does not erase differences: Judah remains Judah; Joseph remains Joseph. The two sticks do not become identical, they become united. This distinction matters. Many people believe reconciliation requires sameness; it does not. Healthy relationships do not require identical opinions, personalities, experiences, or perspectives. Unity is not the absence of difference; it is the presence of connection despite difference. The goal is not agreement on everything; the goal is relationship. Families, marriages, friendships, and communities learn this essential truth and harbor of securing and assuring relationship. Maturity is not learning how to eliminate differences, it is learning how to remain connected in the midst of them.

The Myth of Winning

Much of human conflict is fueled by a desire to win: to be right; to be vindicated; to prove our point; to defend our position, yet relationships rarely flourish when winning becomes the goal. Every argument has two outcomes: Someone wins, or the relationship wins. The healthiest relationships eventually discover that preserving connection often matters more than proving a point. This does not mean avoiding truth, it means holding truth and love together. It means asking: “What serves the relationship?” Instead of: “How do I win?” God’s vision is not about one stick defeating the other, it is about two sticks finding one another again.

The Courage of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is not easy. it requires vulnerability, humility, patience, listening, empathy, and sometimes tremendous courage. Not every relationship can be restored; not every person is safe; not every wound can immediately heal. Life and Truth never call us to ignore wisdom or boundaries, but where reconciliation is possible, it often begins with a simple willingness: a willingness to listen, to understand; to see the humanity of the other person again, and to stop telling the story solely from our side. Many relationships remain divided because both parties are waiting for the other to move first. Someone eventually has to take the first step.

The Ministry of Presence Revisited

One of the great gifts we can offer fractured relationships is Presence, not pressure, manipulation, or coercion. Simply: Presence. Just Showing up, listening, remaining available,

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and remaining open. Many reconciliations do not begin with solutions; they begin with someone creating a safe space where honesty can emerge. That is true in marriages, in families, in grief, in communities, and in spiritual care. Before healing can occur, people often need to feel seen, heard, valued, and safe. Presence creates the conditions where reconciliation becomes possible.

The Divided Places Within

The two sticks may also symbolize something internal. Many people are divided within themselves, part of them longs for healing, another part resists it. Part of them desires change, another part fears it. Part of them hopes, another part doubts. Part of them forgives, another part clings to resentment. Part of them believes, another part remains uncertain. The human heart often contains competing voices.

Perhaps reconciliation is not only about healing relationships around us, perhaps it is also about healing the divisions within us, bringing together the scattered parts of ourselves: the wounded child; the grieving adult; the hopeful dreamer; the fearful protector; the faithful believer; the questioning seeker. Learning to welcome all of those parts into a more integrated whole is the journey we are all sojourners on. Perhaps the two sticks belong not only to nations; perhaps they belong to us.

Reflection Questions

1. What relationships in your life feel divided or fragmented?
2. Are there people whose absence continues to affect you?
3. Where have you confused unity with agreement?
4. What prevents reconciliation in your current situation?
5. Are there divided places within yourself that need healing?

Journal Exercise

Complete the following statements:

- A relationship I grieve is _____.
- What hurts most about this separation is _____.
- What I wish the other person understood is _____.
- What I may not fully understand about them is _____.
- One small step toward healing could be _____.

Presence Practice

Bring to mind someone with whom you have experienced division. Without trying to solve anything, simply sit quietly; notice what emotions arise: grief, anger, sadness, longing, regret, hope. Do not judge them, allow them to be present, then ask: “What would compassion look like

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here?” You may not receive an answer immediately, that is okay. Sometimes healing begins simply by making room for the question.

Closing Meditation

The God who gathers bones also gathers people.

The God who restores breath also restores relationships.

The God who heals valleys also heals divisions.

The story of Ezekiel 37 is larger than individual restoration, it is the story of reconciliation, of bringing together what has been separated, of healing what has been fractured, of restoring what has been lost. Sometimes that restoration happens outwardly; sometimes it happens inwardly. Sometimes it begins with others, sometimes it begins within ourselves, but the invitation remains the same. Take the sticks, hold them together, and trust that God is still in the business of making one what life has made two. The final goal of restoration is not merely survival, healing, or standing, the final goal is wholeness, and wholeness is always relational.

The greatest transformation in Ezekiel 37 may not be the bones, it may be the eyes that learned to see differently.