

What Do You See? An Invitation to the Valley

Foreword - The Valleys Teach Us to See

Stories are the life-giving food that instructs current and future generations. Stories emerge from day-to-day life events: the good, the bad and the ugly. The key is, are we willing to learn? To hear? To see? Today I want to broaden your mind to consider learning through the words, the stories written many decades earlier than our personal existence, and to extract from them a life-giving lesson. The passage I would like for you to consider comes from an ancient and somewhat familiar text we know as the book of Ezekiel. Keep in mind, there are ancient passages that we read, and there are passages that eventually read us. For me, Ezekiel 37 has become one of those revolutionary passages. I first encountered this passage as a biblical story: a prophet, a valley, dry bones, a miraculous restoration.

Over the years, as life unfolded, I discovered that “Ezekiel’s valley” was not simply a place in Scripture, it became a place I recognized, a place I visited, a place I accompanied others through, and at times, a place I found myself standing within.

Life has a way of introducing us to valleys we never expected to enter.

As a pastor, counselor, juvenile probation officer, psych hospital manager, hospice chaplain, bereavement coordinator, husband, father, grandfather, and fellow traveler, I have had the privilege of sitting with people during some of the most sacred and painful moments of human life.

I have stood beside hospital beds, sat with grieving families, listened to stories of heartbreak and witnessed addiction, trauma, estrangement, loneliness, regret, and loss. I have watched people ask questions that have no easy answers: questions about suffering and faith, questions about purpose, whether life could ever feel whole again, and if I am honest, I have asked many of those same challenging questions myself.

Marriages are not exempt from valleys; chaplains are not exempt from valleys; pastors are not exempt from valleys; caregivers are not exempt from valleys, none of us are. We all encounter seasons where something precious is lost, when hope feels fragile. We all encounter circumstances that seem beyond repair.

Some valleys arrive suddenly; others develop slowly over time. Some valleys are visible to everyone; others remain hidden beneath *smiles* and *responsibilities*, yet regardless of how they arrive, valleys tend to cause us to ask the same question: “What now?”

For my wife Amy and I, one of our deepest valleys was the loss of our son, Anthony. There are wounds that change people forever, the death of a child is one of them, no parent imagines such a journey, no parent prepares for it.

There are moments in grief when words fail, moments when explanations feel inadequate, and all that remains is silence, and yet even there, in the midst of profound sorrow, we discovered something that has become central to our life and our work: Presence. Not answers, not formulas, not certainty, simply: Presence. *Presence, the quiet assurance that we are not abandoned in our suffering, the realization that something Eternal meets us, encounters us, not beyond our pain but within it.* This conviction eventually became part of what inspired The Presence Network, a ministry expression dedicated to supporting individuals and families navigating grief, caregiving, relational challenges, spiritual questions, and life's many transitions. At the heart of our work is a simple belief: ***Presence is the quiet gift we offer when words are not enough.***

The more I reflected upon Ezekiel 37, the more I realized that the story was not primarily about bones, it was about perception. In this account, the people believed their story was over, they said: *"Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone."* Those recorded in this account saw only dismal endings, but God saw emerging possibility. They saw death, but God saw life; they saw exile, but God saw restoration; they saw a valley, but God saw a future, and somewhere between those two perspectives lies the journey this book hopes to explore.

I am not writing as someone who has mastered suffering; I am writing as someone who has walked through it. I am not writing as someone who possesses all the answers; I am writing as someone who continues asking questions. I am not writing as someone who has never stood among dry bones; I am writing as someone who has learned that dry bones do not get the final word.

The chapters that follow are not intended to provide quick solutions; life is rarely that simple, instead, they are intended to offer companionship, reflection, perspective, and perhaps most importantly, hope; not the fragile hope that depends upon circumstances, but the deeper hope that emerges when we discover that something "Eternal", some "One" *is still present in the valley.*

As you read, you may find yourself recognizing your own story, your own losses, your own questions, your own dry bones. When this awakening occurs, I encourage you to resist the temptation to rush: move slowly; reflect honestly; engage the questions, and complete the journal exercises.

Allow yourself to sit with what arises. This is not merely a book to be read, it is an invitation to be experienced, and before we begin, I would like to leave you with

one thought. Throughout this journey, you will encounter many themes: Grief. Identity. Hope. Purpose. Reconciliation. Presence. Beneath all of these themes is a single question, the same question God asked Ezekiel, and the same question that continues echoing through every valley we encounter. The question is NOT: “Can you fix the bones?” The question is NOT: “Can you control the outcome?” The question is NOT: “Can you guarantee the future?” The question IS far simpler, and far deeper. *What do you see?*

May the pages that follow help you discover that the Eternal One’s vision is often larger than our despair, greater than our fear, and more hopeful than our conclusions.

And may you discover, as I have, that no valley is beyond the reach of The Presence.

— Carlo Griseta, Founder, The Presence Network

Introduction - An Invitation to the Valley

If you are holding this book, there is a good chance you know something about valleys.

Perhaps you are walking through one now or have recently emerged from one. Perhaps you are carrying wounds that nobody else can see and grief has become a familiar companion. Perhaps a relationship has fractured and hope feels more difficult than it once did. Perhaps life has not unfolded the way you imagined, if so, you are not alone.

For thousands of years, human beings have stood in valleys asking the same questions: *Can things ever change? Can what has been broken be restored? Can what seems dead live again? Can hope return?*

Ezekiel encountered those questions in one of the most remarkable visions found in Scripture: standing among a valley full of dry bones, Ezekiel was confronted with a scene that appeared beyond recovery. Everything visible suggested death, everything visible suggested finality, yet the Creator asked a question: “*Son of man, can these bones live?*”

The more I have reflected upon that passage, the more convinced I have become, that the question was never really about bones, it was about perception, it was about vision. *The true question was about whether Ezekiel would define reality solely by what he could see, or remain open to what his divine Creator, the Eternal Source of all things could see.*

That same question confronts each of us today. When we stand in the middle of grief, *what do we see?* When relationships fracture, *what do we see?* When addiction takes hold, *what do we see?* When our dreams collapse, *what do we see?* When families become estranged, *what do we see?* When hope feels distant, *what do we see?* This book was born from those questions.

Over the years, I have sat with countless individuals and families navigating some of life's most difficult valleys. As a pastor, counselor, chaplain, bereavement coordinator, and fellow traveler, I have witnessed extraordinary pain. I have also witnessed extraordinary resilience.

I have watched people who believed their story was over discover new beginnings. I have watched grieving hearts find breath again. I have watched fractured relationships experience reconciliation. I have watched exhausted caregivers rediscover strength. I have watched people stand again after believing they never would, not because life became easy, but because something changed in how they *saw or perceived what they saw*.

This book is not a promise that every circumstance will unfold exactly as we desire. It is not a formula or a guarantee. This book is an invitation to walk into the valley, to tell the truth, to examine the stories we tell ourselves, and to notice the rattling before the resurrection.

This book is an invitation to receive breath, to rediscover purpose, and to pursue reconciliation. Most of all, this book is an invitation to become aware of The Presence.

One of the most beautiful truths in Ezekiel's vision is this:

God (The Presence) never asks Ezekiel to leave the valley before encountering Him.

The Presence is not waiting at the end of the journey; The Presence meets him in the middle of it.

Perhaps that is where you find yourself today, not on a mountaintop or a finish line, but somewhere in the valley, if so, take heart, you are standing on holy ground. Before we go any further, I would like to ask you the same question God asked Ezekiel, not as a test or a challenge, but as an invitation. Take a moment, look honestly at your life and your life-wounds; look honestly at your hopes and your fears, and then answer: *What do you see?*

Let us begin the journey together...

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 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.

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 - You might want to pause this after each sentence:

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?***

Chapter 2 - Our Bones Are Dried Up

There is something powerful about being heard. Not corrected. Not fixed. Not analyzed. Simply heard. One of the most remarkable moments in Ezekiel 37 is that God tells Ezekiel exactly what the people are saying. *“These bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’”* (Ezekiel 37:11) Before God speaks restoration, He acknowledges their reality. Before The Eternal One speaks life, He reveals that He has heard their despair. Before The Presence offers hope, The Presence names their pain, this matters because many people carry the secret fear that God sees their behavior but not their suffering, that He notices their failures but not their wounds, that He sees their weakness but not their exhaustion. Ezekiel reveals something profoundly different. The Eternal One hears the conversation happening beneath the surface, the words people speak in the darkness, the sentences they repeat to themselves when nobody else is listening. He hears the stories they have come to believe, and what He hears is heartbreaking, *“Our bones are dried up.”*

When Pain Becomes Identity

Notice what the people do not say, they do not say: *“We are struggling,”* or: *“We are grieving,”* or: *“We have experienced loss,”* instead, they describe themselves through the lens of their condition. The dryness has become personal, their wound has become their identity, this is one of the greatest dangers of prolonged suffering. A painful experience becomes a *painful story*; a painful story becomes a *painful*

belief. A painful belief becomes a painful identity, and eventually we stop saying: "I experienced rejection," instead we begin saying: "I am unwanted." We stop saying: "My marriage failed", and begin saying: "I am a failure." We stop saying: "I struggle with addiction", and begin saying: "I am broken." We stop saying: "I am grieving", and begin saying: "I will never be whole again."

Pain begins as an event, but if left unexamined, it slowly becomes a lens through which everything is interpreted. Israel was no longer simply experiencing exile; they had become exiles in their own minds. The walls of Babylon surrounded them physically; the despair of Babylon surrounded them internally, many of us know exactly what that feels like.

The Erosion of Hope

Hope rarely disappears overnight, most often it erodes, like water wearing away stone: little by little, disappointment by disappointment, loss by loss, prayer by prayer that seems unanswered, relationship by relationship that doesn't turn out as expected. The result? Hope weakens gradually, until one day we hear ourselves saying things we never thought we would say: *"Nothing ever changes", "What's the point?", "I've tried everything", "People don't really change", "This is just who I am", "It's too late."* These statements sound reasonable, sometimes they even sound wise, but often they are not wisdom, they are exhaustion speaking, they are grief speaking, they are fear speaking, they are the voice of dry bones.

The Eeyore Syndrome

I often think of Eeyore from Winnie-the-Pooh. If you ask Eeyore how he's doing, the answer is almost always predictable. *"Oh, Not so good," (in that deep familiarly hopeless tone).* Even when something positive happens, Eeyore anticipates disappointment. Even when help arrives, he expects it to fail. Even when friends care for him, he remains convinced that things will not improve. Most of us smile when we think about Eeyore, but many of us have lived as Eeyore, not because we are weak, because we have been hurt.

When life wounds us deeply enough, pessimism can feel safer than hope. If I expect nothing, I cannot be disappointed. If I hope for nothing, I cannot lose anything. If I believe nothing will change, I will never have to grieve unmet expectations. While pessimism may protect us from disappointment, it also protects us from possibility. Pessimism builds walls around the heart, and eventually those walls keep out both pain and healing.

The Hidden Exhaustion

Some dryness is obvious: People see it; friends notice; family members become concerned, but another kind of dryness is much harder to recognize, the dryness hidden beneath functioning. People continue going to work, continue attending church, continue raising children, continue caring for spouses, continue showing up, yet internally they feel empty. Their smiles are present, their joy is absent, their bodies are moving, their spirits are weary. Many caregivers know this experience, many healthcare workers know it, many pastors know it, many parents know it, many spouses know it, many grieving people know it. From the outside everything appears normal, inside, the bones feel dry. Perhaps that is why this chapter matters so much: *God is not intimidated by the places we hide*. The Eternal One is not discouraged by the dryness we cannot explain. He is not repelled by our exhaustion. In fact, He walks directly into the valley.

God Does Not Argue

One of the most beautiful aspects of this story is what God does not do. Notice: He does not argue with the people; He does not say: *“Your bones aren’t really dry.”* He does not say: *“You should be more positive.”* He does not say: *“If you had more faith, you wouldn’t feel this way.”* He does not shame them for their despair. He simply acknowledges it. That is often where healing begins: not with denial, not with pretending, not with forced optimism, but with honesty. The truth may hurt, but it is also the doorway through which restoration enters. You cannot heal a wound you refuse to acknowledge. You cannot restore what you pretend is healthy. You cannot receive breath while insisting you do not need it. Israel’s honesty became the first step toward restoration. Perhaps ours can as well.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever allowed a painful experience to become part of your identity?
2. What labels do you place upon yourself that may be rooted more in pain than truth?
3. In what area of life has hope begun to erode?
4. What statements do you find yourself repeating when you feel discouraged?
5. Are there places where you appear strong externally while feeling exhausted internally?

Journal Exercise - You might want to pause this after each sentence:

Complete the following statements:

The wound that has most shaped my life is

The story I tell myself about that wound is

What I fear is permanently lost is

The label I most often place on myself is

If God were speaking to me in this valley, He might remind me

Presence Practice

Find a quiet place and sit comfortably, place one hand over your heart and take several slow breaths. Without judgment, ask yourself: *“What pain have I allowed to define me?” “What story about myself do I repeat most often?” “What part of me feels dried up?”*

Write your answers, do not edit them, do not defend them, simply notice them. Awareness is often the first movement of healing.

Closing Meditation

The people said: *“Our bones are dried up.”* God did not disagree. The people said: *“Our hope is gone.”* God did not argue. The people said: *“We are cut off.”* God did not shame them, instead, He entered the valley, He listened, He acknowledged their pain, and then He began showing them that their condition was not their identity. Dryness was real. despair was real, exile was real, but none of those things were the final word. The valley was where they were, it was not who they were, and perhaps the same is true for you.

The next question remains: *If your pain is not your identity... **Then who are you?***

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” 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.

What Do You See?

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.

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 - You might want to pause this after each sentence:

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

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.

Chapter 4 - Speak to the Bones

If I am honest, this part of the story has always seemed strange. God asks Ezekiel if the bones can live. Ezekiel wisely responds, *“Lord God, You alone know.”* And then comes an unexpected instruction, God says: *“Prophesy to these bones.”* Talk to the bones, speak to the dry places; address the impossible situation, say something into the silence. At first glance, it almost seems absurd, after all, bones cannot hear, bones do not respond, bones do not listen, bones are dead, yet, God tells Ezekiel to speak anyway, and perhaps, that is exactly the point.

The Voices That Shape Us

Whether we realize it or not, our lives are constantly being shaped by voices, some come from family, some come from culture, some come from religion, some come from our own internal dialogue. Over time, those voices begin constructing the story we believe about ourselves:

*“You’ll never amount to anything.” “You’re too much.” “You’re not enough.”
“You always fail.” “You ruined everything.” “Nobody really loves you.” “It’s too*

late.” “Nothing will ever change.” “You’re damaged.” “You’re broken.” “You’re alone.”

Many of these voices become so familiar that we stop questioning them, we simply assume they are true. Israel had been listening to those kinds of voices: The voice of defeat; the voice of shame; the voice of exile; the voice of despair, and eventually those voices became their reality. *“Our bones are dried up.” “Our hope is gone.” “We are cut off.”* Notice that before God restores their future, He interrupts their narrative, because healing often begins when a new voice enters the conversation.

The Language of Despair

Despair speaks fluently, it is persuasive, it sounds reasonable, it often appears logical.

Despair gathers evidence, it points to failures, it highlights disappointments, it catalogs losses, it remembers every setback, and because despair often uses real facts, it can be difficult to challenge. The bones were dry, that part was true. The exile was real, that part was true. The suffering was real, that part was true. The mistake comes when facts become conclusions.

The fact is: *The bones are dry.* **The conclusion becomes:** *Nothing can live again.*

The fact is: *The marriage is struggling.* **The conclusion becomes:** *It is hopeless.*

The fact is: *A child has become distant.* **The conclusion becomes:** *The relationship is over.*

The fact is: *I made mistakes.* **The conclusion becomes:** *I am a mistake.*

God is not challenging the facts; He is challenging the conclusions.

Speaking Truth Is Different Than Positive Thinking

Some people see and hear a chapter like this and immediately think of positive thinking, that is not what Ezekiel is doing. God does not ask Ezekiel to deny reality.

He does not say: *“Tell the bones they are healthy.”* He does not say: *“Pretend everything is fine.”* He does not say: *“Ignore the evidence.”* Instead, Ezekiel speaks what God says, that distinction matters.

Positive thinking often tries to create reality; divine, prophetic truth: reveals reality.

Positive thinking says: *“Everything is wonderful.”* Truth says: *“Things are difficult, but difficulty is not the end.”*

Positive thinking depends on circumstances; Truth depends on something deeper.

Positive thinking can collapse when circumstances worsen; truth remains even when the valley grows darker, the goal is not optimism, the goal is alignment with what God sees: a redemptive, eternal perspective.

What Are You Saying to Yourself?

This may be one of the most important questions in the entire book. What are you saying to yourself? Not what do you say publicly, not what do you post online, not what do you tell your friends. What are you saying when nobody else is listening? What is the narrative running quietly beneath your life? Many people spend years praying for transformation while rehearsing despair, they pray for healing, then spend the rest of the day declaring hopelessness. They pray for restoration, then repeat stories of defeat. They pray for peace, then continually feed anxiety, this is not condemnation, it is simply awareness. The voices we listen to eventually become the stories we believe; the stories we believe eventually become the lives we live.

The Bones Within Us

Most of us have dry bones somewhere: a relationship, a dream, a ministry, a marriage, a friendship, a calling, a sense of purpose, a part of ourselves we quietly buried years ago. Some bones are visible, others are hidden. Some people know exactly where their valley is, others have become so accustomed to carrying it that they no longer notice, yet God continually invites us to bring those places into the light, not to shame us, not to expose us, but to restore us. Healing cannot occur in places we refuse to acknowledge. Transformation begins when honesty meets hope.

The Courage to Speak

Perhaps Ezekiel's greatest act of faith was not believing the bones would live, perhaps it was simply obeying. Ezekiel spoke before anything changed; he spoke before there was evidence; he spoke before there was movement; he spoke before there was proof. Most of us want evidence first, then action or obedience; God often reverses the order, not because He enjoys uncertainty, but because trust

grows in places where certainty cannot survive. Ezekiel participates before he understands, and that participation becomes part of the miracle.

Reflection Questions

1. What messages do you most often repeat to yourself?
2. Which of those messages are rooted in fear, shame, or despair?
3. What conclusions have you drawn from difficult experiences?
4. Are those conclusions facts, or interpretations?
5. What truth might God be inviting you to speak into your own valley?

Journal Exercise - You might want to pause this after each sentence:

Complete the following statements:

The message I most often repeat to myself is

This message came from

The evidence I use to support this belief is

What God may be saying instead is

One truth I need to remember this week is

Presence Practice

Find a quiet place, take several slow breaths. Write down three negative statements you frequently tell yourself. Beside each one, write: *“Is this a fact, or a conclusion?”* Then ask: *“What truth might God speak into this situation?”* Do not rush; sit with the question: listen, reflect, allow a different voice to enter the conversation.

Closing Meditation

The valley speaks. Fear speaks. Shame speaks. Trauma speaks. Loss speaks. Regret speaks. Despair speaks. The question is not whether voices exist, the question is which voice will shape your future. Ezekiel stood among dry bones and spoke not according to what he saw, but according to what God revealed, he did not deny reality, he simply refused to let reality become the final word... perhaps that is faith... not certainty, not control, not understanding.

We must simply allow God's voice to become louder than despair, because somewhere in every valley, a new story is waiting to be spoken, and sometimes the first movement of restoration begins with a single act of courage: **Speak to the bones.**

As we move into Chapter 5, something fascinating happens: Ezekiel speaks, but the bones don't immediately become a living army. First there is a rattling, then bones come together, then tendons, then flesh, then skin, yet still no breath. That's an incredibly important lesson: **healing often happens in stages.** Many people quit because they mistake partial progress for failure. Chapter 5 we explore how restoration often begins with small movements long before full transformation appears.

Chapter 5 - The Rattling

Most of us want miracles to happen instantly. We want prayers answered immediately, for healing to arrive overnight. We want broken relationships restored in a single conversation. We want grief to disappear, anxiety to lift. We want certainty, we want completion, but Ezekiel 37 offers a different picture, a much more honest picture, a much more human picture. After Ezekiel speaks to the bones, something happens, but not what we might expect. The bones do not suddenly leap into life, the valley does not instantly become an army, instead, Ezekiel says: *"As I prophesied, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone."*

A rattling, not resurrection. Movement, not completion, something has begun, but the miracle is still unfinished.

The Sound of Change

Imagine standing in that valley: Silence has existed for years; death has been the only reality. Nothing has moved; nothing has changed; nothing has lived, then suddenly there is a sound. A noise, a rattling, something is shifting, something is happening, not enough to satisfy the impatient observer, but enough to indicate that the story is changing. Many of us miss this stage, because we are waiting for resurrection while The Presence is initiating movement, we are waiting for the finished product. God is beginning the process; we are waiting for certainty. God is offering evidence; we are waiting for life. God is producing a rattling, and rattling can be uncomfortable, because movement often creates disruption before it creates order.

Before Things Come Together

One of the most overlooked details in this story is that the bones were scattered before they were assembled. Before there could be life, there had to be connection: Bone to bone; piece by piece; fragment by fragment; part by part, the miracle begins with gathering. The things that had been separated start finding one another again, perhaps that is why healing often feels messy. We imagine restoration as a smooth upward journey, but restoration often begins with scattered pieces being brought together: Old wounds surface; forgotten memories emerge; conversations happen; truth is spoken; relationships shift; patterns become visible, the process can feel chaotic, but sometimes chaos is simply evidence that something long disconnected is being reassembled.

Progress Does Not Always Feel Like Progress

One of the greatest frustrations in any healing journey is that progress often feels slow: a grieving person may still cry; a recovering addict may still struggle; a marriage may still have difficult conversations; a caregiver may still feel tired; a person wrestling with anxiety may still have anxious days, and because the miracle is incomplete, they assume nothing is happening. Ezekiel teaches us otherwise: the rattling mattered; the gathering mattered; the movement mattered, even before breath arrived. Sometimes we dismiss the very things that indicate healing: a difficult conversation; a moment of honesty; an apology; a boundary; a counseling session; a new habit; a small act of courage, none of these are the finished miracle, yet all of them may be signs that the bones are moving.

The Courage to Stay

Many people quit during the rattling stage, because the outcome is not yet visible, because change is not yet complete, because the valley still looks like a valley. The temptation is to abandon the process, to return to old patterns, to assume nothing is happening, to conclude that hope was misplaced, but healing often requires remaining present long enough to witness what God is building. Imagine if Ezekiel had walked away after the rattling. Imagine if he had said: *“Well, that didn’t work.”* He would have missed the next stage entirely. How often do we do the same? How often do we abandon growth because it is incomplete? How often do we mistake unfinished work for failed work? Yet throughout Scripture, God seems remarkably comfortable with process: seeds become trees, children become adults, disciples become apostles, wounds become wisdom, valleys become testimonies, rarely overnight, almost always through process.

The Ministry of Reconnection

The phrase “bone to bone” carries profound significance. Healing often involves reconnection, parts of ourselves that have become fragmented. Relationships that have become distant. Communities that have become divided. Dreams that have been abandoned. Truths that have been forgotten. Many people live disconnected lives; disconnected from themselves, disconnected from others, disconnected from God oftentimes through unresolved trauma, disconnected from purpose. The journey of restoration often begins by bringing those scattered pieces together, not perfectly, not instantly, but gradually: bone to bone; conversation by conversation; decision by decision; step by step.

The Gift of Small Victories

We often celebrate dramatic transformations, but small victories deserve attention too: the grieving person who gets out of bed; the couple who chooses one more conversation; the recovering addict who remains sober one more day; the anxious person who takes one courageous step; the caregiver who asks for help; the estranged family member who sends a text. These moments may seem insignificant, yet they are often the rattling, evidence that movement has begun. Evidence that something long dormant is stirring. Evidence that restoration is already underway, even if it remains incomplete.

Reflection Questions

1. Where in your life do you hear the sound of rattling?
2. What small signs of movement have you overlooked?
3. Have you ever mistaken slow progress for failure?
4. What scattered pieces of your life might need reconnection?
5. What would it look like to remain faithful during the process rather than demanding immediate results?

Journal Exercise - You might want to pause this after each sentence:

Complete the following statements:

The area of my life where I most desire immediate change is

A small sign of progress I have overlooked is

What feels unfinished right now is

The pieces that may be coming together are

One reason I can remain hopeful is

Presence Practice

Take ten minutes today: Write down every small sign of growth, healing, or movement you have experienced in the last year. Do not evaluate them, simply list them. Notice how many things have shifted that you may have forgotten.

Sometimes the miracle is larger than we realize because we have only been looking for dramatic change. The Presence often works through smaller movements first.

Closing Meditation

The valley did not change all at once, first came a sound: a rattling, a movement, a gathering. The miracle or breakthrough began long before it was complete, and perhaps that is where you find yourself today: not fully restored; not fully healed; not fully free, yet no longer where you once were. Something is moving, something is shifting, something is gathering, something is reconnecting, do not despise the rattling, it may be the first evidence that life is returning. Every great restoration begins the same way: one movement; one connection; one step; one bone finding another.

And now we arrive at what may be one of the most profound insights in the entire chapter. The bones come together: tendons appear, flesh appears, skin appears; everything looks alive, but it isn't, there is still no breath.

Many people have structure, success, religion, routines, marriages, ministries, careers, and responsibilities, yet feel spiritually empty because the breath has not yet filled the body.

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. 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.

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 - You might want to pause this after each sentence:

Complete the following statements:

The areas where I feel most alive are

The areas where I feel like I am merely functioning are

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.

Chapter 7 - Come, Breath, Come

There comes a moment in every healing journey when we discover that effort is not enough. We have gathered the bones; we have done the work; we have attended the counseling; we have read the books; we have established the routines; we have spoken the truth; we have taken responsibility; we have shown up, and still, something is missing.

The bodies in Ezekiel’s valley are now fully formed, the miracle appears nearly complete, yet they remain motionless: beautifully assembled, perfectly structured, entirely lifeless, and then God gives Ezekiel another instruction: *“Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’”* This is no longer about bones; this is no longer about structure; this is no longer about assembly; this is about life itself.

The Limits of Human Effort

One of the hardest lessons many of us learn is that effort has limits, not because effort is bad, but because effort was never designed to carry the entire burden of life. You can work hard and still feel empty. You can be disciplined and still feel disconnected. You can be responsible and still feel lonely. You can be successful and still feel restless. You can be religious and still feel spiritually dry. Human effort can organize the body, it cannot create breath, this realization is both humbling and liberating: humbling because we recognize our limitations, liberating because we no longer have to carry responsibilities that were never ours.

The Invitation of Breath

Notice something remarkable: God does not tell Ezekiel to manufacture breath, He tells him to invite it, to call for it, to welcome it, to make room for it, this changes everything. Many of us have spent years trying to force life, trying to force peace, trying to force joy, trying to force healing, trying to force transformation, yet breath cannot be forced, it can only be received. You do not earn your next breath, you receive it. You do not achieve the sunrise, you welcome it. You do not manufacture love; you participate in it. The deepest realities of life arrive as gifts.

The valley teaches us that restoration is not something we control, it is something we welcome.

The Four Winds

God tells Ezekiel to call to the breath from the four winds. In ancient Hebrew thought, this represented every direction: North; South; East; West... everywhere. The image is beautiful; life is not coming from one isolated source. Life is already present, the breath of God is not absent, it is moving, the winds are already blowing. The invitation is to become aware, to become receptive, to become open, this is one of the central themes of Presence. God is not hiding; God is not withholding Himself; God is not waiting to be convinced. The Spirit is already moving. The question is not whether God is present, the question is whether we are.

Learning to Receive

Receiving sounds simple, it is not. For many of us, receiving is harder than striving. We know how to work, we know how to perform, we know how to fix, we know how to solve, we know how to produce. Receiving feels vulnerable, it requires surrender, it requires trust, it requires admitting we need something beyond ourselves. Many people spend their lives trying to prove they are enough. The valley whispers a different truth: You were never meant to be enough by yourself; you were designed for breath, designed for connection, designed for relationship, designed for Presence, not independence, not isolation, not self-sufficiency.

The Sacred Pause

Perhaps this is why silence matters, why stillness matters, why prayer matters, why contemplation matters, not because they earn God's favor, but because they help us notice what is already here. Many people assume God speaks only through dramatic moments: earthquakes, visions, miracles, yet often the breath arrives quietly, in stillness, in awareness, in compassion, in gratitude, in a conversation, in a moment of forgiveness, in the embrace of a friend, in the beauty of creation, in the tears we finally allow ourselves to shed. The breath is often closer than we think, we simply move too fast to notice.

The Difference Between Existing and Living

There is a profound difference between existing and living: existing is survival; living is participation. Existing merely gets through the day; living engages the day. Existing manages responsibilities; living experiences wonder. Existing endures; living awakens. Many people exist for years: functioning, producing, achieving, yet never truly living. Then something happens: a loss, a healing, a revelation, a moment of Presence, and suddenly they realize life is more than survival. The breath enters, and everything changes, not because circumstances become perfect, but because the soul awakens.

Breath and Grief

This truth is especially important for those walking through grief: Grief often steals our breath. Not physically, but emotionally, spiritually, relationally. The loss of a loved one can leave us feeling as though the air has been removed from the room. The future becomes difficult to imagine, the heart becomes heavy, the world feels muted, yet the promise of Ezekiel is not that grief never exists, the promise is that breath can return, not immediately, not mechanically, not by force, but gradually. Breath returns tenderly, patiently; life can emerge again. Joy can return again; meaning can return again. The breath can find us again.

Reflection Questions

1. Where have you reached the limits of your own effort?
2. What are you trying to force that may need to be received instead?
3. What practices help you become aware of God's Presence?
4. In what ways have you confused striving with living?
5. What would it look like to become more receptive to breath?

Journal Exercise - You might want to pause this after each sentence:

Complete the following statements:

The area where I feel exhausted from striving is

What I most long to receive is

One place where I have noticed breath recently is

The thing I am most afraid to surrender is

What might change if I trusted that God is already present is

Presence Practice

Spend ten minutes today simply breathing: no agenda, no requests, no problem solving. As you inhale, silently say: “*Come, Breath.*” As you exhale, silently say: “*I receive.*” Allow yourself to rest, not perform, not achieve. Just receive, notice what arises, notice what softens, notice what becomes possible.

Closing Meditation

The valley was full of bodies: complete, restored, reassembled, yet still waiting, and then Ezekiel called to the breath from every direction, from every horizon, from beyond what could be controlled, and the breath came. Not because it was manufactured, not because it was earned, but because it was welcomed. Perhaps that is where you find yourself today, not needing more effort, not needing more performance, not needing more striving. Perhaps what you need is breath, the reminder that life is still available, that Presence is still near, that God has not abandoned the valley, that the winds are still blowing, and that somewhere beyond your exhaustion, your fear, your grief, and your uncertainty, the breath is already on its way; all that remains is the courage to welcome it: ***Come breath come.***

The next chapter naturally becomes “**An Exceedingly Great Army.**” God does not raise the bones merely so they can exist. He restores them to purpose, contribution, connection, and participation in the healing of the world. Restoration is not the end of the story; it is the beginning of a new one.

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.

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.

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 - You might want to pause this after each sentence:

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.*

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.**

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 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, 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 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.

Chapter 10 - What Do You See Now?

We have come a long way together. We began in a valley; a valley filled with dry bones, loss, grief, disappointment, shattered expectations, a valley where the evidence seemed overwhelming and the future appeared uncertain. And there, in the middle of that valley, God asked a question: “Son of man, can these bones live?” It was never merely a question about bones, it was a question about vision, perception, perspective, possibility, about how we interpret the valleys we encounter, and perhaps most importantly, about whether we are willing to see beyond our current circumstances.

Now, after walking through this journey, another question emerges: **What do you see now?**

The Valley Has Changed

Or perhaps more accurately: you have changed. The valley may still exist. Some wounds may still ache, some losses may still be real. Some prayers may still feel unanswered; some relationships may still be complicated; some grief may still visit unexpectedly. The goal of this journey was never to eliminate every difficulty, the goal was to help us see differently, because transformation does not always begin with changed circumstances, sometimes it begins with changed vision.

At the beginning of Ezekiel 37, the bones represented death, now they represent possibility.

At the beginning, the valley represented endings, now it represents beginnings.

At the beginning, the future seemed closed, now it stands open.

What changed? The perspective.

Seeing Through the Eyes of Hope

Hope is often misunderstood. Many people think hope means optimism, or certainty, or confidence that everything will work out exactly as planned. Genuine, authentic hope is deeper: Hope is the refusal to let present circumstances define ultimate reality.

Hope says: “This hurts, but this is not the end.”

Hope says: “I do not understand, but I remain open.”

Hope says: “I cannot yet see the outcome, but I refuse to surrender possibility.”

Hope is not naïve; hope is courageous, because hope chooses to remain open in the face of uncertainty.

Hope keeps breathing, keeps listening, keeps showing up, keeps looking.

Hope keeps trusting that The Presence, The Eternal One, may be doing more than we currently understand.

The Question Behind Every Valley

Over the years, I have sat beside many people: people facing death, grief, addiction, divorce, loneliness, regret, uncertainty, and one truth continues to emerge... *every valley eventually asks a question.*

The question is not: “Will life be difficult?” It will.

The question is not: “Will loss occur?” It will.

The question is not: “Will disappointment come?” It will.

The deeper question is: How will you see what is happening? Will you see only the bones? Or will you remain open to breath? Will you see only the loss? Or will you remain open to restoration? Will you see only the separation? Or will you remain open to reconciliation? Will you see only what is? Or will you remain open to what may yet become?

The Invitation of Presence

Throughout this book, one theme has quietly remained beneath the surface: Presence.

Not performance; not certainty, not perfection. Presence.

The God of Ezekiel, The Presence, does not shout instructions from a distance, He enters the valley. The Spirit leads Ezekiel into the valley, The Presence speaks within the valley, and breath enters the valley. Restoration happens within the valley. The Presence of God is not waiting on the other side of your pain, The Presence of God meets you within it, this may be one of the most important truths we ever learn.

You do not have to escape the valley to encounter The Presence.

You do not have to become whole before The Presence draws near.

You do not have to fix yourself before The Presence arrives, The Presence is already there.

The question has never been whether God is present, the question has always been whether we are.

A New Way of Seeing

When Ezekiel first entered the valley, he saw death, by the end, he saw life, not because the bones changed first, but because God's perspective changed the way he interpreted them.

This is not about denial, pretending, or ignoring reality, it is about learning to see reality through a larger lens, a lens that includes possibility, grace, healing, restoration, a lens that includes The Presence.

The world remains imperfect, people remain imperfect, you remain imperfect, and yet possibility remains. Breath remains, love remains, hope remains, The Presence remains.

The Valley Will Return

One final truth deserves honesty: you will likely encounter another valley, perhaps several.

Life is not a single journey through difficulty; life is a series of seasons. New challenges emerge, new losses will occur, disappointments will arise, and new questions will surface, but perhaps the next valley will feel different, not because it is easier, but because you now know something you did not know before:

You know valleys are not permanent;

You know dry bones are not final;

You know rattling often precedes restoration;
You know breath still comes;
You know healing takes time;
You know reconciliation remains possible;
You know The Presence remains near;
You know that God is not afraid of valleys;
And because of that, perhaps you no longer need to be afraid either.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you see now that you could not see at the beginning of this journey?
2. How has your understanding of hope changed?
3. What lessons from your valley do you want to carry forward?
4. Where have you experienced breath returning?
5. How might your life look different if you lived from Presence rather than fear?

Final Journal Exercise - You might want to pause this after each sentence:

Take a few moments to answer the following:

The valley that brought me here was

What I learned in that valley is

What surprised me most about this journey is

The breath I have received is

The purpose I am discovering is

What I see now is

Final Presence Practice

Find a quiet place, take a slow breath, then another, and another. Remember the valley, the bones, the rattling, the breath, the standing, the reconciliation, The Presence, then simply sit. No agenda, no performance, no striving, just gratitude, just awareness, just Presence.

Closing Meditation

The valley was real; the bones were real; the grief was real; the exile was real; the despair was real, but none of them were final. The Presence never asked Ezekiel to deny reality, He asked him to see beyond it, to remain open, to remain attentive, to remain willing, to trust that what appeared impossible was not beyond the reach of grace. And now, the question comes to you one final time, not as a test or a challenge, but as an invitation. Look again: at your life, your wounds, your relationships, your future, at yourself. Look again, and ask: **What do I see now?**

May you see not only the bones; may you see the breath.

May you see not only the valley; may you see The Presence.

And may that Presence remind you, again and again, that no valley gets the final word, the final word belongs to Life.

“The Presence is not asking Ezekiel to fix the bones. The Presence is asking Ezekiel to see them differently.”