CAN THESE *BONES LIVE?*

unit 15 | session 5

CHRIST CONNECTION

God gave Ezekiel a vision of the power of God to bring life out of death and to restore a broken and scattered people. Ezekiel's vision was fulfilled ultimately in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is Immanuel—God with us—the King who gives life and rules over a unified people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9).

DEATH TO LIFE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Ezekiel 37

GOD'S SPIRIT GIVES LIFE

EZEKIEL 37:1-10

1 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by his Spirit and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me all around them. There were a great many of them on the surface of the valley, and they were very dry. 3 Then he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I replied, "LORD God, only you know." 4 He said to me, "Prophesy concerning these bones and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! 5 This is what the LORD God says to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you will live. 6 I will put tendons on you, make flesh grow on you, and cover you with skin. I will put breath in you so that you come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD." 7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded. While I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 As I looked, tendons appeared on them, flesh grew, and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. 9 He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man. Say to it: This is what the LORD God says: Breath, come from the four winds and breathe into these slain so that they may live!" 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me; the breath entered them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, a vast army.

OUR HOPE IS SECURE

EZEKIEL 37:11-14

11 Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Look how they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished; we are cut off.' 12 Therefore, prophesy and say to them, 'This is what the LORD God says: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them, my people, and lead you into the land of Israel. 13 You will know that I am the LORD, my people, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I have spoken, and I will do it. This is the declaration of the LORD.'"

MAIN POINT.

We are evidence of God's power to bring life from death and restoration from destruction.

THEOLOGY *CONNECTION*

GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

God is all-powerful: God can do anything so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

DISCUSSION

GOD'S SPIRIT GIVES LIFE

EZEKIEL 37:1-10

- **Do you believe anything is possible for God? Why do we doubt this?**

- **Why do you think God showed Ezekiel these bones?**
- **What happened to make the bones truly come alive? What does this mean for us?**

OUR HOPE IS SECURE

EZEKIEL 37:11-14

- **What hope does God's restoration of Israel give us?**

- **What did the people feel (v. 11)? Are our feelings always true?**
- **Why would God want to revive Israel even after all they had done against Him?**

HOW DOES THIS PASSAGE GIVE YOU HOPE EVEN WHEN WHAT YOU'RE FACING FEELS HOPELESS?

CULTURAL *CONNECTION*

Does God's presence have limitations? For instance, could we mess up so badly that God would leave us? Does He have a boundary concerning how far He will go before He gives up on us? These are questions God's people probably asked in their exile. Had God left them? Sure, their own rebellion landed them in exile. Israel was destroyed, and the temple was obliterated because the people repeatedly ignored God's warnings. They were exiled and scattered by their own doing. So, surely God was done with them? Since the temple was gone, surely God's presence was gone too? The short answer is this: God never left them. He was never confined to the temple. He was with them even in their consequences, even in their exile. If we have called on Jesus for salvation, then as God's children, we have assurance that He is always with us and working in us (Phil. 1:6). God can cross any boundary. We can't wander far enough that we're out of His reach. Even in our own consequences for sin, the Lord is with us. We may suffer from relational distance when we sin, but God will never leave us. We can't mistake consequences for abandonment.

DAY ONE

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-23

Have you ever been in a situation that felt impossible—like a positive outcome wasn't possible or all hope was lost? Honestly, death can feel that way, can't it? When we lose loved ones, we may feel hopeless. Grief is heavy—so heavy at times that it can feel like it's crushing any joy or hope you had left. Death feels so final.

Many of us have read about Jesus's resurrection. We study it at Easter, and we believe Jesus conquered our sin. But we often forget that Jesus conquered death—not just His own death but *all* death. In the passage today, Paul reminded believers in Corinth of this same truth. Death trickled down through history because of Adam's sin. Death is reality for us. No matter what we do, our life here will end, and this can cause many people to feel afraid. But for believers, death isn't final; it's only a doorway. Because Jesus rose from the grave, we will rise too. Just as death came from one man (Adam), life comes from One—Jesus. We share in His resurrection! Knowing this can give us hope here and now, even when we face the death of a loved one and even when we may face our own. Knowing this helps us grieve with hope (1 Thess. 4:13). We have this wonderful hope that this life isn't all there is; death isn't the end. We're made alive in Christ now and for eternity. And knowing this must motivate us to share the gospel with others.

- **WHEN HAVE YOU STRUGGLED WITH FEELING LIKE DEATH WAS FINAL AND HOPELESS?**
- **WHY ARE BELIEVERS ABLE TO GRIEVE DIFFERENTLY THAN THE WORLD—WITH HOPE?**

PRAY

GOD, DEATH SOMETIMES FEELS SCARY AND FINAL. I TRUST THAT JESUS HAS CONQUERED DEATH BECAUSE OF HIS OWN DEATH. I HAVE FAITH THAT DEATH ISN'T FINAL. HELP ME TO GRIEVE WITH HOPE AND TO SHARE THAT HOPE WITH OTHERS.

DAY TWO

GALATIANS 2:20

Think back to when you were only five years old. In what ways have you changed? Are you more bold or more shy? Are you sillier or more serious? Even your physical appearance has probably changed. Though you may still be recognizable, your features aren't the same. Time has a way of changing us. The circumstances we live through, the highs and the lows, change us too. We're often shaped by our life experiences.

As believers, we've experienced Christ. We've encountered Him. And encountering Him and remaining the same is impossible. It would be like falling from a tall tower and then getting up and walking away with no injuries. Your body would show evidence of the fall. When we encounter Jesus, our lives should display the evidence. Paul explained to the church in Galatia that once he met Jesus, his old self died—it was "crucified with Christ." He even explained that he no longer lived at all but that Christ lived in him. Paul radically changed because he allowed his old life to die; he surrendered it in faith, knowing Christ loved him and gave His life for him. Before knowing Jesus, Paul (formerly known as Saul before meeting Jesus) persecuted Christians. He imprisoned them and ordered their deaths; he did everything he could to ravage the early church (Act 8:3). But that version of Paul was dead and gone. Christ lived in him. What about you? Since meeting Christ, have you seen transformation in your life? Has your old self—your sinful, worldly lifestyle—died and faded away, or do you still cling to it? There isn't anything to fear in letting that part of yourself go. You're still you; you're still who God created you to be. But with Christ now living within you, you're made alive and free!

- **WHY ARE WE AFRAID TO LET GO OF OUR OLD LIFESTYLES?**
- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CRUCIFY SOMETHING? WHAT DOES PAUL MEAN BY SAYING "I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST"?**

PRAY

GOD, I DON'T KNOW WHY I CLING TO MY OLD SELF. I HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR BECAUSE I KNOW YOU LOVE ME AND GAVE YOUR SON FOR ME. HELP ME TO PUT MY SINFUL LIFESTYLE BEHIND ME AS I FOLLOW YOU.

DAY THREE

EPHESIANS 2:1-7

This week, we read about a vision of God restoring Israel from death to life. While His people were exiled, God gave Ezekiel a vision of a valley full of dry bones. He commanded Ezekiel to speak His Word and to prophesy over the bones to come alive. Then, God breathed life into the bones and they formed a vast army. After years and years of wandering away from the Lord, Israel appeared to be spiritually lifeless. But God showed Ezekiel this vision to communicate that He was going to restore His people. He alone could bring them back from death.

We often think of physical death as our greatest enemy, but we forget that the worst type of death is spiritual death. Spiritual death means separation from God. The truth is that before knowing Christ, we were all spiritually lifeless. We were as dead as the dry bones in the valley of Ezekiel's vision. Paul explained in the passage today that we were once dead in our trespasses and sins—in the way we used to live. But God saved us. Through Christ, we were brought from spiritual death to spiritual life. God breathed His Spirit into us, and everything changed, right? We went from dead to alive, so surely that change is evident in the way we walk—in the way we now live? In this passage, Paul used the word "previously" twice when he describe believers' lifestyles before knowing Jesus. And that's the key: We were *previously* dead; we are *now* alive. Moving from death to life makes a striking difference. Instead, many believers who've been brought to life walk around as if they're still dead. We try to walk in our previous "ways of this world" (v. 2) even though that path only led to death. When we meet Christ, we're made new. We're made alive. Why would we want to go back to a lifestyle of death?

- **WHAT HABITS OR SIN FROM BEFORE YOU MET JESUS DO YOU STILL WALK IN? HOW CAN YOU WALK IN LIFE INSTEAD?**
- **WHY SHOULD MEETING JESUS CREATE A NOTICEABLE CHANGE IN US?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR BRINGING ME FROM DEATH TO LIFE! I DON'T WANT TO WALK IN THE WAYS OF MY OLD LIFE. I WANT TO WALK IN A WAY THAT SHOWS OTHERS I'VE BEEN MADE NEW.

DAY FOUR

GENESIS 2:7

Have you ever had to take a deep breath to calm down? When we're nervous, almost by instinct, we inhale deeply to calm our nerves. Pay attention the next time you get nervous, and you'll probably notice that you do this too. Watch batters before they step into the batter's box or basketball players at the free throw line; many of them take a deep breath. Doing this helps our system to regulate and manage stress. Deep breathing works against our body's response to fight back or run, a response called "fight or flight."

Deep breathing may calm our system, but breath is critical for life. If we stop breathing, we stop living. We can't operate without air. In Eden, God formed Adam from dust. But Adam wasn't alive until God "breathed the breath of life into his nostrils." That's the moment Adam "became a living being." Spiritually, God breathes His Spirit into us when we confess Christ as our Lord and call on Him for salvation. In the way that air is required for us to physically breathe, God's Spirit living inside of us is required for us to be alive spiritually. The Holy Spirit lives within us to guide us, comfort us, and convict us. The gift of the Holy Spirit acts as a "seal" (2 Cor. 1:22), marking us as people who belong to the Lord. His Spirit is also called a "down payment" (2 Cor. 5:5) because it guarantees our future inheritance. The Holy Spirit living within us works to develop spiritual fruit too (Gal. 5:22-23). Think about it: Fruit is a sure sign that a plant or tree is alive. The fruit of the Spirit is a sure sign we're spiritually alive too! We can't produce spiritual fruit on our own. But God's Spirit works in us, giving us life and helping us thrive!

- **WHAT ARE THE SIGNS IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU'RE SPIRITUALLY ALIVE AND THRIVING?**
- **IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDING YOU, COMFORTING YOU, AND CONVICTING YOU?**

PRAY

GOD, I CAN'T LIVE APART FROM YOU. YOUR SPIRIT LIVING INSIDE OF ME MAKES ME ALIVE. THANK YOU FOR THE GIFT OF YOUR SPIRIT, WHICH SEALS ME AND PRODUCES FRUIT IN ME.

DAY FIVE

EZEKIEL 36:22-27

Have you ever wanted to do the right thing but instead did the wrong thing that you didn't really *want* to do? In other words, have you ever felt torn over doing what is right over what is wrong? Of course you have. Even Paul explained that he often struggled with doing the "evil" that he didn't want to do (Rom. 7:15-20). The truth is that we walk around with a battle going on inside of us at all times. It's a battle of our flesh versus our spirit—the Holy Spirit. And like Paul explained, on our own, we can't do the good we want to do. Nothing good lives inside of us without God's Spirit living within us (Rom. 7:18).

In today's passage, God explained through Ezekiel that He was going to make Israel clean. They had profaned, or defiled, His name among the nations. They had cheapened His reputation, and through them, God was going to ensure that the nations knew of His holiness. The nations would recognize God's holiness through His people living holy lives (v. 23). But how could they do this when they had the same battle raging inside of them as we have raging inside of us? God said He was going to place His Spirit within His people, and His Spirit would cause them to *desire* to follow His commands (v. 27). Really take that in for a minute. On our own—in our flesh—we don't want to follow God. Our sinful nature is even hostile toward Him. But His Spirit living within us longs for God's will. It longs for God's commands. And it transforms our desires to long for these things as well. Now, as long as we're here on earth, we'll battle our sinful nature. But, we can position ourselves to follow the Holy Spirit instead of our own flesh. Reading God's Word, praying, worshiping daily, and spending time with godly believers are all steps that help us follow the Holy Spirit's voice. They're actions we can take in the battle between our flesh and the Spirit.

- **HOW HAS THE HOLY SPIRIT CHANGED YOUR DESIRES?**
- **WHAT STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO WALK BY THE SPIRIT INSTEAD OF GIVING IN TO YOUR FLESH?**

PRAY

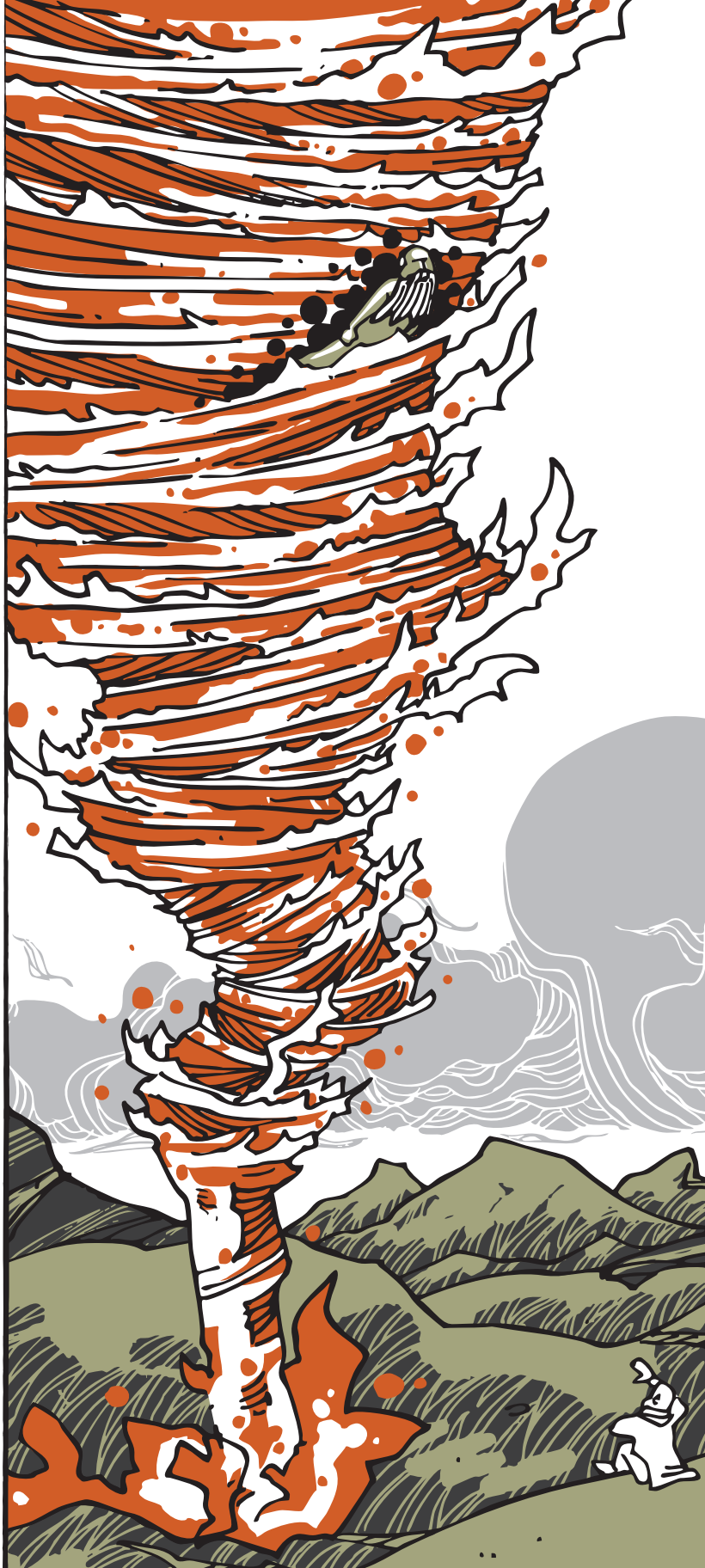
GOD, NOTHING GOOD LIVES INSIDE OF ME WITHOUT YOUR SPIRIT. PLEASE TRANSFORM MY DESIRES SO THAT I LONG TO FOLLOW YOUR SPIRIT INSTEAD OF MY FLESH.

AUTHOR & CONTENT EDITOR

ALECIA BRYANT

Can a voice be incredibly loud yet barely detectable at the same time? Somehow, God's voice is like this—close because His Spirit lives within us, but other voices often suffocate it. God speaks to us— encouraging us, warning us, leading us. But sometimes, we miss all of it. Sometimes, we would rather listen to another voice. And like God's people, we find ourselves in places we never intended to go—places of wandering and exile. The truth is that God will always be with you. He will always pursue you. God wrote His Word on your *heart*, deep within. Choose His voice above any other. Every time. Let it transform you from the inside out.

Alecia Bryant



NOTES

1. Charles Spurgeon, "The Law Written on the Heart," The Spurgeon Center, October 29, 1882. https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-law-written-on-the-heart/.

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