WHEN GOD STEPS IN

1PETER 1:3-9/EZEKIEL 37:1-4

Hebrews 1:1
Romans 15:4
Romans 8:9-11
Ezekiel 36:26-27
Psalm 139:17-18
Romans 15:13

The Hebrew word “RUACH” appears 10 times in 14 verses

It means “breath, wind, and/or Spirit”

There is NO hopelessness with God!

The resurrection power of God is not only a past event but an active, indwelling presence in Christians

Don't dismiss the willingness of God to heal and restore.

Too often we consult the valley more than the word of God.

TAKE AWAYS:

1. **Actively nurture your intimacy with God.**
2. **The dry bones came to life because of the Word of God**
3. **Meditate on what God thinks of you.**

When God Steps In
1 Peter 3:3-9 Ezekiel 37:1-14

The Bible teaches us in Hebrews 1 that God spoke in the Old Testament in many ways. He spoke through a burning bush, a donkey, angelic presences, direct speech, dreams, visions and so on. Paul writes in Romans 15:4, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." These communications reveal God's will and His covenantal purposes. In one of the most memorable moments in the Bible, In Ezekiel 37 God speaks though dealings with a boneyard. The prophet Ezekiel is one of the many Jews exiled to Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar. The exiled remnant of the nation of Israel feels cut off, defeated, and hopeless: "11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'" Sound familiar? Sometimes, the valley of dry bones is a reality for each and every one of us, as well. God takes Ezekiel in the Spirit to a valley of dried, sunbaked bones—a lifeless, hopeless valley.

But, Church, God is still on speaking terms with His people. Though it seems that are cut off from fellowship with God, God steps into their despair; He steps into the valley and the lifelessness to breathe life into dead spaces. He gives to them resurrection from the grave: "12 Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:12). The Hebrew word for *breath* is *ruach*. It means breath, wind, or spirit, and it appears ten (10!) times in fourteen verses of the story of the valley of dry bones, four times in verse 9 alone. The Spirit of God is moving in a dry, desolate valley, in this valley of lifelessness defeat, and shame. God, in His Holy character and power, takes the initiative to restore with His love His people. The dry bones lie exposed, lying on the valley's floor; they bare the shame and guilt of His people. Their restoration is all due to God's power and love through

Ezekiel and his obedience. He preaches what God instructs him to preach, and he lets God do the work of restoration. And God does it!

Can I remind you that God specializes in resurrection? David writes,

18The Lord is close to the brokenhearted

and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

19 The righteous person may have many troubles,

but the Lord delivers him from them all;

` 20 he protects all his bones,

not one of them will be broken. (Psalm 34)

There is no hopelessness with God. "I am going to make . . ." (Ezekiel 37:5). "I will attack . . ." (v. 11). "I am going to open . . ." (v. 12). No, there is no hopelessness in God. Some of us right now may be in a crisis that has us feel hopeless. Can I point out to you that it is not the determination or effort of the bones that brings life. It is obedience and the word of God that brings resurrection power.

The work of God in and among God's people is not done even yet. And if you are a child of God, you are still on speaking terms with Him because of His love. Notice something in the story of the restored dry bones: Verses 5 & 6 describe an "inside out" restoration and resurrection. And here's the wonderful news: The resurrection power of God is not only a past event but is active, indwelling presence in Christians:

9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life[a] because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in

> you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of[b] his Spirit who lives in you. --Romans 8:9-11

Listen. I know that the valley is a reality sometimes. Areas of our lives can feel dry and lifeless: seasons of despair, grief, loss, pain, sin sickness. Sometimes, it is necessary to inventory the valley in which we find ourselves and then honestly answer hard question about our spiritual condition. It is also necessary to recognize God's sovereignty and, like Ezekiel, submit and leave restoration up to Him:

> "2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3 He asked me, "'Son of man, can these bones live?' I said, 'Sovereign Lord, you alone know.'"

Family, we have to be honest with God and ourselves about our dry places. Don't dismiss, however, the willingness of God to heal and restore. Happily, we are to be comforted, as David reminds us, "Yeah, though I walk through the valley of death, thou are with me" (Psalm 23:4).

So where do we begin?

1. Nurture your intimacy with God. Can these dry bones live? Yes! We begin with getting off our tail bone and spending time on our knee bones, going before God, remembering that nothing is impossible for Him.
2. Remember that the quickening of the dry bones happens because of the Word of God. Eight times Ezekiel tells us that God speaks: "He said to me" or "this is what the Lord says" or "declares the Lord." Family, in these declarations is the prescription of wholeness: The Word of God. Too often we consult or focus on our valley more than on Scripture; too often we focus on our feelings more than our faith. Too often, the rattle of the dry bones drowns out the voice of our

Father. Family, the Gospel is not a distraction from our issues. It is the prescription for healing. It is a guide to our walk in His ways: "26 I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. 27 My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Ezekiel 37:26-27). This promise of His providence in your life should lead you to plead for His presence until His presence is priority. Then nurture this intimacy. Let God love you back to life. In the story of the dry bones in the valley, He doesn't stop with simply standing the bones up straight or just add sinews or skin. He breathes total life into these once dead human remains: "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army" (Ezekiel 37:10).

3. Meditate on what God thinks of you:

> How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
>
> How vast is the sum of them!
>
> Were I to count them,
>
> they would outnumber the grains of sand—
>
> when I awake, I am still with you. Psalm 139:17-18

David acknowledges the vastness of God's personal care for His people. This is God's character: His thoughts are for your good and His glory. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: "3 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). In this passage, appear three articles of Advent: Hope, Joy, and Peace—all available because of His great love for you—and there it is, the fourth article of Advent: LOVE.

God's love is the resurrection power that lives in us. Following the example of Ezekiel, we proclaim, "It's up to you, God." In His love, we can move

from bone dry to living and Spirit-filled. That' the Gospel. He is the God of all hope. When God steps in, life happens.

Passages in support of this sermon:

1 Peter 1:3-9

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord was on 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. 2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

4 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! 5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath[a] enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, "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.'" 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' 12 Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, 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 the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'"