

I. The Valley of Dry Bones

- A. Dry bones. Bleached by the sun. Broken. Jagged, cracked, fragmented. A whole valley full of dry bones. Dead. Fit for nothing but burial.
- B. Dry bones. When the prophet named Ezekiel stood up to preach, that was his audience. A valley of dry bones. And he preached to them, and something mind-blowing happened.
- C. Hello Campers. Welcome to Camp Neighborhood. Welcome to Campfire Hill... the place where we experience the great stories of the Bible.
 1. David and Goliath, The Parting of the Red Sea, The Tower of Babel, Daniel in the Lion's Den... and on and on.
- D. We have this awesome treasury of God's mighty works, to paint the power of God in bright colors on the walls of our imaginations. And for this summer here at Camp Neighborhood, we've been seeing how God still speaks from the pages of his Word.
- E. Today, one of the strangest word-pictures in the Bible. It's the story of a prophet named Ezekiel, and of the vision God gave him one day.
- F. Here's that vision.
 1. *The LORD took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the LORD to a valley filled with bones. He led me around among the old, dry bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground. Then he asked me, "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?" "O Sovereign LORD," I replied, "you alone know the answer to that."*
Then he said to me, "Speak to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Look! I am going to breathe into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"
So I spoke these words, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as they had been before. Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them.
 2. *Then he said to me, "Speak to the winds and say: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so that they may live again.'"*
So I spoke as he commanded me, and the wind entered the bodies, and they began to breathe. They all came to life and stood up on their feet--a great army of them. (Ezekiel 37:1-10, NLT).
- G. Ezekiel was a prophet which means a preacher of God's truth.
- H. He served during a really tough time in Israel's history. This was almost six hundred years before Christ. The nation was being picked apart, piece by piece. Israel was invaded by Babylon. One by one, Babylon was picking off cities and forcing people into exile into faraway lands.
- I. God warned them this would happen. He told them if they worshiped other gods, and hardened their hearts against God, he would lift his hand of blessing. God loves you too much to subsidize your own self-destruction.
- J. And he loves these people, but he has to let them hit rock bottom. And they did. They are sent into exile, which became the depressing centerpiece of their lives.
- K. Ezekiel is one of those exiles. Along with thousands of other Jews, Ezekiel had been dragged off to Babylon and forced to resettle there. With every new wave of exiles, they hear stories of how bad it is back home. Soon, in a few short years, even Jerusalem would be destroyed. And worst of all, the Temple of the Jews would be demolished stone by stone.
- L. So what does God say to people whose lives are in a place they never wanted to be? Even when it's by their own choices? Even when it's their own dumb fault?
- M. What does God have to say to that person who sees their foundations crumble and their security blankets shredded before their very eyes?
- N. He speaks a message of grace for them, and he wraps that grace in a very cool vision called The Valley of Dry Bones.
- O. Like all grace, the grace offered in this vision comes with a choice to make. That choice is a simple one called faith.
- P. I want to apply this grace to the dry bones, the broken places, the existential exile in your heart today. And I want to help you make THE CHOICE that will breathe new life into your spirit.
 1. So I'm giving you this head's up. At the end of my talk, I'm going to ask you to pray, and to tell God your choice to receive Jesus and his grace like you've never done before.
 2. No pressure. No weirdness. I won't single you out. But God brought you here today because there's a valley of dry bones in your heart, and Campfire Hill is where people get saved.
- Q. After Ezekiel describes the freaky vision of dry bones, God makes it easy. God gives him an interpretation. It's like a secret decoder ring to understand the vision. Let's take that apart verse by verse.

II. Life from Death in the Valley of Decision

- A. *Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' (Ezekiel 37:11)*
 1. There comes a point when you just have to tell yourself the truth.
 2. *1. If you want to lay hold of a new life, you have to start with ACCURATE SELF-ASSESSMENT.*
 3. It's that "searching and moral inventory of your self" in the twelve steps.

4. In the interpretation, God says, Son of man... that's just his title for the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel, these bones are the whole house of Israel. It's a nation conquered, divided, and scattered.
5. The first part of the tragedy is they were once so glorious. King David, King Solomon. They had a golden age when kings and queens traveled across the world to see the wonders of Israel.
 - a) Have you ever rooted for a sports team that dominates one season and falls apart the next? Say for example, they win the World Series one year in a stunning reversal of history, and then play under .500 baseball the next? Hypothetically?
6. The Jews had so much power, so much wealth, so much prosperity in their past -- such huge potential. And now they are conquered, divided and scattered. That's the first part of their tragedy.
7. And the second part is they brought it on themselves.
8. They forgot the God that loved them. They forgot where every good thing in their lives came from. They made other gods their god. They thought they could break God's laws and nothing would happen.
9. Have you ever made a bad choice and regretted it later?
10. They brought it on themselves, and look at what they say about themselves:
 - a) They say, Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off.
11. Accurate self assessment. A searching and moral inventory of yourself.
12. I have never heard of any person who accurately assesses the size of their moral brokenness and sin.
13. Back in the day, they used the phrase, "the exceeding sinfulness of sin." What they meant was that sin wasn't a little thing. This moral brokenness we feel inside wasn't minor. It wasn't simply a psychological issue or a bad feeling. It was more than a minor wound you could slap a band-aid on and be okay.
14. If God is pure, if God is good, if God is righteous and just and fair... if God is holy and clean... then even the slightest moral failure is a crime against infinite justice, and worthy of swift retribution.
15. There are no little sins against the Almighty.
16. These people speak of their bones, so they conceive of themselves as dead. Every person with even one stain of moral failure should think of themselves in the same way. Spiritually dead, the Bible teaches. Alienated from God's great heart. A moral corpse. Unresponsive. Unseeing. Unhearing. Unmoving with regard to God. Cut off from his love, his grace, and his heaven.
17. The Bible calls us dead in trespasses and sins. It feels like an empty place in your heart. It feels like dissatisfaction. Or like guilt. Or shame. Or sadness. Or fear. Or like something's missing. The spiritual death can feel like desperation. Or you might numb it over, and it feels like nothingness. It's all chronic.
18. Whatever it feels like, it's the moral decay of every person coming into the world. It's the pain machine inside you. Sin isn't just bad stuff you do, it's the brokenness inside and the rebelliousness it causes against God.
19. And none of us really gets how immeasurably, unalterably, irredeemably bad it is. It's a condition of being under the judgment of God - out of adjustment to his holiness and power.
20. Our bones are dry. Dust in the wind. Have you ever done that searching and moral inventory of yourself in your relationship to God? You might not be addicted to alcohol or drugs or porn or gaming or sex... You might not need the twelve steps in your psychology.
21. But what about your spirit? What about the part of you that interfaces with God? When you talk to God, have you ever told him about your moral failure? Have you ever confessed that you are a sinner?
22. Because when you lead with that, God really listens to you for the first time in your life. And that is what I want to help you do today. You might not be ready, but you don't have to be. Just be willing.
23. As long as you have sin on your record, all you can say is our bones are dried up. I am dead. And cut off from the one person who loves me best and the eternal forgiveness and life only He can bring.
- B. *They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' (Ezekiel 37:11)*
 1. I know it's the same verse, but I want to laser in on the words, "our hope is lost."
 2. They say, Our hope is lost.
 3. For the Jews in exile, this meant, our nation is lost, our identity is lost, our future is lost. We will never be a nation again. We will never have a place of worship again. We will never have the love and joy and peace and prosperity of God's promised land again. We will never have a glorious kingdom and a gracious king to lead us again. Our hope is lost.
 4. There's nothing we can do. Our situation has become unmanageable and we are powerless to fix it.
 - a) *2. If you want to lay hold of God's new life, you have to COME TO END OF YOURSELF.*
 5. That is the key to everything.
 6. Let me show another Bible verse about hope, and talk about it for a minute.
 - a) *[We] have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast... (Hebrews 6:18, 19)*
 7. A Christian is a person who has fled for refuge to lay hold of Christ.
 8. Most you know I grew up going to church, Sunday School, Awana clubs, prayer meetings. If my church had a meeting, I was at it. I knew about Jesus. I knew the Bible.

9. I knew about Jesus dying, rising again, and being my Savior. The language we used back then was to ask Jesus into your heart. We also said to give your life to Christ.
10. And I had done that as a boy. In fact, I did it over and over again, because I didn't understand. The pieces of the puzzle really had not come together for me. I believe God saved me the first time, and that my understanding just had to catch up.
11. One day it did.
12. I was in my high school, Chicago's Lane Tech High School. This was a big school, over 5,000 students, and it looked like a giant factory.
13. It was Junior year, so I was 17. I was in gym class, and my teacher was absent that day. When our gym teacher was absent, we sat in the stands in the giant gym, and used it as a study period.
14. I brought a book to read.
 - a) (*Satan Is Alive and Well on Planet Earth*, by Hal Lindsey, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1972, pp.184,5).
 - b) When a person becomes a true believer in Christ, he is born into the family of God and out of the family of Satan. Satan does everything he can to keep us blinded to the offer of forgiveness in Christ, but millions have thrown off his shackles and gone from death to life. This has absolutely infuriated Satan, and each time someone responds to the Gospel, it's a slap in his face....
 - c) One of the most successful tactics the demons used in neutralizing their enemies (the Christian) was to get them to dwell on all of their failures. Once they began to feel guilty about their performance in the Christian life, they were no longer any threat to Satan's program.
 - d) Things haven't changed much in Satan's tactics. Why should they? He's got a winner.
 - e) There's nothing Satan likes better than to get a believer started on the guilt trip.
15. The whole chapter talks about this guilt trip, and that was my middle name.
16. So here I am, a young guy, in this cavernous gym. Echoes of bouncing basketballs. I'm in the stands on a hard wooden bench, along with maybe another fifty students, all spread out. Some are writing. Some are sleeping. Some, like me, are reading.
17. I read as the author talked about guilt.
 - a) That's me, I thought.
18. He told about how the devil screws a handle on our backs, called guilt and shame, and slams us around every so often.
 - a) That's me, I thought.
19. Then he talked about Jesus. And how he died on the Cross. And how anything that could possibly make me guilty before God was lifted out of me, placed on Christ, and dealt with, totally, completely, one hundred percent so there was nothing left to do.
 - a) Does that mean me? I said.
20. Then the book went into the great verse in the Bible where Jesus, hanging on the cross, paying for every sin of my past, present, and future — where he cried out IT IS FINISHED.
 - a) And when I read that, it hit me.
 - b) That's me! That's me! That's me!
21. It literally felt as if a heavy burden dropped off my shoulders, and I was free. I saw that Christ obtained total forgiveness for me, once, for all, and forever.
22. I was desperate. I wanted to know I was clean before God.
23. And when I saw Jesus dying on the Cross, I ran to him and laid hold of him. I discovered he laid hold of me, and would never let me go. What an awesome day. That's what I'm praying for you today.
24. The Bible says to come to Christ, and that is true. But it's not like you simply saunter down the candy aisle and pick whatever candies you want.
25. No. It's more than that.
26. If you really realize how deep your sin is, and how dangerous your condition is, and if you deeply see how seriously out of touch with God you are, and how you can't fix it...
27. You don't just saunter up to Christ.
28. You run to him. You flee for refuge.
29. And in that moment, you discover he's been running to you all your days.
 - a) 3. If you want to lay hold of God's new life, you have to... **FLEE FOR REFUGE TO CHRIST.**
30. A Christian is a person who has fled for refuge to lay hold of Christ.
31. And that is what I want to help you do today. Because if you do, this is what will happen:
 - C. "Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and [I will] cause you to come up from your graves, and [I will] bring you into the land of Israel. "Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. "I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD.'" (Ezekiel 37:12-14)
1. You were dry bones, spiritual dead, out of touch with God.

2. And God says,
 - a) I will open your grave.
 - b) I will cause you to come up from your grave.
 - c) I will bring you into the land.
 - d) I will put my Spirit in you, and...
 - e) I will place you in your own land.
 3. Grammatically, there are five "I wills" from God... and then one "you will" about you:
 - a) You will know that I the Lord has spoken it and performed it.
 - b) 4. *If you want to lay hold of God's new life, you have to... BELIEVE ALL THE WORK HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE BY GOD.*
 4. I used to think I had to perform my way into God's favor. I had to obey him. Please him. Be a better person. Serve him. Do good works for him. And that if I didn't do that, he wouldn't accept me.
 5. That belief was a gigantic weight around my emotions.
 6. Can you see how that would make for a lot of guilt inside a person?
 7. I had a giant mental shift I needed to make. It was a shift in how I saw my relationship with God.
 8. It was a shift from works — which is my effort and me paying the price — to grace which is God's effort and God paying the price.
 9. It's from me saying, God, I'll do this for you, and that for you... baptism, confirmation, good works, pay it forward, sacrifice, improve my life, go to church, giving...
 10. When all along, God has been telling me, I will do it. I will pay for it. I will accomplish it. I will make it happen.
 11. And you will know that I the Lord have spoken and performed it.
 - a) Only God could find dry bones, and make them live again.
 - b) Only God could open a grave, and bring life up from the dead.
 - c) Only God could forgive the tragic choice of sin, that alienated us from him without human hope.
 - d) Only God could become human, and absorb the punishment for our sins, because he had no sins of his own.
 - e) Only God could hold out his hand to you today, right now, offering a gift to you, totally free, and paid in full by Christ.
 12. Will you say yes that gift?
 13. The vision of the dry bones ends this way.
- D. *So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.*
- Also He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live."'" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army. (Ezekiel 37:7-10)*
1. Can you imagine that vision? Bones start rattling and shaking and moving, and assembling and joining and coming together.
 2. And they form skeletons and flesh came upon them, but they lay there like unanimated corpses.
 3. And then Ezekiel calls for the Spirit of God to come, and he comes. And they come to life, and stand to their feet.
 4. And what do they become?
 5. An exceedingly great army.
 6. God is in the business of raising the dead to life, and mobilizing his living children into an army of light and love to deliver his good news to all the world. Especially to our city and our place and our neighborhood and our land.
 7. So right now it is time for THE CHOICE, that I talked about earlier. Because here is our last lesson.
 - a) 5. *If you want to lay hold of God's new life, you have to... ASK, AND YOU WILL RECEIVE.*

III. The Choice

- A. You find in your heart a valley of dry bones. You ask, can these dry bones live again?
- B. Jesus says yes. I died on the cross for you. When that happened, I cleared away the guilt and shame for you.
- C. And right now, you can be brought from a condition of death to life.
- D. You can be forgiven and cleansed, and given life with God in heaven forever.
- E. You say what do I have to do?
- F. God says, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

IV. Invitation

- A. ADMIT: God, I admit today that I need you. There is a place inside me that is as dead and hopeless as those dead bones so long ago. My heart is far from your heart, and my life is far from your standards. I am a sinner and I need a Savior.
- B. BELIEVE: God, I believe that Jesus is that Savior. Today I make him my Savior. Not my works, but your Son. Not my efforts, but his great sacrifice. I believe he is your Son. I believe he died on the Cross. I believe he rose again. I don't get how it all works, but I believe that Jesus is my way to you. He is my only way. He is the perfect way. I believe.
- C. CHOOSE: Right now, I choose to receive Jesus as my personal Savior. I flee to him for refuge. I'm asking you to breathe into my heart the supernatural life only you can give. Right now, I'm asking you, because of Jesus, please save me. Amen.
- D. To learn more about what you just prayed, visit welcometogodsfamily.cc.