

# Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

## Lesson 34

### *Dry Bones, Rise Up And Live!*

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Ezekiel, a prophet of God, was ministering to the Hebrew nation at the time they were in exile in Babylonia. Well-known prophets such as Jeremiah and Daniel had been prophesying to the people before Ezekiel arrived on the scene. Sadly, the unrepentant nation had been in captivity for so long, they had become hopeless of any chance for life.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel, wanting to help the people learn from their failures and rebellion, is given a graphic vision from God.

**Ezekiel 37:1-5, 10 (KJV)** - *“The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest.*

*Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live...So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.”*

In Ezekiel’s vision of *The Valley of Dry Bones*, he sees the stark reality; the past is gone. The dryness of the bones is an indication that those bones had been there for a very long time. They are the bones of human soldiers slain in battle. There is no mistaking it; the bones symbolize his deceased nation and their spiritual deadness. No matter how much he wished things were different, there is nothing that can be done about the past. The bones had been separated from one another, pointing out that the Hebrew nation had been separated and scattered. The bones declared that the people of Israel had lost all hope of becoming a nation again or of seeing God’s covenants fulfilled.

**Ezekiel 37:11 (KJV)** – *“Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel:*

*behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.”*

If you have been incarcerated in a prison facility for many years, you may very well relate to Ezekiel’s vision. You may even feel like a dead man’s bones, separated, cut off from everything you ever cared about. When Ezekiel looked out over the valley, he saw a lot of hopelessness. You may feel hopeless today; like God isn’t moving in your life the way you want Him to. Lacking a full understanding of the consequences, many prisoners who profess Jesus Christ as Lord, come out of prison speaking words of condemnation, rather than words of life. The following words are all too familiar;

*“Well the DOC only gives you a \$100 dollars when you get out of prison...What good is that going to do me? I’ll probably have to sleep under a bridge with a piece of cardboard.”*

If this is how you feel, consider how your words are a dead give away to the image you have of yourself. Jesus warns us about the damage of our words and the consequences they bring.

**Matthew 12:36-37 (KJV)** – *“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”*

Based on the words you repeatedly use to describe your present situation, would the account you give to Jesus on the Day of Judgment be one of justification or condemnation? In other words, are you prophesying life or death over your life?

If failure is all you envision for yourself upon release from prison, then what you are doing is pronouncing a self-fulfilling prophesy over your own life. You can be sure; the adversary will see to it that your words will bring defeat at every corner.

Oh, but there is more to Ezekiel’s vision. As he continued looking across the open valley, he heard the words of the Lord speaking to the dry bones!

*Ezekiel 37:4-5 (KJV) - "...Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live..." [emphasis mine]*

It doesn't matter what station one has in life, no one will get very far in this world without tuning their ears to hear the word of the Lord. God wants to rekindle the life-giving spirit He has freely given to those who confess Jesus Christ as their Lord.

To be truly alive once again after years of suffering in exile, Israel needed a new spirit breathed by God. Ezekiel assured the people that God would restore Israel to life. Only a "new creation" could resurrect Israel, or anyone else for that matter. God can take people who are spiritually dead and hopeless because of sin, and recreate them to be His people. This is salvation. As Paul testified firsthand;

*II Corinthians 5:17-19 (NIV) - "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who...was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them."*

This all sounds well and good. But, there is a catch, or condition if you will. If you are truly in Christ, that is, reconciled to Him, you will *believe God*, rather than the world. The cold hard truth is this; just because God is not counting your sins against you, does not mean that the world has forgotten your sins. When you walk out the gates of prison, your faith in God will be put to the test. Who will you put your trust in when the hard knocks of life come your way? *I Peter 5:8-11 (KJV)*

If you come out of prison expecting to draw your hope from the world, rather than from God, you will be constantly disappointed. If you spend your waking hours focused on what is *wrong* with the world, expecting rejection at every turn, you can become blinded to the goodness of God. How? By being deceived into thinking there is nothing in life to be thankful for, which is exactly where Satan wants you, unthankful to God for the gift of salvation.

If you want God to help you, you need to cultivate a lifestyle of thankfulness, smack-dab in the midst of opposition. Just as Ezekiel kept hearing the word of the Lord, *you* should keep hearing the word of the Lord prophesying *hope to you*. The longer you listen,

the more God's word will come alive in your spirit. His word will eventually drive out the bitterness, anger, and resentment you harbor against the world. You will come to the simple, but profound truth; it does no good whatsoever to get mad at the world, for not keeping a promise, it never made to you in the first place. The world owes you nothing. It is God's promise that counts in your life. *John 16:32-33 (KJV)*

*Hope* is the one thing all prisoners and those coming out of prison need. The God kind of *hope* can only come by being attentive to the constant leadership of the Holy Spirit, whose primary intent is to breathe new life into your spirit. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God's purpose can be fulfilled in your life.

**The bottom line:** Don't just *say* you are a child of God. Rise up and be one!

*Ezekiel 37:10 (KJV) - "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army."*

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#### Questions for personal or group study:

1. In Ezekiel's vision of *The Valley of Dry Bones*, he saw the bones of human soldiers slain in battle. What did these bones symbolize?
2. What did the dryness of the bones say about the "hope" of the nation of Israel?
3. As Ezekiel looked over the valley he saw that the bones were separated, cut off in parts. As a prison inmate can you relate to Ezekiel's vision, feeling cut off and separated from everything you cared about?
4. How do we pronounce a self-fulfilled prophecy over our own life by the words we use? Are you prophesying life or death over your own life?
5. To be truly alive [spiritually resurrected] after years of suffering in exile, what did Israel need from God? Through what process does this take place?
6. How does focusing on what is *wrong* in the world, cause us to become blinded to the goodness of God?