

Ezekiel 37

The breath enters them, and they stand on their feet as “a vast army.” God then explains the vision:

Our hopelessness is ultimately a problem of forgetting one of God's names. Our worn-out existence a symptom of Spirit-amnesia. The difference between dry bones and a living army is God's empowering presence—God's Holy Spirit.

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- Ezekiel 37:3

“Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” – Ezekiel 37:3

"Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live." - Ezekiel 37:9

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I. God's Empowering Presence Makes Us Alive

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The Hebrew word *ruach* and Greek *pneuma* can carry the sense of spirit, wind, and breath. Throughout Scripture, these meanings overlap. In Ezekiel, God promises:

"I will put my Spirit/breath [ruach] in you and you will live." - Ezekiel 37:14

The connection between breath and life goes all the way back to creation.

Genesis 2:7 says:

"The Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

Breath is our most desperate physical need. We can live weeks without food and days without water, but only minutes without breath. God continually gives us the breath by which we live.

But Scripture distinguishes between merely having life and having *Life*. We can use the breath God gives us to curse, destroy, and harm. God wants us to breathe deeper—to receive the life that comes from his Spirit.

This is fulfilled in Jesus. The Spirit rested upon Jesus, and after his death and resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples and said:

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."
... *"Receive the Holy Spirit."* - John 20:21–22

Jesus breathed on them as a sign of the Spirit he was giving them. The dry bones of Ezekiel's vision point toward the resurrection life God gives through Christ.

Romans 8:11 gives us the promise:

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he...will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you."

So, can these dry bones live?

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Yes—with God’s Spirit. His empowering presence gives life to our mortal bodies and points us toward the resurrection life to come.

When you feel hopeless and lost: *breathe*.

When the pain and chaos of the world feels suffocating: *breathe*.

Breathe deep and remember God’s sustaining presence, His Spirit within you.

The Spirit of God is not an optional addition to Christianity. He is God’s empowering presence within us.

II. God’s Empowering Presence Settles Chaos

The Spirit can make some Christians uncomfortable. We can associate the word “Spirit” with unpredictability or disorder. People feel the Spirit is the weird uncle of the Trinity. As one student told a professor:

*"I believe in God the Father, I believe in Jesus Christ, but I wonder about the Holy [Spirit]."*¹

But Scripture presents something different.

Paul tells the Corinthians:

“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”
– 1 Corinthians 14:33

God’s empowering presence brings peace. The Hebrew word *shalom* carries the idea of peace, wholeness, and order.

The earliest biblical examples of people being filled with God’s Spirit are often people empowered to bring order into the world. Joseph receives wisdom to make a plan that will help Egypt survive famine (Genesis 41:38).

Bezalel is filled with the Spirit to build beautiful things for the tabernacle (Exodus 31:2–3).

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The first appearance of the Spirit of God is also at creation:

“The earth was formless and empty... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” - Genesis 1:2

God’s Spirit is his active, empowering presence intervening to bring his order and peace into creation. This becomes clearer in Jesus. At his baptism:

“The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.” - Luke 3:22

Father, Son, and Spirit together send Jesus into the world to bring God’s peace and order. After Jesus’ resurrection, the Spirit comes upon his followers at Pentecost with the sound of rushing wind and fire (Acts 2:1–4).

Our discomfort with the Spirit often comes because we can understand God up there—the Father, or God back there—the Son, but God *in here*—The Spirit, makes demands on us. We become part of His peacemaking mission, commanded to be obedient to God’s leading.

And this means we are not merely spectators. When we ask, “Can these bones live?” the answer is yes—but we do not get to sit on the hillside and watch. God’s empowering presence invites us to join him in his work.

III. God’s Empowering Presence Shows Us Reality

When the Spirit brings us to life and calls us into God’s mission, we need the Spirit to keep us in touch with reality.

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth:

“He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.” - John 14:16–17

And later:

“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”
- John 14:26

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Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 2. The Spirit reveals things we could never discover on our own:

“These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.”
- 1 Corinthians 2:10

The inner experience of the Spirit is of a voice deep in us telling us to choose love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

This inner experience is what Ezekiel prophesied about. The Lord promised Israel:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you... And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees.” - Ezekiel 36:26-27

The Spirit helps us live according to the reality of who God is.

Can these bones live?

Yes, if they remember they are not alone. Gordon Fee gives a simple theological definition of the Spirit:
“God’s empowering presence.” ²

The Spirit is *God with us*.

Whenever we face anything which frightens, overwhelms or threatens us, we have the ability to move towards the ‘advocate’, the encourager. God, the Holy Spirit, is the coach running alongside us, reminding us we don’t have to figure it all out on our own.

IV. God’s Empowering Presence Makes Us Bold

There is another major thing the Spirit does in Israel’s Scriptures: he calls people into battle.

Gideon is filled with the Spirit to rally Israel’s troops (Judges 6:34). Samson is given strength by the Spirit to fight Israel’s enemies (Judges 14:6; 15:14). Saul is rushed upon by the Spirit and calls Israel to war (1 Samuel 11:6-7).

The Spirit does not make us timid. Paul tells Timothy:

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“The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7)
The dry bones are brought to life and called “a vast army.”

But Christian boldness is not aggression for its own sake. The Spirit’s greatest gift of courage is the courage to love (1 Corinthians 13).

The Spirit gives us the courage to fight for love, say hard things for love, face our fears for love, stretch beyond our comfort for love, and carry our crosses as Christ carried his.

Love is the greatest thing you can ever do.

Love is the fruit of the Spirit and the fulfillment toward which the Spirit’s power is directed.

His love makes us alive.
His love gives us peace.
His love shows us reality.
His love makes us bold.

God’s Empowering Presence in Us

The promise of God’s presence can be difficult to believe in seasons of suffering. Sometimes we try to breathe and feel choked up. We listen for the wind and hear only silence. We look for an ember and see only ashes.

But God’s presence does not always come in the way we expect.

Sometimes a casserole shows up on your doorstep. People clean your house. They send gift cards. They sit with you and weep. They help you get back on your feet. God did not only promise to be **with me**, but **with us**.

God’s empowering presence reminds us to look for God not only within ourselves, but in the hands, feet, and faces of the people who follow him.

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Even when we feel as though our bones have been dead and dried up, there is an army around us—God’s reconstituted people—calling us to get up with them and live.

So the question remains:

Can these bones live?

The answer is yes.

God's Spirit makes us alive.

God's Spirit brings peace and order.

God's Spirit shows us reality.

God's Spirit makes us bold.

And so we pray:

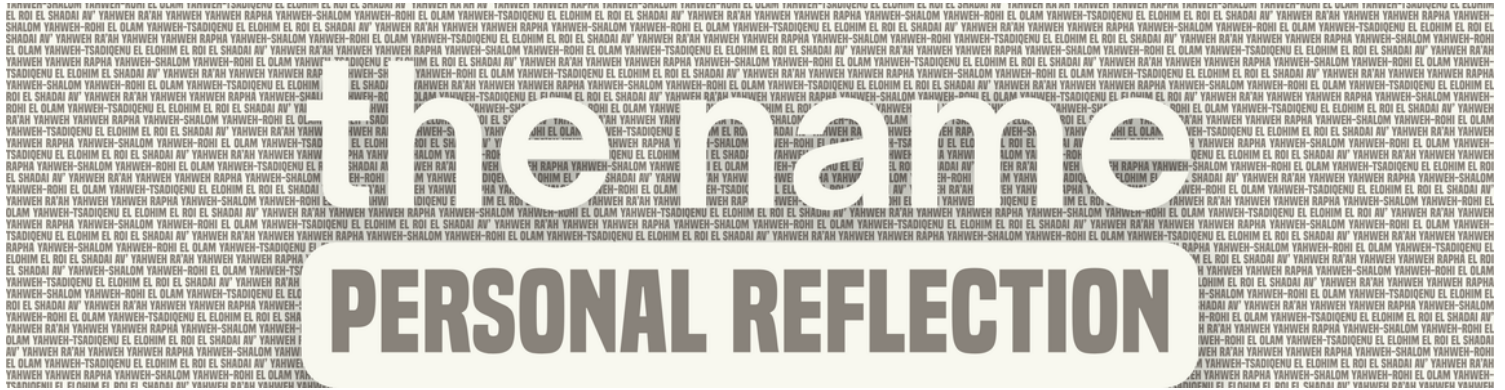
“Breathe on us, breath of God.

Fill us with life anew."

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Personal Reflection Questions

Open Up:

- How often do you live in the awareness of God’s Spirit within you?
- What gets in the way of remembering the Spirit?

Dig In:

Read **Romans 8**, the seminal chapter on the Holy Spirit in Paul’s theology.

- What promise or truth stands out to you in this passage? Memorize this verse.
- What do you need from the Spirit—life, peace, truth or boldness? Pray for this.
- Where might the Spirit be speaking to you in and through His people?

REFLECTION

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References

- ¹ Fee, Paul, and the Spirit, and the People of God, pg. 37.
- ² See Gordon Fee, God's Empowering Presence, pgs. 1-9.