



Devotional Guide for the Season of Lent 2017

As we journey together through the season of Lent, this devotional guide is meant to serve as weekly preparation for the Sunday to come. Email subscribers will receive each week's devotion early in the week prior, giving them several days to study the Scripture passage for the week and meditate on the questions, hymns, and prayers provided.

You are encouraged to spend the days leading up to each Sunday in prayer and meditation with the Scripture, opening your hearts to hear what message God may have for you. We hope that this guide will be a blessing to you, and that your season of Lent may be a time in which you are renewed and refreshed.

We suggest that you use this guide in this manner:

Day One: Read the Scripture and commentary. Circle words and underline phrases that speak to you. Reflect on them.

Day Two: Read the Scripture again and focus on one of the questions.

Day Three: Read the Scripture again and focus on another of the questions.

Day Four: Read through the hymn lyrics, and sing them if you so desire. How does the hymn deepen the message of the Scripture?

Conclude each day by praying the prayer.

April 2nd, 2017 - Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act," says the Lord.

"These bones cry out, these bones cry out to You to live and move." The plaintive cry of Christian artist Michael Gungor in his 2011 song "Dry Bones" reaches out to us from Ezekiel's prophecies. The dead, dry bones of Israel lay amidst the valley of Ezekiel's vision, scattered by Babylon during the exile, crying out to the Lord for new life. Here, Ezekiel witnesses God speak to the bones of Israel, and sees them return to life once more.

In this passage, God promises a resurrection, a return to life for the people Israel. God instructs Ezekiel to prophesy hope to the people, telling them that they will be returned to their land and they will be given new life, and so they will know that the Lord God has spoken to them.

How often do we look at hopeless situations and imagine that God could not possibly be present within them? A valley full of dry bones would seem to be the most desolate of places, and yet, even there, we see that God can move and work to give new life to God's people. "Dry Bones" closes with the words, "Jesus, You're the one who saves us, constantly creates us into something new." The new life we have been given through Christ is a new creation - dry bones given flesh once more through grace and mercy.

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Questions to Consider

- 1) Lent is often a time during which we reduce ourselves to the barest of minimums, and indeed, that has been especially true for us during our Lenten Sabbath this year. In what ways can we look forward to God putting new flesh on our bones as Lent approaches its end?
- 2) When we see desolate situations where there appears to be no hope, how can we draw upon the promise that God will speak new life into the dry bones? What can give us hope where there seems to be no hope at all?

Hymn for the Week - “Spirit of the Living God”

Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mold me,
fill me, use me.

Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.

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Prayer for the Week

Our God, our bones cry out, our bones cry out to you to live and move, to make us new. Give us the faith to see the new life being breathed into the dry bones, to see the new flesh covering them as they move in your promise once more. Grant us our own hope in the times of dryness and desolation, that we may know the promise of renewed life when all seems lost. We give you thanks for the new life received through the one in whose name we pray, Jesus Christ, our Lord, AMEN.