

The Gospel Project® for Adults

Daily Discipleship Guide CSB, Unit 15, Session 6

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God Pictures a Future Hope

Session in a Sentence: God promised one day to give life to His people, to restore them, and to provide a King so He could dwell with them.

Background Passage: Ezekiel 36–37

CPR, short for cardiopulmonary resuscitation, finds its origins in the mid-1700s with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation used for drowning victims. The first successful use of chest compressions for human resuscitation was recorded in 1903. The technique used today for CPR was developed in 1960. CPR is attributed with helping to save millions of lives. Immediate application of CPR after a cardiac arrest can double or triple a person's chances of survival. CPR is, without question, an amazing gift from modern science to humanity. 1

What conditions are required for effective performance of CPR?

Group Time

Point 1: God gives life to a people who are dead (Ezek. 37:1-6).

1 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by his Spirit and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. **2** He led me all around them. There were a great many of them on the surface of the valley, and they were very dry. **3** Then he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I replied, “Lord God, only you know.”

4 He said to me, “Prophecy concerning these bones and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! **5** This is what the Lord God says to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you will live. **6** I will put tendons on you, make flesh grow on you, and cover you with skin. I will put breath in you so that you come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.”

The bones littering the valley represented the whole house of Israel: she was dead (v. 11). The people of Israel considered themselves beyond resuscitation as a nation. For too long they had rejected the Lord and His messengers, and as time passed, their hearts became increasingly hardened. The people's rebellion ultimately led to God's punishing them by means of exile. In short, their disregard for God's word, as preached by the prophets, led to their death as a nation.

How does a rejection of God's Word lead to death?

God asked Ezekiel if those dry bones could live. Now, the Lord had already raised the dead to life on several occasions (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37; 13:21), but in this scenario, God would have to resuscitate dry bones instead of corpses shortly after death. But rather than discount God, Ezekiel replied in submission to the sovereign knowledge and power of God. God then channeled His divine power through Ezekiel's words and the bones came to life, covered with flesh and filled with breath (Ezek. 37:7-10).

How have you seen God's Word bring restoration to your life or to the life of someone you love?

Point 2: God restores a people who are scattered and divided (Ezek. 37:16-17,20-22).

16 “Son of man, take a single stick and write on it: Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him. Then take another stick and write on it: Belonging to Joseph—the stick of Ephraim—and all the house of Israel associated with him. **17** Then join them together into a single stick so that they become one in your hand.

.....
20 “When the sticks you have written on are in your hand and in full view of the people, **21** tell them, ‘This is what

the Lord God says: I am going to take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them into their own land. 22 I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel, and one king will rule over all of them. They will no longer be two nations and will no longer be divided into two kingdoms.

Next, Ezekiel was commanded by God to perform a symbolic act involving two sticks, one representing the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the other representing the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Joining the sticks together as one symbolized God's plan to reunify the two kingdoms following their split after Solomon's death (1 Kings 12). The Lord longed to see the tribes of Israel reconciled and unified under one king, a reality that would come to pass in His timing and by His doing.

God told His people that His plan for restoration extended beyond those involved in the Babylonian captivity; it included the Israelites in all the nations where they had been scattered, bringing them all back to their homeland. This greater gathering speaks of a future reality that goes beyond the returns from exile that happened in the days of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. God also reiterated His commitment to unite His people forever under one future King—Jesus Christ.

What messages should unity among God's people communicate to the world?

Voices from the Church

"God wants our churches—whatever specific forms our gatherings take—to be focused on active discipleship, mission, and the pursuit of unity." 2

—Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle

Point 3: God dwells with a people who are in rebellion (Ezek. 37:23-28).

23 They will not defile themselves anymore with their idols, their abhorrent things, and all their transgressions. I will save them from all their apostasies by which they sinned, and I will cleanse them. Then they will be my people, and I will be their God. 24 My servant David will be king over them, and there will be one shepherd for all of them. They will follow my ordinances, and keep my statutes and obey them.

25 " 'They will live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They will live in it forever with their children and grandchildren, and my servant David will be their prince forever. 26 I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be a permanent covenant with them. I will establish and multiply them and will set my sanctuary among them forever. 27 My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. 28 When my sanctuary is among them forever, the nations will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel.' "

Ezekiel did not know the specific details surrounding the messianic King's arrival, but as verses 23-24 suggests, he knew the coming of this King would correspond with the permanent cleansing of the people from sin. God was going to place over Israel a King from the line of David, and under this King, God's people would turn from their idolatry, be saved from their apostasies, and experience spiritual cleansing like never before. Furthermore, this King would lead them to obey the word of the Lord.

Christ as King: To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would _____ His people and restore all of _____. The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the _____.

The chapter concludes with God proclaiming a permanent covenant with His people. Five times in verses 25-28 we find the same Hebrew word translated "forever" or "permanent." God promised to restore the people to their land forever, to construct a sanctuary that would last forever, and to dwell among the people permanently. No longer would sin separate and exile; rather, God's people would be sanctified, cleansed, and pure, forever at peace with God. This is the promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What should it mean for us that we worship a God who is never changing and who always keeps His promises?

My Mission

Because we have been given life in Christ, we are to share the hope of the gospel with others and invite them to become part of God's one, unified family in Christ.

- **What steps of faith will you take in light of God's character and actions on display in this passage and in the gospel of Jesus?**
- **How can your group help those experiencing a spiritually dry season move toward greater spiritual health?**

- **With whom will you share the gospel of King Jesus, who frees from sin and gives eternal life to those who believe?**

Voices from Church History

“What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus; What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh! Precious is the flow That makes me white as snow; No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” 3
–Robert Lowry (1826-1899)

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Ezekiel 36:1-15

Have you ever had a really painful falling out with a friend? It may be that things ended so poorly that you were certain the relationship was beyond any hope of reconciliation. Imagine that in time you came to realize that the fallout was caused entirely by your own sin. Recognizing your fault in the situation, how shocked would you be if the other person came to you seeking to repair the relationship? Chances are you would be astonished by the person’s demonstration of forgiveness.

God’s capacity to forgive is astonishing as we read of His plan in Ezekiel 36 to restore Israel from Babylon and all the nations to the promised land. God’s relationship with His people lay in ruin because of their rebellion, yet He extended His hand of mercy even though they were undeserving. Part of the plan to restore Israel involved the fruitfulness of the land.

Verses 8-15 lay out four promises the Lord makes to Israel. First, the land will again be fruitful (vv. 8-9). Second, the people will return and multiply in the land (vv. 10-11). Third, their return to the land will be permanent (vv. 12-14). Fourth, God’s people will never again be insulted by foreign nations (v. 15).⁵ In short, God poured out His merciful love on a people who did not deserve it.

How does the gospel influence your outlook and actions regarding fractured relationships?

Voices from Church History

“The Bible reveals a God who, long before it even occurs to man to turn to him, while man is still lost in darkness and sunk in sin, takes the initiative, rises from his throne, lays aside his glory, and stoops to seek until he finds him.” 4
–John Stott (1921-2011)

Day 2: Read Ezekiel 36:16-38

God wants us to have a “heart of flesh” that is pliable and responsive to Him. Much like a lump of clay in a potter’s hand, a tender heart is more easily shaped by God’s character and desires. The problem, if you have not noticed, is that our hearts are inherently rigid. To remove this rigidity, we read in the New Testament that God sent His Holy Spirit to indwell each believer in order to soften and sensitize hearts to His leading.

Ezekiel prophesied of the day when the Spirit would indwell the heart of every believer: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.” (vv. 26-27). When we submit to the Lord, He imparts great wisdom to our soft hearts. We are then more ready to deal with sin in our lives and return to a place of obedience and blessing.

What are warning signs that your heart’s spiritual health is not what it ought to be?

Day 3: Read Ezekiel 37:1-14

A favorite cartoon growing up was Looney Tunes’ Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote. I loved watching Road Runner foil Wile E. Coyote’s diabolical plans again and again, but eventually I found myself rooting for the coyote. After so many misadventures and catastrophes, how could you not? Plus, what’s more annoying than an arrogant, uncatchable nemesis? The fix was in against Wile E. Coyote because no matter how hard he tried, it was never within his power to win.

In reading the prophecy of the valley of dry bones, we are reminded that it was never within Israel’s power to save themselves. No matter how hard they might try, their devotion to the Old Testament law could never save them from their sin. Their spiritual restoration lay solely in the power of God. One way we see God’s active role in saving Israel is by reading verses 1-14

and underlining every time God uses the pronoun “I” in describing His role in bringing Israel back to life. Today we are still entirely dependent on the Spirit of God to stir our affections and to breathe life into our dry bones.

Why is it encouraging to know that we worship a God who offers mercy to people who are undeserving and may not even ask for it?

Day 4: Read Ezekiel 37:15-22

Satan hates God, and consequently, Satan hates the people of God—the church. Satan does all he can to stir up disunity among God’s people, going to great lengths to create division and strife (1 Pet. 5:8). On the other hand, God loves when unity exists among His children. Ezekiel 37:17 paints a visual picture of God’s desire to restore unity between Judah and Israel. Illustrating this desire, God told Ezekiel to join together the ends of two sticks in order to create one unified stick.

The point is we worship a God who values unity, so we should as well. So how does valuing unity manifest itself in our daily lives? Valuing unity means we pray for unity. It means we judge ourselves before we judge others. It means we count the cost of disunity and seek reconciliation when we can. It also means pursuing humility, which acts as an antidote to selfishness.

How can you seek reconciliation and ensure unity with others in the body of Christ, the church?

Day 5: Read Ezekiel 37:23-28

This passage tells us of God’s plan to restore a united Israel to the promised land. The Lord committed not only to bring them back home but also to set over them one king who would act as a servant-leader—“My servant David” (v. 24). God’s plan to appoint a servant king over Israel was ironic in light of the historical events surrounding the original schism between Israel and Judah. The split of the kingdoms was essentially the result of King Rehoboam’s unwillingness to serve the people of God as his elder counselors advised.

Ezekiel’s prophecy, of course, pointed to the messianic King—Jesus Christ. Jesus embodied for us what servant leadership looks like. Examining Jesus’ life, we see that servant leaders seek the glory of God (Mark 10:42; John 7:18) while not being preoccupied with their own (Mark 10:43-45). They forgo their own rights for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:15-19) and understand the joy in serving others (Mark 9:35). Jesus’ life was marked by service and our lives should be as well.

How are you embodying servant-leadership in your life for the sake of the gospel?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God gives life to a people who are dead (Ezek. 37:1-6).
- God restores a people who are scattered and divided (Ezek. 37:16-17,20-22).
- God dwells with a people who are in rebellion (Ezek. 37:23-28).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

How can your group use God’s Word to bring hope to the hopeless in your community?

What are ways to cultivate unity within your church for the sake of your gospel witness to the world?

References

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5. Lamar Eugene Cooper Sr., *Ezekiel*, vol. 17 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1994), 312.