

# BELPRES CHURCH

## Sermon Title: Spirits Power Scott Dudley

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### Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-10

<sup>1</sup> The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know." <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. <sup>6</sup> I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'" <sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. <sup>8</sup> I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" <sup>10</sup> So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

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### Transcript:

Well, if you're here, go ahead and have a seat. Hello? Those of you joining us online, thank you for joining us for worship. Great to see all of you here as well. I want to start with my favorite quote from Pastor Alexis. He may have even said it before I got in the room. When he's talking about the holy spirit, how the holy spirit empowers us, guides us, brings dead things back to life, you will often hear him say the holy spirit, he is a good guy. I just love that quote. The holy spirit, he is a good guy. You say that don't you? Yes, you do. The holy spirit, he is a good guy. We're doing a sermon series called Remake on Ezekiel, Chapter 37. We're just going to hang out for a couple of weeks in this one passage because it's about hope and how God breathes life into dead dry things.

In a vision, God shows Ezekiel a valley of dry bones, and then God joins the bones together, and then tendons and muscles and skin appear on them, but they're not

alive until God breathes his spirit into them. The point is that dead things come to life only by the power of the holy spirit. In the original Hebrew, the word for spirit is the same word for breath, same word for wind, all the same word, ruach. Sounds a little bit like you're choking, right, ruach, and it can be translated breath of life or the force that makes everything live. That word, ruach, spirit, breath, wind, all the same thing, that word shows up nine times in just 10 verses. This is a passage that is all about the holy spirit and how the holy spirit makes dead things come alive.

In this text, God says, I will put my spirit in you and you will live. In other words, without the holy spirit there is no real life. Without the holy spirit there is no real life. We cannot be remade. We cannot be revived. The dead marriage, the relationship problem, the financial problem, the school, the career problem, a sense of boredom and restlessness in life, none of that will come to life without the power of the holy spirit, and unless God breathes his spirit into those things. Now, sometimes we Presbyterians are a little nervous to talk about the holy spirit. It's a little supernatural. It's a little emotional. Someone might feel an emotion during worship, maybe raise their hand, and we'd have to call a meeting of the elders to deal with the crisis. Although I have noted, and I've said this before, I have noted, you all came back from COVID a little more animated. You know what I mean? It's hard not to be animated with this band. Right? I mean, this is awesome.

Last week over there in the sanctuary, I think I heard, the choir was going hmm hmm, and amen, and I think I even heard a preacher pastor. I mean, it's awesome. The holy spirit, who is he? The holy spirit is God himself living inside of us. The holy spirit does a lot of things. Leads us to faith. Gives us insight. Helps us make decisions. Comforts us. Teaches us. Shows us our sin and assures us of God's love and forgiveness. He directs our steps. He gives us the right word at just the right time. Empowers us. Makes us brave. Brings dead things back to life and so much more. He helps us understand scripture. He helps us understand sermons and on and on and on. The holy spirit, he is a good guy.

If you have put your faith in Jesus, his holy spirit lives inside of you. You don't need a special prayer or anything like that, but we do need to ask the holy spirit to fill us over and over again. In the Bible, when it talks about people being filled with the holy spirit, the verb form that is used there usually means is a repetitive action, over and over, be filled over and over again. We need to learn how to rely on the power of the spirit, because I think a lot of us Christians, a lot of us are like a person who's inherited a huge amount of money and invests it. Then years later has financial troubles and is living in poverty because they forgotten how much money they have. We have so much power inside of us, but we don't draw on it. Let's walk through this passage to talk about how the holy spirit remakes us, and brings marriages back to life, and finances back to life, and hope back to life, and courage back to life, and all of that. Makes us more fully alive with meaning, purpose, and joy, and all of that.

Now the bones in this vision, they represent the Israelites who have been conquered by the Babylonians. Jerusalem has been burned to the ground and they've been taken into exile in Babylon. Ezekiel says, God led me back and forth among the bones. God doesn't just show him the bones. He immerses Ezekiel in an experience of the bones. He says, I saw a great many bones, bones that were very dry. The text emphasizes how dry they are. These aren't skeletons. They'd been there so long they'd become disjointed and the bones are all in different places. They'd been bleached dry by the sun because they'd been dead for so long. Not only are they merely dead, they're really most sincerely dead to quote the munchkins from Wizard of Oz because it's always fun to quote munchkins.

What has been dead in your life so long you've lost hope? What's been dead in your life so long you've lost hope. The first step in experiencing the power of the holy spirit is you have to confront the dead things in your life, and here's why. Because to experience the holy spirit, we have to know our need for him. This is where we get tripped up. I think especially American Christians, one of the reasons I think American Christians don't often experience the power of the holy spirit as much as we could is because relative to other Christians in the world, we have it pretty good here. That trains us to rely on ourselves and our own skills and all of that. We try to fix the marriage, try to fix the relationship, try to fix the career problem with our own understanding rather than leaning on the holy spirit.

It's only when we're confronted with something so big that we know that we can't handle it, that we say, holy spirit, this is above my pay grade. You have to do this. I can't. Now that does not mean that unless your life is falling apart, you can't experience the holy spirit because even if things are going awesome, the holy spirit can make them more awesome, more hope, more joy, more purpose, more meaning than what we can generate on our own. In America, we tend to think, well, what I really need, I need a good job. I need good money. I need the right relationships. Churches in America, we sometimes fall into this I'm sad to say. We think, well, what we need is a great marketing campaign or good programs for music or children. All of that's fine, but here's the problem. The more we rely on ourselves, the more we marginalize the holy spirit and end up only with the little that we can accomplish on our own rather than the much more that the holy spirit can do.

This is why those of us who are American born Christians need new hope revival. We need New Hope Revival very badly because in that faith tradition and from their life experiences, often people in New Hope Revival, Chinese covenant, tend to rely more on the power of the holy spirit and they can show us Americans how we can do that. In the text Ezekiel says the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them. Just picture this, okay? This picture that's happening, this is a horror movie. Right? Skin and tendons, or as Alexis said last week, ick, gross. But there was no breath in them. They had a body, muscle, skin, all of that, but no life. Basically they're zombies. They had the appearance of life, the semblance of life, but not the fullness of life.

I think often it's the same with me. Maybe it's the same with you. Our culture offers us all kinds of things that give us the semblance of life, the appearance of life. The accolades, the success, the material, things that we've got, all of those things can give us temporary happiness, but that's different than lasting joy. As you've heard me say before, happiness is based on your happenings, and if your happenings aren't happening to happen the way you want them to happen, then you're not happy. Joy, deep-seated joy is independent of any kind of circumstances. I think we often go out into the world with just tendons and bones and think we're done. Think it's good enough. Marriage is okay. Relationship is okay. Career's okay. Everything's okay. But like the bones in this story, we're not fully alive until we plug into the power of the holy spirit. We end up being people who the Bible describes as having a form of godliness, but denying its power.

I find this one of those ouch verses, like kind of convicting. It's religiosity. We go to church. We go through the motions, but no real relationship with Jesus. No power of the holy spirit. An appearance of godliness, a form of godliness denying its power. Does that describe you? Does that describe me? Does that describe this church? That's a good question. Then God tells Ezekiel, prophesy to the breath, wind, spirit, all the same word in Hebrew. I prophesied and breath entered them. They came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast army. This echoes Genesis where God makes Adam and Eve. It 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.

First, God made the body. Right? Just like Ezekiel here, he forms the body, and then God breathed his spirit and Adam became alive. It's very similar to what Jesus does with his disciples after his resurrection. It says he breathed on them and said, receive the holy spirit, which is a great verse. I know that in COVID it's also a weird verse. I just have to admit that. Right? Like gross dude, no. The point here is it's a supernatural thing, and without it, all we have is the appearance of life, but not the fullness of life. Another analogy. I think a lot of us, sometimes I fall into this, maybe you do too, a lot of us are like the appliances in our house. The TV, the refrigerator, the dishwasher, whatever it is, the toaster, they're all built correctly, but unless they are plugged into the electricity, they don't work. There's no power. A lot of us are assembled correctly, but we don't have the electricity, the power moving through us.

One time when my family and I were in Hawaii, my son said, man, I wished I lived in Hawaii. It's just amazing here. Then my daughter said, yeah, but then you have to have the spirit of aloha all the time. That's hard for you, Jackson. Man, my kids, they make such great sermon illustrations. Now they're all gone to college and moved away and left us alone. But I'll get over it. It is hard to pretend to have the spirit of aloha all the time. In order for it to be genuine, it has to be a supernatural feeling. Here's the first part of your homework for this week. Ask Jesus to show you what he wants to revive because sometimes we're trying to revive something that should stay

dead. Right? That's a whole another sermon, but you can think about that. What does he want to revive? Then ask him to fill you with his holy spirit and do his revival work.

There are so many ways that the holy spirit gives us life, and I'm just going to briefly mention some. We'll talk more in the weeks ahead, but the first way the holy spirit brings life is he helps us obey God's commands, and God's commands bring life when we do them. Relationships are better. Marriage is better. Everything's better when we do it God's way. Our emotional life is better when we avoid the addictions of pornography or workaholicism or shopping or those sorts of things. We're free from bitterness when we practice forgiveness. Life is better when we follow God's commands. Right before the passage we read, Ezekiel says to the Israelites or God says to the Israelites, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees, and be careful to keep my laws.

What that means is that the holy spirit changes our motives for obeying. It goes from I better obey God or else to I want to obey God because, because the holy spirit has helped me feel his love. If God loves me, that must mean he wants the best for me. If he wants the best for me, that must mean his commands are what's going to be good for me, and that even if it's hard, forgive people. Keep sex inside marriage. Give sacrificially. Even if it's hard, I trust the command brings life because God loves me and wants the best for me, and so I obey not out of legalism, but out of trust because I want thrive. The holy spirit helps us obey God's command. Second, holy spirit brings life by guiding us in life. He guides us. As we do the things he guides us to do, it brings life.

Over the years, I have told you 4,022 stories, more or less, about people who've got some nudge, got some thought that wasn't their thought, and they did it. They followed the nudge and amazing cool things happened. It led to something that was life-giving, which brings me to the third way that the holy spirit gives us life and that is he gives us joy. One of the ways I know I'm not fully alive when I'm not, or one of the ways you can know that you're not fully alive is you're always waiting for the next thing to make you happy, the next vacation, the next promotion, the next purchase, whatever it is, to deal with the restlessness inside of you. The more we experience the holy spirit, the more joy we have, and we're not looking for the party out here because we got the party in here because the holy spirit's giving us joy.

Then the last way the holy spirit brings life, he empowers us to heal the world. At the end of this story, that dry bones were revived. Then it said they stood up a vast army. Armies have a purpose. These bones aren't just revived for the fun of it. They're revived for a purpose. Whatever God revives in your life is not just for you, it's for a purpose that is bigger than you. It's meant to make a difference in the world. The holy spirit equips us to do that because that gives us more joy, more meaning, more purpose, a sense that my life matters. The holy spirit equips us by giving us spiritual gifts to help us make a difference in the world. The holy spirit equips us by encouraging us when we're discouraged with the thought that he puts in our head or that text that comes at just

the right time from just the right person. The holy spirit helps us heal the world by nudging us to do things that are outside of our comfort zone, and this is a big one, nudging us to do things that don't always make sense to us.

Sometimes the holy spirit doesn't make sense. God tells Ezekiel to preach to the dry bones. That makes no sense at all. What good is that going to do? In another place, God tells Ezekiel to lay on his side for a year in the public square in nothing but his underwear while staring at a model of Jerusalem to make a preaching point. By the way, I'm going to do that next week, so you might want to be here for that because it's going to be amazing. Ezekiel is three gallons of crazy in a two gallon bucket because revival is not something we do, it's what the holy spirit does. It's not always going to fit our understanding, and sometimes it's not going to make sense, but if we want to experience God, we got to do that thing.

Here is the second part of your homework. Do something that doesn't make sense. Some of you are like, finally, something I can do. I do that every day. Obviously, I mean because the holy spirit nudged you to do it. How do you know if it's the holy spirit? Well, does it align with scripture? The spirit of God will never contradict the word of God. Does it align with scripture? Is it not the kind of thing you would normally think? You can ask other people to help you discern. What this all comes down to, the bottom line for all of this, what this all comes down to is in order to experience the power of the holy spirit, we have to let go of control. Ooh, that's hard. We are control freaks. I am a control freak, but here's the thing. You don't experience the power of the spirit, unless you let go of control.

It's not until you follow that nudge to do that thing that doesn't make sense that you experience the power of the holy spirit. In worship, when people are in worship, it's when they stop worrying about what do people think about me and just start worshipping that they experienced the power of the holy spirit. We got to let go of control. There's a story that appeared in the local news 17 years ago, back in 2004, about a 17-year-old named Laura Hatch who left a party one night and then went missing for eight days. Her car had crashed and tumbled down a ravine that had a lot of vegetation. The police started looking. Her church, the church in Redmond that they went to, they formed a search party. They didn't find anything. Laura's family began to assume the worst as day went on to day.

The mom said we had given her up for dead in our hearts. Dry bones, right? Helpless, hopeless. They said, all we could do is pray. All we could do is pray. Turned out that was more than enough with plenty of leftover. One night, a woman named Shaw Nor who was the mother of one of Laura's friends, had a dream that reoccurred all night of her being in a wooded area. She kept hearing the message, keep going, keep going. The next morning, Shaw and her daughter, they just started driving around randomly. They just kept praying, speak to us, speak to us, speak to us. Then Shaw got this nudge, it didn't make any sense, to just randomly stop in this random place. She just stopped in this random place, climbed down the bank, and she was able to see Laura's

crumpled up car barely through the vegetation. Laura was still alive. Laura was conscious. In fact, she even had a bit of a sense of humor. She said, I think I missed my curfew.

Paramedics took her to Harbor View where she was treated for severe dehydration, and a blood clot in her brain, and broken ribs, and broken legs. Well, meanwhile, while this is going on, there was a prayer vigil where a hundred people had showed up to pray all night for Laura to be found. When they found out that she had been, it just erupted into all kinds of celebration. The doctor said it was a miracle. Eight days. Dehydration should have killed her. If the blood clot in her brain had grown at all, it would have killed her, but the reason the blood clot didn't grow, the doctor said, is probably because she was dehydrated. Even that turned out to be a blessing.

Dead bones brought back to life because everyone was crystal clear. They needed the holy spirit. No illusion. There's a vast army of friends and family praying, relying on the spirit for the sake of something bigger than themselves, to find Laura, yes, but also to create this amazing fate story. The spirit guided Shaw Nor and her daughter step-by-step in ways that didn't make sense, but they let go of control, relied on the spirit, not on their own intelligence, and the spirit accomplished what they could never do on their own, and dry bones were brought back to life. I know some of you might be thinking, yeah, but that doesn't always happen. What about when the miracle doesn't? I know that's a great question. We've talked about that in other sermons. God always still does something, brings good out of it in some way, but always, always, always the holy spirit does more than we could ever ask or even imagine according to the power that has at work within us.

What that means is we dare to believe. Because of the holy spirit, we dare to believe. Because of the holy spirit, we dare to believe that we can be a vast army that brings healing to our families, and our culture, and our church, and our nation, in our workplaces, in our schools. We dare to believe that the holy spirit unites what the world divides, that Africans, and Americans, and Chinese can worship together in unity in one church, which is why starting today, New Hope and modern worship will combine permanently at 11 o'clock. We dare to believe that the holy spirit can end a genocide in Congo, and so we step out in faith, even when it doesn't always make sense. We dare to believe that the holy spirit can heal the divisions in our family and church, and in our country. We dare to believe that students returning to in-person school with all the stresses of COVID plus all the normal pressures to achieve and succeed, that the holy spirit can give them hope, and peace, and comfort, and help them be who God made them to be, not who society says they should be.

We dare to believe that dead marriages can be brought back to life because it's happened here in this church over and over. We dare to believe these things because the holy spirit is none other than the spirit of God himself moving in us. The holy spirit? The holy spirit, he is a good guy. Amen. Holy spirit, move in this church. Move in our hearts. Make us spirit-filled, spirit-led people. Make us a spirit-filled, spirit-led church. Do

in, through, and around us what only you can do. When the world sees it, they're going to know that Jesus is Lord, and we pray this in his name. Amen.

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**Discussion Questions:**

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Read Ezekiel 37:1-10 and answer the below questions with your friends, family or All In small group.

**Ice Breaker Question:**

- What is something that sparks your curiosity and want to learn more about?

**Opening Questions:**

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions** – Together read Ezekiel 37:1-10 and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions** – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following

- Have you ever felt the presence of the Holy Spirit? What did he say/do/make you feel?
- Where could you use the power of the Holy Spirit to remake/revive something in your life?

**Closing Question and Application:**

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.