

## “Dry Bones Can Live Again”

Dem bones, dem bones, dem a dry bones  
Dem bones, dem bones, dem a dry bones  
Dem bones, dem bones, dem a dry bones  
Now hear the word of the Lord.

Well, your toe bone connected to your foot bone  
Your foot bone connected to your heel bone  
Your heel bone connected to your ankle bone  
Your ankle bone connected to your leg bone  
Now hear the word of the Lord.

Your leg bone connected to your knee bone  
Your knee bone connected to your thigh bone  
Your thigh bone connected to your hip bone  
Your hip bone connected to your back bone  
I hear the word of the Lord!

Ever hear that song before? It's an old spiritual song. It's based on Ezekiel 37 in the Old Testament. The prophet Ezekiel is prophesying in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The southern kingdom of Judah – all that's left of the Jewish nation - has been overrun and conquered by the Babylonians. Many citizens of Judah have been taken into exile in Babylon. Ezekiel understands this as God's judgment on His people for their sins and rebellion against God. The nation is in a state of collapse and ruin. The nation is *dead*.

God gives Ezekiel this vision of a valley, filled with “dry bones”. Actually, he could have been looking at the actual bones of dead warriors still lying on the battlefield. But God is about to do something stupendous! These bones, representing God's people, are going to come to life again! God's people will be revived, and the nation of Judah will be restored and renewed!

“Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy 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, ‘Prophesy 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’” (Ezekiel 37:4-11a).

There would be revival for God's people: new life, new hope, new joy! *God wasn't done with them yet!*

Robert Coleman, a professor at Asbury Seminary in Kentucky wrote a book about revival, and based the title on imagery from the Book of Ezekiel. The title of the book was *Dry Bones Can Live Again*.

The word “revival”, when it’s related to the church and religion, is a word often looked down upon, viewed in a negative, skeptical way. It’s an old-fashioned word. For some, it brings up images of shouting preachers, preaching hell and damnation, or holy roller worship services, where people shout amen, and those wanting to be saved finally go to the altar after singing 43 verses of “Just As I Am”!

But genuine revival is a beautiful thing! It means to come to life again. To be renewed and restored with new vigor and energy and activity. It’s like going to bed dead tired, getting a decent night’s sleep, and waking up refreshed and energized. It’s having a cold drink or taking a dip in a pool on a sweltering hot day. Nature provides examples of revival: when dry, parched ground and faded grass becomes lush green after a rain, or when trees and plants, dormant through the cold winter months, come to life in spring with colorful blossoms and new leaves.

Spiritual revival is sometimes sorely needed. Just like in the Bible, God’s people throughout history, and surely today, can sometimes be spiritually dormant or dead. The psalmist said, “Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?” (Psalm 85:6).

Sin takes its toll on our lives. We can drift from God. We can lose the joy in our faith. Our love for God and others can grow cold. Sometimes we need a revival. We need the dry bones to come back to life.

*This is true of us as an individual, in our own personal walk with God.* Have you ever had a spiritual revival in your life? There are different kinds of experiences that can offer a chance for spiritual renewal: a “day apart”, a weekend retreat, a week of Bible camp at Sandy Cove. Back in the 1970’s and 1980’s there were Lay Witness Missions, where Christians from other churches came to your church for a weekend to share their testimonies, and lead small group experiences. Many in our churches were spiritually renewed through these Lay Witness Missions.

Churches used to have revival services. Maybe they held a week of services. Maybe they hired an evangelist to come in. There would be evangelistic messages. Not much of that anymore. Revival services were sometimes looked down upon. But they meant a lot to me. We had them in the church I went to as a youth. I had them in some of the churches I served early on. Our next-door neighbor got converted at one of those services. One night one of the *Sunday School teachers* I had as a youth went forward to the altar and gave his life to Christ! I later saw him and said I was glad he did that, and he replied, “It’s about time!” It was at the altar at one of those services where I answered the call to a fulltime church-related vocation.

*There are other ways God works in our lives to renew and revive us.* We might be renewed by hearing a sermon, reading a book, spending time in prayer. Someone who’s drifted from God might get a wakeup call by being in a serious accident, or being diagnosed with a serious illness

– and come back to God.

I remember a lady in one of the churches I served. She started to come to Sunday School, and church. One day she told how, as a teenager, she knew a personal relationship with God through Jesus. But then, as she grew up, she got away from that (which often happens). But now she was back in church. And she said, “I feel it again! It’s coming back!” That brings joy to a pastor’s heart!

*There are many ways God brings revival and new life to people. It’s not important how it happens – just that it happens!*

Do you need a spiritual revival in your life? That the dry bones can come together and live again? This can happen when we seek the Lord with all our heart, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to renew us. Have the attitude Jacob had when he wrestled with an angel of God: “I will not let you go unless you bless me” (Genesis 32:26).

*But, churches need revived too!* The church in the United States needs a big revival! Need I remind you of the state of the church today in our culture? Our culture has been becoming more and more secular. The church, and organized religion, aren’t even on the radar of more and more people’s lives. In one recent survey, asking people why they didn’t go to church, the answer that got the highest response was, they didn’t feel the church was necessary.

Denominations are dying. All of the major denominations have been in decline for a number of years. There are a lot of empty pews. And those in the pews are, by and large, older adults. I saw a distribution chart that shows the age groupings of people in the various denominations. United Methodists are at the top when it comes to having mostly elderly people in their churches. Only 12% of people in United Methodist churches are under 36 years of age. 70% are 55 and older. A retired pastor I know in Florida goes around to United Methodist Churches and talks about Lay Servant Ministries in our denomination. He often posts photos on Facebook of the churches where he speaks. A lot of the photos of congregations show sparse attendance, empty pews, and mostly older folk.

Now not all is bad. Non-denominational churches generally are doing better. The Church in some countries is thriving and growing. Also, the number of “nones” in the U.S. (those claiming no religious affiliation), which has been the fastest growing group, is now *decreasing*, according to a recent study. Praise the Lord for that!

But wouldn’t you agree with me in saying that we need a revival in our churches? Can the dry bones live again?

*What about this church – Community United Methodist Church!* Can these dry bones live again? Unfortunately, over the last 20-25 years we have been declining in membership and worship attendance. The decline has slowed during my almost 9 years here, but it’s still a decline. Reality, and common sense, tells us that if we continue to decline we will no longer be able to

survive as a congregation. We won't be able to support a pastor, or pay the bills, or maintain the building. Can these dry bones live?

We are taking a major step to address this situation. We are bringing another pastor onto our staff – Peter Wolfgang. Peter will serve as our Pastor of Outreach. This is an enormous step of faith, to add an additional salary of a ¾ time pastor.

But we are hoping and praying that if we all pitch in and work together...if we pray and pray and pray for the Holy Spirit to bring new life and growth to our congregation....that God will bring about a renewal and a revival that will honor His name.

Yes, dry bones can live again!

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.*  
*Community United Methodist Church*  
*June 29, 2025*

