



WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY:

**Words of Comfort and Hope
for Those Who Are Grieving**

By Bass Mitchell

Book Three

The Plant



"Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then God said to me, "Prophecy to these bones..." (Ezekiel 37:3-4a - NRSV).

It was the most lovely plant I had ever seen. I just knew I would have to buy it for my wife, who loves plants. Only problem is that we get quite busy in my household (bet it's the same for you) and the plant was placed in the living room and promptly forgotten. We just noticed it the other day - withered, many of its leaves dry and drooping, others had fallen off. The soil was dust. It was dead. I thought I would just throw it out - no hope for that plant that had once been so beautiful and alive. But my wife insisted on watering it. I had my doubts. But you know what, slowly I saw those leaves begin to lengthen and uncurl, taking on that brilliant green color of life. And before long what I thought was dead had been brought back to life.

It seems to me that this is the hope, the message Ezekiel is being given. What seems lifeless, hopeless to us as a valley of dry bones can, by the life-giving Spirit of God, be redeemed, resurrected!

I have seen this so many times. You, too, if you stop and think about it.

There was a lovely forest not far from where I grew up. One day much of it went up in flames. This was when I was a child. I recently went back home and it had almost fully recovered. God has placed a renewing power even in nature.

I once was aware of a certain situation in a church. It was pretty bad. I was ready to dig the grave and have the funeral service for that church. But somehow those old bones started to stir and rattle. New life began to flow into us. I still do not know how it happened. All I know is I sat and watched in awe as a valley of dry bones came alive again.

I need to be reminded of this. I face situations in my own life and you do, too, that seem as hopeless as bringing life to dry bones - relationships so torn and broken you wonder if they can ever be healed; inner demons of guilt, shame, inadequacy that cripple and torment us at will; physical pain that seems unbearable; illness and disease

that rob and maim; death that takes those we love away from us. Can these bones live? Can there be life again in the mist of such pain, brokenness, and death?

Yes! By the living God, yes! Somehow, I know not, I have seen God's power and love flow into these dry bones like water to that plant, giving life where there was not life, hope where there was no hope, laughter where there was only sorrow, peace when there was only storm.

Those bones can live!

I love the story of the raising of Lazarus. He had been dead for three days. Surely there was no hope at all for him. But then Jesus came and those dead bones came to life again with the words from the lips of the Son of God!

I know not all bones can live in the way we want. Not all plants can be brought back to life. Some die. Not all situations can be redeemed in the way we wish or would hope for. But there is grace and healing even in these. I have seen persons in such a physical state that death came to them not as an enemy but a friend. But I believe they were given a new life in a way I cannot comprehend. And I have seen persons who



came through traumatic experiences and broken, unmendable relationships, but still find somehow the strength, the love to keep on going, one day at a time, to discover small doses of healing and hope each day. Healing does not come with the snap of a finger, in an instant. God's healing takes time...like a little water poured daily into the soil of a plant...

God of life, God of power and light, God over valleys of dry bones, move over us...stir us...mend us...heal us...bring new life into us. Flow, water of life, Living water, into the dry and arid places of our soul. And all those parts of our lives that seem hopeless and lifeless we leave in your care, your wisdom, and in your own good timing. And let us, like your prophet of old, stand with those who suffer so, who are so crushed and broken that life seems over, and let us speak words of hope and life. Help us take notice of those thirsting for healing and wholeness around us, and let us be water poured out for them. Amen.

"I Didn't Know You, Did I?"

"...Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it...And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul..."--(1 Samuel 31:4; 2 Samuel 1:17).

I will never forget the day when our senior minister called the staff together and in a hushed, somber voice told us, "James is dead."

James was my friend. He had served as associate pastor on our church staff. He left our church to assume his first charge as senior minister. One cold afternoon in November of that same year, his fiancé found him in the basement of the parsonage. He had taken his life.

His death took all of us by surprise. We were stunned. Numbed. Angry. But most of all profoundly sad.

I learned that I never really knew James. Yes, I worked closely with him. We would spend hours talking together. He and his fiancé came over to eat with us on several occasions. But I never really knew him. As I looked back on our conversations, I realized that they were so superficial and shallow. We never really opened up and poured out our souls to one another, took off the masks and revealed who we were.

After the death of James, I wanted to go around to everybody in our church, to my family and friends, grab them by the shoulders and shake them until they told me everything that had ever bothered them, even if they had to make up something. You see, I learned that I didn't really know them either.

One of the saddest things I have ever heard was said by a young man after the funeral of his father. He said, "I never knew my father. He never really knew me."

It was not meant to be this way. It does not have to be this way.

I was in a church school class. I began the session by asking them to go around and share with the whole group something about them that few people knew. I have

often done this in other groups. I expected them to share things that put them in a good light, you know, things that would flatter them. This is how it went until it was the turn of a young lady. She said, "Well, I guess most people do not know that I am a recovering



alcoholic." You could have heard a pin drop. But that kind of honesty made a tremendous impact on this class over the next few weeks and months, drawing us closer together. We started to truly get to know one another. This was the result of one young woman

bravely sharing who she was, freeing the rest of us to do the same.

The young man said, "I never knew my father. My father never really knew me." It's too late for them now.

I never really knew James. And it's too late this side of heaven.

But it's not too late for us. There's still time to get to really know one another.

I took my young daughter to the funeral of James so she could say goodbye, for he had been like an uncle to her. In her childlike way she told him goodbye and that she hoped he would feel better. As we walked out that night I found myself hoping and praying the same thing.

"Loving Lord, you know all we feel, all we think, all we can ever experience. You are always there for us. Help us to cast all our cares upon you, for we know you care for us. And in our brokenness may we truly know the power of your grace. You surround us with persons who long to listen to and care for us. Help us to be willing to share our burdens with them. And help us to keep on living in faith and love, even in the midst of profound sadness and confusion. Amen."