

“Bone Dry?”

*The water I give you will become a well of water springing up for eternal life (John 4:14).
Ezekiel 37:1-6; John 4:9-15*¹

Those who study such things tell us that the human body is approximately 65% water by weight. Our bodies are constantly using and losing water, and if we fail to replenish that water, all sorts of things begin to go haywire. According to the information I can find online, on a normal day I should drink about a gallon of water in order to stay properly hydrated.

Other than a few experiences at sea when the ship’s boilers needed water more desperately than the crew did, I don’t think I’ve ever experienced a severe lack of the water needed to sustain life. And I frequently experience bursts of gratitude when I open a faucet and out comes a virtually endless supply of water that is completely safe to drink. This is one of the many miracles that every one of us experiences every single day.

I’ve been thinking about water quite a bit lately, since one of the many things doctors tell us to remember when visiting places in the developing world is that we’re not supposed to drink the water—not at all—not for drinking, not for brushing teeth, not for anything. The reason for this is that water purification in much of the world leaves much to be desired—if it exists at all—and there is an impressive list of diseases that can be acquired by drinking water that isn’t adequately purified.

This is, of course, the main reason our congregation has given nearly \$30,000 over the last few years to provide clean water for a number of villages in Ghana. And it’s the reason why I’m taking a water purification device with me that promises to remove 99.9999% of anything and everything harmful in the water I will drink.

Both of my parents grew up on farms that got their water from deep wells. I’ve been to some of those wells, and I’ve drunk water from them. Along that line, I’m told that once upon a time there was an old well that stood outside the front door of a family farmhouse in New Hampshire, just as similar wells stood outside the front doors of my parents’ homes in North Carolina and Kentucky. The water from this well was remarkably pure and cold, and no matter how hot the summer or how severe the drought, the well was always a source of refreshment, pleasure, and life.

The faithful old well served the family for years and years, until eventually the farmhouse was modernized. The REA brought electricity, and indoor plumbing then brought hot and cold running water. The old well was no longer needed, so it was sealed up for possible use in the future.

Many years later, one of the Old Timers in that family got a hankering for the cold, pure water of that old familiar well, so he unsealed the well and lowered a bucket for a nostalgic taste of the delightful refreshment he remembered from his youth. The Old Timer was shocked to discover that the well that once had survived the severest droughts was now bone dry! Perplexed, he began to ask some of the Older Old Timers what might have happened to his well.

He learned that wells in that area were fed by hundreds of tiny underground rivulets which seep a steady flow of water. As long as the water is drawn out of the well, new water will flow in through the rivulets, keeping them open for more to flow. But when the water stops

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on February 4, 2018.

flowing, the rivulets clog with mud and close up. The well dried up not because it was used too much, but because it was used too little.² Hold that thought. . . .

The day had begun in a fairly typical fashion. The prophet Ezekiel was going about his usual business when the day took a most unusual turn. Here's how he described what happened:

*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."

⁷ So I prophesied as I had been commanded. While I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ As I looked, tendons appeared on them, flesh grew, and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. ⁹ He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man. Say to it: This is what the Lord GOD says: Breath, come from the four winds and breathe into these slain so that they may live!?" ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me; the breath entered them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, a vast army (Ezekiel 37:1-10).

In this vision, Ezekiel found himself transported to a valley filled with human bones that had been bleached by the sun. It was as though this had been an awful field of battle where thousands had been killed and left unburied. The immediate context for the vision was the return of the nation of Israel from the Babylonian Exile—that was the resurrection specifically foretold in this most unusual vision.

This vision was the inspiration for our African-American spiritual for this week: "Them bones, them bones, them dry bones." There are many directions one might go in interpreting this text, but this morning **I want to focus on Ezekiel's perception that the bones in this valley were "very dry."** Sometimes our spiritual lives become rather like those dry bones. Our spiritual lives become ho-hum, perfunctory, essentially empty, just going-through-the-motions.

Sometimes our situation may actually be closer to "dehydration" than to "bone dry," but from time to time I expect that most of us have known seasons in which our walk with God has left a lot to be desired. Sometimes we even use language such as "dry" or "limp" or "empty" or "withered" to describe how we feel spiritually; and Jesus used the language of "living water" to tell us what we might do about being "dried up."

That's what was going on in this morning's text from John 4. Jesus was resting at Jacob's ancient well while His disciples went into the village of Sychar to get lunch at McDonald's—I'm just checking to see if you're paying attention! A woman came to draw water from the well, and Jesus asked her if He might have a drink.

Shocked, the woman responded, ⁹ *"How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman??" she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.*

² Adapted from John A. Sanford, *The Kingdom Within* (J.P Lippincott Co., 1970), pp. 15-16. The same principle applies to many things, including cow's milk, breast milk, muscle tone, musical skill, etc.

¹⁰ Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water.”

¹¹ “Sir,” said the woman, “you don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this ‘living water’? ¹² You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock.”

¹³ Jesus said, “**Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. ¹⁴ But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life**” (John 4:9-14).

Now the best way to deal with dehydration, whether physical or spiritual, is to stay ahead of it and to prevent its development. That’s what the woman was getting at, though she didn’t yet understand what Jesus really meant, when she asked, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and come here to draw water” (John 4:15).

So . . . our questions this morning are, “**Where can we get God’s Living Water to nourish and to replenish our souls?**” And “**How can we flourish spiritually rather than just ‘getting by’?**”

What would you be willing to give or to do in order to truly be flourishing in your spiritual life and in your life in the world, at work, in your family, in your leisure time? Perhaps such flourishing is a circumstance you can remember at some point in the past, but it’s not your situation as you sit here this morning. Maybe you can’t remember ever experiencing a clear sense of life direction, an awareness that you are living well and effectively, a deep and durable connection to other people, and a hopeful expectancy about the future . . . but wouldn’t you *like* to experience those things?

Wouldn’t you *like* to be able to “joyfully draw water from the springs of salvation”? Wouldn’t you *like* to be able to say, “God is my salvation! I will trust him and not be afraid, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my song” (Isaiah 12:2-3). Those things really *are* possible, and God intends for you to experience them . . . but like the well in my opening story, we have to continually draw water from the “springs of salvation” if that water’s nourishment is to continue flowing. Neglecting to “joyfully draw water from the springs of salvation” leads to being “bone dry.”

Happily, beginning in just a few minutes, you’ll have a rather remarkable opportunity to experience the spiritual flourishing that comes from God’s gift of “Living Water.” Our Deacons have organized a Lenten experience of “Streams of Living Water” that really *does* offer the possibility of rehydrating and revitalizing your spiritual life . . . and mine.³

By participating in one of the spiritual formation groups that are being organized TODAY—once a week during the Lenten Season—each of us will discover new ways of focusing our heart’s steady attention on God, and we will learn how to fuel our lives from the Presence and Power of God. We will learn how to respond to every experience with spiritual integrity, and how to extend God’s compassion in every sphere of our lives. We will learn how to more fully encounter the invisible God in the visible world, and we will discover new ways of sharing these discoveries with others. Doesn’t that sound like a journey that would bless your life?

³ Our study, *A Spiritual Formation Workbook, Revised Edition: Small Group Resources for Nurturing Christian Growth*, by James Bryan Smith and Lynda Graybeal (HarperOne, 2007), is a shorter approach to the content of Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (HarperOne, 2001).

Now you certainly don't have to participate in these Lenten experiences, any more than you have to drink the requisite amount of ordinary water every day; but the results of negligence in either area are quite predictable. Jesus told us that His purpose is for us to have "living water" within that causes our lives, our spirits, and our relationships to flourish "abundantly" (John 10:10). Do those words describe your life as you sit here right now? Wouldn't it be wonderful if they did?

Another term we sometimes use for the kind of experiences I'm talking about is "spiritual awakening," and once we experience spiritual awakening, all sorts of remarkable things begin to happen. We find ourselves able to believe, feel, and do things we couldn't do before. We discover ourselves to be on a path that is really—finally!—going somewhere, somewhere important and eternal. We sense that we stand on the edge of new mysteries, joys, and experiences of which we had never even dreamed.⁴ The Bible calls it being "reborn" (John 3:3).

It's beginning to rain.
The drought is ending.
What are you waiting for?
Come, just as you are.

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Come just as you are;  
Hear the Spirit call.  
Come just as you are;  
Come and see, come, receive;  
Come and live forever.

Life everlasting,  
And strength for today;  
Taste the Living Water,  
And never thirst again.

Come just as you are;  
Hear the Spirit call.  
Come just as you are;  
Come, receive, Christ, the King  
Come and live forevermore.

Life everlasting,  
And strength for today;  
Taste the Living Water,  
And never thirst again.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981), pp. 109-110.

<sup>5</sup> Crystal Lewis, "Come Just As You Are."

# The *Spiritual Values Inventory* ©

Welcome to the *Spiritual Values Inventory*. This inventory is designed to assist you in examining your life in the context of your spiritual values. Please complete the Inventory by entering the number that represents your answer in the blank to the right of each statement. Sometimes the choices may not seem to fit the way you would like to answer. At those times, please choose the answer that seems closest to your desired response.

Please use this Key to record your responses. Please respond to all of the statements.

1 = this is never true for me    2 = this is seldom true for me    3 = this is sometimes true for me

4 = this is often true for me    5 = this is always true for me

|     |                                                                               |  |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 1.  | I have many friends.                                                          |  |
| 2.  | Sometimes I'm sad or angry without knowing why.                               |  |
| 3.  | I am truly connected to God.                                                  |  |
| 4.  | Sometimes I am too emotionally dependent upon others.                         |  |
| 5.  | I think I know what my "spiritual gifts" are.                                 |  |
| 6.  | It's too late for me to change.                                               |  |
| 7.  | I regularly read the Bible, or other material related to my spiritual values. |  |
| 8.  | I spend a lot of time worrying about bad things that might happen.            |  |
| 9.  | I expect my life circumstances to improve.                                    |  |
| 10. | I have no really close friends.                                               |  |
| 11. | I am doing what God intends for me to do with my life.                        |  |
| 12. | I often feel guilty.                                                          |  |
| 13. | I feel able to change my life.                                                |  |
| 14. | Most of my friendships are one-sided.                                         |  |
| 15. | I'm helping to accomplish God's purpose for the world.                        |  |

Scoring instructions are on the reverse side of this sheet.

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Scoring the *Spiritual Values Inventory* is a simple, three-step process:

1. Using the table below, write your response for each statement in the space provided.
2. Reverse the score for items followed by "(R)." In order to do this, subtract your response for these statements from 6 in order to derive their corrected score. For example, if your response was "5," then  $6 - 5 = 1$ , which is the "true" score. Write the corrected scores by each of your responses.
3. Total all the scores—reversed and non-reversed alike. Your final score will be somewhere between 15 and 75.

In general, the higher your score, the more likely it is that you are aware of your core spiritual values, and that these values are helping you to grow spiritually and to live effectively. If your total score is fifty (50) or less, you may wish to discuss your scores with your Pastor, Bible Study Leader, or with someone else whose spiritual life you respect. God has more in store for you than you have yet discovered!

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord,  
"plans to prosper you and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).*

| Subscale                                                                  |    | Items in Scale  | Score |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----------------|-------|
| <i>Vocation:</i><br><b>Your Sense of Life Direction</b>                   | 3  | _____           |       |
|                                                                           | 5  | _____           |       |
|                                                                           | 7  | _____           |       |
|                                                                           | 11 | _____           |       |
|                                                                           | 15 | _____           |       |
| <i>Responsibility:</i><br><b>Your Sense of Living Effectively</b>         | 2  | _____ (R) _____ |       |
|                                                                           | 4  | _____ (R) _____ |       |
|                                                                           | 8  | _____ (R) _____ |       |
|                                                                           | 12 | _____ (R) _____ |       |
| <i>Community:</i><br><b>Your Sense of being Connected to other People</b> | 1  | _____           |       |
|                                                                           | 10 | _____ (R) _____ |       |
|                                                                           | 14 | _____ (R) _____ |       |
| <i>Hope:</i><br><b>Your Expectations about the Future</b>                 | 6  | _____ (R) _____ |       |
|                                                                           | 9  | _____           |       |
|                                                                           | 13 | _____           |       |
| <b>Total Score:</b>                                                       |    | <b>15-75</b>    |       |