



## *Introduction*

*Thus says God to these bones:  
"I will cause breath to enter you,  
and you shall live."*

Ezekiel 37:5 (NRSV)

there I am  
in Ezekiel's valley,  
one heap among many,  
just another stack  
of old, dry bones.

some Mondays  
feel this way,  
and Tuesdays, too,  
to say nothing of  
Wednesday, Thursday, Friday.

*(continued on next page)*

lost dreams  
and forgotten pleasures,  
sold like a soul  
to a gluttonous world  
feeding on my frenzy  
and anxious activity.

but just when  
the old heap of bones  
seems most dry  
and deserted,  
a strong Breath of Life  
stirs among my dead.

Someone named God  
comes to my fragments  
and asks, with twinkling eye:  
“May I have this dance?”

the Voice stretches into me,  
a stirring leaps in my heart,  
lifting up the bones of death.

then I offer my waiting self  
to the One who’s never stopped  
believing in me,  
and the dance begins.

*Joyce Rupp*

I always struggle with being too busy. I promise God and myself that I will be more faithful to contemplation and then I find myself zooming through my days, caught up in activity that engulfs my spirit. I get weary, worn out, and I come crawling back to God, crying out: “Refresh me, restore me!” I don’t know if God gets tired of this pattern, but I surely do.

In chapter two I have written about Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones. That’s exactly how my spirit feels when I rush about without taking time and space for reflection. Inside I feel hollow, dead, and empty. My activities clatter around anxiously. But when I pause and allow room for prayer and solitude, my spirit experiences a coming together much like the dry bones in Ezekiel’s valley that come together into life.

### **An Invitation to Dance**

God constantly visits my valley of dry bones and invites me to dance. God faithfully asks me if I want to live with greater quality of life and deeper enthusiasm. When I am faithful to my inner journey, my life comes together in a sense of wholeness and aliveness.

This book is an invitation to be more faithful to prayer, to be more constant to the dance of life that God so desires for us. It is a call to put our busyness aside for a while in order to rekindle our relationship with the Holy One and to gain a clearer vision of what is really valuable in our lives.

Prayer keeps our hope active and restores life to the dead bones of our dreams. Prayer is meant to be much more than just a storehouse or a reservoir where we get filled up so that we can work harder. This concept only reinforces our compulsive work ethic.

Regaining our energy and vitality may very well happen when we seek time apart with God, but we seek that time for the sake of the relationship, not because we want more success in our work. Prayer is a time to dance with our Divine Partner, to let the Beloved One take the lead, and to enjoy the true delight and source of life that God is for us.

This book invites you to take time for the inner dance. As you hear God's invitation to dance, you might experience some of the varied feelings of anyone asked to dance: hesitancy, self-consciousness, fear of doing it wrong, concern about "looking good," or great joy at being asked because you have long wanted to dance with this Partner.

We all know people who say, "Oh, I can't dance," or "I don't know how to dance," or "I just don't have any rhythm." We also know people who love to dance, who can't wait for the music to begin. I think that deep within everyone wants to have the freedom and the joy of dancing with a wonderful partner. We may feel inadequate or unable to dance well, but the opportunity for a vibrant inner life waits for us if we are willing to risk the dance floor of prayer.

The reflections that follow depend on your taking time for silence and inner pondering. Sometimes it is difficult for us to be silent. We may yearn for quiet, but when we have it, there can be a kind of spiritual panic attack. After ten or fifteen minutes we may feel bored or restless. "Now what?" the mind asks. The silence feels strange, just as when we learn how to dance, we feel clumsy and awkward.

Our minds might be filled with all the stuff that makes up our day: the unfinished work, the old fights, or the over-full calendar. Our quiet time floods us with the realization of how busy we are. We may feel depressed or discouraged as we remain in the solitude and stillness of our reflection time. Or, we may fear what could surface from within us if we remain in stillness for too long. All of this is natural and normal. It takes time to slow down, to become still, to let go. We must be patient with ourselves and with the process of quiet reflection. We must take time to learn the steps of the dance.

We must also let go of thinking that we have to have something to show for our efforts, for our time spent dancing with God. Just choosing to be with God is valuable. We cannot control what will happen. We must simply trust this Wise Companion with our lives, trust that God will never harm us or lead us anywhere but into greater harmony and integrity. Prayer is not about “feeling good.” Rather, it is about learning the dance of the Holy One, which is the dance of truth and wholeness.

What happens in our prayer time will naturally affect the rest of our lives. Gradually we will become more deeply aware of God’s presence in the everyday world around us. We cannot isolate our spiritual life from the rest of our life, for it is in our day-to-day situations that we experience our personal transformation toward wholeness.

When we enter our time of prayer we bring our life and our work with us. We do so in order to connect with God, to renew that relationship so it permeates our whole life. That is why the themes for the chapters of this book are connected with our daily lives and with the natural seasons of the year.



Beloved Dancer of my Heart, thank you for being a faithful presence and a loving partner on my journey of life. Your grace-filled movements continually teach me fresh inner dance steps. You invite me to trust you more fully as you direct my whole self to the music of continual growth.

Remind me often that the more easily I glide along with you, the freer my heart becomes. When my days hold distress and discouragement, encourage me to draw near to you. Move me gently across the dance floor of my unwanted experiences. Twirl me around joyfully when my heart yields to the wonder and delight found in positive events, loving people, and the beauty of life. Guide me through the unknown steps of confusion and mystery-laden transitions when I am not sure which way to move.

I will listen to your invitation as you daily invite me to join you in partnership. May my inner footsteps be ever more in sync with yours. Each day as your voice calls to me through the melody of your love, I will respond: "Yes, I want to be one with you, Beloved Dancer of my Heart. Come, be my partner. I am ready to follow where you lead."

—Joyce Rupp

## **How to Use This Book**

For three years I offered monthly retreats called “Desert Days.” People of different religious denominations and walks of life joined me on those days. Sometimes our group was as large as forty, sometimes as small as five. We met for five hours, beginning by introducing ourselves to one another. I then gave a presentation on the theme for the day, followed by morning prayer. From there we all left quietly to go to our own desert spaces: rooms and corners and pews, trees and lawns around the parish center and surrounding area. As the group left, they received scripture readings and other suggestions for prayer during their quiet time. We prayed alone for three hours, choosing to eat our lunch whenever and wherever we wanted. An hour before the closing we met for forty-five minutes of small group dialogue. We closed with communal prayer.

As we prayed in solitude I felt bonded to the group in a special way. A quiet strength came from our gatherings. Rarely did anyone engage in conversation during the hours of solitude. Silence was treasured and welcomed.

Not everyone can gather with a group and not everyone can choose a five-hour space once a month for prayer. But everyone can choose some time to regularly pause and renew a relationship with God. This book is designed to meet one’s unique need for solitude. Pray the months with a group or by yourself. Take as much or as little time as you desire. A portion of the chapter could be prayed every day or once a week, or the reflections and suggestions for prayer could be used for a monthly retreat day.

Scripture passages are suggested for those who choose to pray each day with the month’s theme. For those who meet regularly to

share their spiritual journey, the questions at the end of each chapter may be helpful. They can also be used for individual reflection and journaling.

I hope you will wear the pages of this book thin with use. May God's life dance within you as you pause for quiet places of prayer in your busy life.