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Imagine it's Christmas morning. The presents are all wrapped and under the tree. You spent hours the night before assembling all the toys. Everything is ready for the big day. The children run into the room, and the wrapping paper begins to fly off the presents. Shouts of glee erupt upon opening each gift. Smiles and excitement fill the room as children discover the contents of each package. After everything has been opened, everyone goes to the table for breakfast. When the food has disappeared, the children head back to their gifts, ready to settle in and play with their new treasures. And then you hear a voice ask, "Do we have any batteries for my toy?"

Uh oh. Batteries. You distinctly remember the package for the battery-operated toy stating, "batteries included." They must be in the wrapping paper somewhere, so you begin sorting through the piles on the floor, eventually coming to the packaging material for the toy. You spy the label and realize you had misread the words, for it plainly says, "Batteries NOT included." Somehow you had missed the word *NOT* when you purchased the gift,

and now the toy lies lifeless on the floor, a jumble of inanimate plastic and wires with no possibility of moving on Christmas Day.

A small voice asks, "Can you run to the store and get batteries?" Piles of snow block your driveway, and you're too tired from staying up wrapping presents to venture into the wintry weather. In addition, the stress of your job and concern about your finances have left you lifeless and exhausted. You feel like a pile of dry bones, waiting for the renewal of an afternoon nap.

For many, the Advent season leading up to Christmas can be exhausting rather than peaceful. Buying too many gifts with limited resources adds stress to many families. Those without families nearby may feel loneliness rather than peace. Memories of disappointing holidays may create feelings of sadness. Those battling illness may not experience the peace they long for as anxiety fills their days and nights.

On top of all the turmoil in our personal lives, the news reminds us of the unrest in our nation and the world: from debates over tax reforms and

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healthcare funding to protests in the Middle East about our President's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In this season when we proclaim God's peace, we recognize the world is not at peace. Some suggest that Jews have been living in Jerusalem for thousands of years, so they should have sole rights to the land, while others recognize that Jews, Christians, and Muslims have been living side by side in that region for countless generations, with all groups claiming religious ties to the Holy City. All three religions trace their faith back to Abraham and Sarah and claim holy sites in Jerusalem. Everyone wants peace, and yet, we just can't seem to find what we long for so much.

Trying to sort out the complex history of the Middle East or our personal feelings of fear and anxiety seem exhausting, leaving many feeling as though their energy has been depleted, as though our batteries are drained and new ones are not included. We may feel as though we're walking through a valley of dry bones, lifeless, uninspired. I think that's why the prophet Ezekiel's vision of a

valley of dry bones connects to us so well, for his vision describes what many of us feel at some point in our lives.

Ezekiel lived in Jerusalem over 2500 years ago, born into a priestly family, but he and many others were carried away into exile to Babylon. I can't imagine what life for them felt like, how the stress of being dragged away from home impacted their lives. For centuries, they also longed for peace, disappointed time and again when nations invaded their land.

In the midst of the turmoil, Ezekiel had a vision of a valley filled with dry bones. God told Ezekiel to speak to the bones, telling them that they would live again. The bones began to rattle and shake, with tissue forming to connect those bones to muscles, protected by a layer of skin. But wait—something wasn't quite right, for although the bodies were made whole, they had no life. The scene might have appeared like a modern-day movie about zombies, the dead walking with outstretched arms, but no breath of life filling them. Something seemed to be missing on the inside, that

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mysterious part of us that gives us life and meaning, which was something one child had a hard time understanding when writing an essay on the body. The child wrote:

Your head is kind of round and hard, and your branes are in it and your hair on it. Your face is the front of your head where you eat and make faces. Your neck is what keeps your head out of your collar. It's hard to keep clean.

Your shoulders are sort of shelves where you hook your suspenders on them. Your stummick is something that if you do not eat often enough, it hurts, and spinach don't hep it none.

Your spine is a long bone in your back that keeps you from folding up. Your back is behind you always, no matter how quick you turn around.

Your arms you got to have to pitch with, and so you can reach the butter. Your fingers stick out of your hand so that you can throw a curve and add up 'rithmatick.

Your legs is what—if you have not got two of—you cannot run to first base, neither can your

sister. Your feet are what you run on. Your toes are what always get stubbed. And that's all there is of you except what's inside, and I never saw it.<sup>1</sup>

What's on the inside that makes us whole? What's that part that gives us life and energy? What are the batteries that keep us going?

Have you ever had a day when you feel as though your batteries are drained? When you long for peace to fill your life? When you feel like a valley of dry bones walking around lifeless? When you wonder what everyone would remember about your life if you were gone?

Some men were having a conversation about death and dying. The question came up, "What would you want people to say about you at your funeral?"

One replied, "I'd want people to say, 'He was a great and compassionate humanitarian who cared about those in need.'"

A second one said, "I'd want people to say, 'He was a good father and husband, whose life was a fine example for others to follow.'"

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A third answered, “I’d like them to say, ‘Look, he’s moving!’”<sup>2</sup>

That’s what Ezekiel saw in his vision of the valley of dry bones—they were moving. But God envisioned more than that, for God told Ezekiel to say, “Breath/spirit, come from the four winds. Breathe on them, that they may live. Tell the people that even though they feel dried up and cut off without hope, that I will open your graves and bring you new life. I will bring you back from your exile into your homes. I will put my spirit in you and you shall live.”

Ezekiel brought a vision of renewal to people living in exile thousands of years ago, but that vision still brings us a sense of peace today. When you feel exhausted and drained, God says, “My

batteries are included in you through my breath, though my Spirit, which fills your life and can bring you renewal. Even though the world seems to have gone awry, I will bring my peace to the world and to you. Even though gloom may fill the long days of winter, I will provide you the batteries of my Spirit to recharge your soul.”

During this season of Advent, we wait for the arrival of the One who brought a new sense of peace, born to teach us that God remains with us—One to remind us of God’s promised Spirit. For upon Christmas Day, we will be reminded once again that batteries are included, for God’s Spirit moves within us, bringing us in the midst of the chaos of the world the promise of God’s peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Hodgins, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 3617-3625). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #685.

<sup>2</sup> [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com)