



TROIKA MINISTRIES · FROM THE STUDY · POSITION PAPER · NO. 4

CAN THESE BONES LIVE?

*The Resets: Four Depths of Death, One Direction — A Troika
Ministries Position Paper*

Jose G. Rodriguez, Ph.D. (Dr. J)

Founder, Troika Ministries · troikaministries.org

ABSTRACT

*Every serious tradition of human repair — clinical, moral, religious, civic — eventually meets a case it cannot restart, and quietly stops speaking of it. This paper argues that Scripture does not stop. It names death at more than one depth, and it answers each depth with a different voice: the Spirit within, before the grave; the friend still near, at the grave; and the Father alone, in the valley where no one else remains. These movements — the Hope Reset, the 4th Day Reset, and the Ezekiel Reset — are repeatable works of grace with distinct scriptural anchors (Romans 4–5; John 11; Ezekiel 36–37), and behind them stands a horizon that is not repeatable at all: the New Creation, when the pattern of dying and restoring itself ends (2 Peter 3; Revelation 21). Underneath all of them lies a single diagnosis, stated twice in Genesis on either side of the Flood: the inclination of the human heart, which no external judgment, however total, has ever changed. The paper's claim is therefore precise: **restoration is never resuscitation**. What God does with the dead is not to return them to the condition that killed them, but to return them to their design — to original intent. The framework is offered to the church as pastoral architecture, to the academy as a coherent biblical theology of restoration, and to the reader who believes none of it as an honest description of an experience he already knows from the inside.*

I. The Question in the Valley

There is a question almost no one asks out loud, because everything in us has already answered it.

The prophet Ezekiel is set down in a valley full of bones, and the text is careful to say they are "very dry" (Ezekiel 37:2) — not recently dead, not warm, not the kind of dead that a fast response might still reach. Decay has finished its work. Even the skeleton, the last thing that holds a body's shape after everything else is gone, lies scattered. This is not a scene of loss. It is a scene *after* loss — after the funeral, after the visitors stopped coming, after everyone reasonable has moved on.

And it is into that valley, at that hour, that God asks the one question no one else would dare: "**Son of man, can these bones live?**" (Ezekiel 37:3).

Ezekiel's answer is the only honest one available on a valley floor: "Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

Notice what he does not say. He does not say no — the evidence said no. He does not say yes — no honest man standing in that valley could. He hands the question back to the only One whose answer is not bounded by the evidence. That handed-back question is the thread this entire paper pulls.

Every person reading this has stood at the edge of some valley — a marriage, a calling, a church, a son, a self — and privately concluded: *past saving*. The conclusion feels like realism. This paper contends it is a category error. We assessed the bones with the only categories we had — alive, dying, dead — and Scripture operates with a category we did not know existed: **dead, and still addressable**. The valley is not where God's speech runs out. It is where every other voice does.

II. The Diagnosis Underneath: Why External Resets Fail

Before any reset can be understood, the wound must be named accurately, because the resets answer *this* wound and not another.

Scripture names it twice, in nearly identical words, and the placement of the two sentences is the argument. Before the Flood: "The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5). Then the Flood comes — the most total external judgment the world has ever undergone, a reset of the entire created order down to eight people. And when the waters recede, God says: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood" (Genesis 8:21).

The same sentence. Restated. **On the far side of the Flood, the diagnosis is unchanged.**

The narrative immediately supplies the evidence: Noah — the righteous man, the remnant, the fresh start — plants a vineyard and is shamed by his own drunkenness within a chapter (Genesis 9:20–27). Two chapters later, at Babel, the same self-exalting pride that provoked the judgment is building a tower (Genesis 11). The Flood changed everything outside a person and nothing inside one.

This is the finding on which the whole framework rests, and it is worth stating in modern terms, because the modern world runs on its denial: **no external reset reaches the heart**. New city, new marriage, new church, new government, new resolution, new year — the waters recede and the inclination is intact. Every human program of reform, however sincere, is a flood: it rearranges circumstances. The wound is not in the circumstances.

Where did the wound come from? Not from the fruit, but from a word before the fruit. The enemy's opening move in the garden was a question aimed at what God had said — "Did God really say...?" (Genesis 3:1) — and the man and the woman took a lesser voice at its word rather than returning to the Creator for direction. That is the **first settling**: trusting the nearer, cheaper voice over the One who held the design. And note what the first settling produced — not repentance. They hid; they covered themselves; they shifted blame (Genesis 3:8–13). The turning never rose from within them. It never has. That is Genesis 6:5 and 8:21 in narrative form: the heart does not self-correct, before judgment or after it.

So the Father supplied what they would not — and not as a reaction. The first death in Scripture came so that the guilty could be clothed (Genesis 3:21); the promise of the seed who would crush the serpent was spoken over the very ground of the curse (Genesis 3:15); and the Lamb who would carry it all was "chosen before the creation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20). The remedy is older than the wound. "It is finished" (John 19:30) was not the improvisation of a rescuer arriving late; it was the completion of a plan that preceded the garden. Then He went to prepare a place (John 14:2–3) and sent the Spirit to keep both the place and the teaching alive in us (John 14:26).

And still — this must be said plainly, because it is the ache the resets answer — **we settle**. With the debt paid, the Spirit indwelling, and the place prepared, we still take the lesser voice at its word. The first settling cost Eden; ours is done in greater light. And when a person settles, the decay is slow and quiet — which is precisely why it is so rarely interrupted in time.

The diagnosis, then: a heart whose inclination no flood can touch, in a person who settles by degrees. What that requires is not a better flood. It is what only God has ever claimed to do: **"I will give you a new heart"** (Ezekiel 36:26). The resets are the shape that promise takes at three different depths of death.

III. Movement One — The Hope Reset: Before the Grave

The first reset is preventative, and it is the one the modern reader is most likely to mistake for something he already has.

Its portrait is Abraham — an old man facing "the deadness of his own body" and the barrenness of his wife's (Romans 4:19), who "against all hope, in hope believed" (Romans 4:18). Read that clause slowly: *against* all hope, *in* hope. The first "hope" is the kind the world manufactures — probability, prospects, momentum — and Abraham was honest that it was gone. He did not manage his expectations or reframe his situation. He faced the facts of death in his own body and then trusted past them, in the God "who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not" (Romans 4:17).

This is where the Hope Reset must be distinguished from its counterfeits, because the distinction is the whole pastoral point. Hope, in this framework, is **not optimism** — optimism is a temperament. It is **not resilience** — resilience is a capacity, and capacities deplete. It is not self-made at all: "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). The Hope Reset is the Holy Spirit indwelling a person and keeping alive in them the sight of what they were made for.

And that seeing is its mechanism. Because we have seen original intent — even in glimpses — settling for less becomes intolerable. The Spirit does not primarily lecture the settling soul; He keeps the vision of the design so vivid that the counterfeit loses its taste. Where that vision dims, the soul begins the slow decay described above, usually without a single dramatic decision. Nobody chooses the grave. They settle toward it.

The Hope Reset, then, is the reset *before the grave* — the ongoing, renewable work of the Spirit that keeps a living person from needing the deeper interventions. Its voice is **faith spoken forward, by the Spirit within**. In the language of formation: this is why the daily practices exist. Not to earn anything — the ledger was closed at the cross — but to keep the vision of original intent bright enough that settling stays intolerable.

For the reader keeping score in the academy: the Hope Reset locates itself in the ordinary, continuing ministry of the indwelling Spirit (Romans 5:5; 8:11), not in crisis intervention. It is the framework's account of perseverance — and its account of why perseverance fails when the vision of the design is lost.

IV. Movement Two — The 4th Day Reset: Held in the Grave

The second reset begins where the first was refused or overwhelmed: death has actually come.

Its portrait is Lazarus, and the text insists on the ugliness: "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days" (John 11:39). Jewish burial custom of the period gives the detail its force — by the fourth day, no one disputed the death, and decay was underway. This is not a rescue at the last second. The last second passed days ago. Whatever this man's future holds, it will not be because anything in him recovered.

But note the one thing this grave has that the valley of bones does not: **someone is still near**. Martha meets Jesus on the road. Mary falls at His feet. The community is present, weeping. And Jesus stands at the tomb itself and speaks — "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25) — *before anything visibly moves*. The declaration precedes the evidence. Then the word into the tomb, and the man comes out.

He comes out bound. This detail carries half the pastoral weight of the entire movement: "Take off the grave clothes and let him go" (John 11:44). The raising was Christ's alone; the unbinding He assigned to the people standing there. **Raised by the Lord; released by the community**. A person can be genuinely alive again and still walking in wrappings — the habits, shames, and self-definitions of the tomb — and the ones who love him are commissioned to take them off, not to stand at a distance admiring the miracle.

The 4th Day Reset is therefore the reset for the one who has died some real death — a moral collapse, a burned-down calling, a faith gone cold, a life ended in every way but clinically — **and has not yet been abandoned**. Its voice is **the one still near**: the inner circle willing to stand at a stinking tomb and speak life when the evidence is finished. Where the Hope Reset is the Spirit's ongoing work within, the 4th Day Reset is Christ's word arriving through presence — His own, and then, in His pattern, the presence of those who stay.

This is the reset Troika has taught longest, paced across a full arc — sitting with the weight, the resurrection reframe, the covenant pathway, and re-entry with a peer cohort — refusing the urgency that would compress the days of grief into a single session. Here it takes its place in the larger architecture: the middle depth, where death is real but the voices are not yet gone.

V. Movement Three — The Ezekiel Reset: The Tomb No One Came To

The third reset is the one the church scarcely has language for, which is why the valley had to be shown to a prophet.

Consider what the valley of dry bones actually is: **it is what Lazarus becomes if no one speaks in time.** Extend the fourth day to the fortieth year. The decay runs all the way down — past flesh, past shape, to bones "very dry" (Ezekiel 37:2), disarticulated, anonymous. And attend to the sociology of the scene: there is no Martha here, no weeping community, no inner circle. Nobody is standing at this tomb, because nobody came. These are the dead that even the mourners forgot.

Every human system of restoration presumes some remnant to work with — some motivation to coach, some support network to mobilize, some ember to fan. The valley is Scripture's deliberate removal of every such remnant. No inner life remains to appeal to. No community remains to deploy. If anything happens here, only one voice is left in range, and God makes the point unmistakable by the instrument He chooses: "Prophesy to these bones" (Ezekiel 37:4). Not medicine, not method, not community — **the sovereign word of God, alone**, spoken over what everyone else stopped speaking to. And the bones become "a vast army" (37:10) — not a ward of convalescents. An army. Restored not merely to life but to purpose.

But here the framework must refuse a shallow reading, because the chapter before the valley refuses it first. One chapter earlier, the same Sovereign LORD names what He is actually doing, and it is not resuscitation: **"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws"** (Ezekiel 36:26–27). Then, in the valley, the same promise in the same words: "I will put my Spirit in you and you will live... Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it" (37:14). One Spirit, one oracle, two pictures.

This is the hinge of the entire paper. The Ezekiel Reset answers the exact wound the Flood could not: Genesis 8:21's unchanged inclination is a **heart of stone**, and the promise of Ezekiel 36 is not a cleaner environment or a second chance but **replacement at the root** — stone taken out, flesh put in, the Spirit installed where the inclination lived. The Flood proved that judgment cannot change the heart. Ezekiel announces the only thing that can: God gives a new one.

The voice that answers in this movement is **the Father alone** — and He does not stop at raising the dead. He remakes what raised them.

A pastoral word inside the argument: if the reader is the one in the valley — the one whose phone stopped ringing, whose case everyone closed — this movement is not theory. It is the claim that your abandonment did not remove you from the range of God's address. The valley is not evidence that He has finished with you. In the text, it is precisely where He goes to ask His question.

VI. The Horizon — The New Creation Reset: The End of the Pattern Itself

An honest framework must now face an honest objection: if these three resets are real, why does anyone need them twice?

Because they are needed twice. And a tenth time. The diagnosis of Genesis 8:21 is not deleted by any of the three movements in a believer's present experience — the settling resumes, the vision dims, new tombs are dug. The three resets are *repeatable* precisely because the wound keeps reopening. A theology that hides this becomes a theology of disappointment; every honest believer already knows it from the inside.

Scripture knows it too, and answers with a fourth word that is categorically different: not another reset within the pattern, but the end of the pattern. Peter sets it deliberately beside the Flood, so that the difference cannot be missed: "By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment" (2 Peter 3:6–7). Not water a second time. Fire — once, and final. And, exactly as in Ezekiel, the judgment is not the point but the threshold. John records what stands on its far side: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, **'I am making everything new!'** (Revelation 21:4–5). And the last loose end of Eden is tied off in a single clause: "No longer will there be any curse" (Revelation 22:3).

Note the verb. Not *I am repairing everything old* — "I am making everything new." The New Creation is not the biggest restoration; it is the moment restoration itself is retired, because nothing will decay again and no one will settle again. The voice is the same as the valley's — the Father's sovereign word — but it does not leave a valley behind.

This horizon is not a fourth tool in the pastoral kit, and this paper does not offer it as one. It is the reason the three movements are worth practicing at all: they are not a treadmill. The pattern of dying and being restored has an appointed end, and the end is not exhaustion but "everything new." Hope, in the first movement, is the Spirit keeping original intent visible; the New Creation is that sight made permanent.

VII. One Direction: Restoration Is Never Resuscitation

Now the framework's single deepest claim, toward which every movement has been walking.

In none of the four does God return anyone to their prior condition. Resuscitation — the mere restart of what was — is precisely what He declines to do, every time. The verse beneath the first movement is Creator language: the God "who gives life to the dead **and calls into being things that were not**" (Romans 4:17). That is Genesis language. When this God raises the dead, He is not reversing an event; He is resuming a design.

Watch it hold across all four depths. Abraham is not merely kept alive; he is "credited with righteousness" (Romans 4:22), restored to the covenant relationship he was created for. Lazarus is not merely revived; he is unbound and released — "let him go" — into life as it was meant to be walked. The bones are not merely reassembled; they are made an army, returned to land and purpose, and the heart beneath them is replaced at the root. And the New Creation does not even stop at restoration — it goes past the design's first installation into "everything new," with no curse left to restore from, ever again.

Four depths — before the grave, held in the grave, alone in the valley, and the end of the valley itself — pulling in **one direction: to get to original intent**.

This is what distinguishes the framework from every program of recovery it superficially resembles. Recovery aims at baseline: getting back to functioning, back to normal, back to how things were. Scripture has no interest in how things were; how things were is what died. The direction of every divine reset is the design — the person, the calling, the church as God intended it before the settling began. Which means the goal of restoration is not the old life with better defenses. It is the original one.

VIII. To the Reader Who Does Not Believe

You have read this far, perhaps, the way one reads someone else's mail — with interest, and from outside. A direct word, then, without a trap in it.

You do not have to grant a single theological claim in this paper to recognize its anatomy, because you have lived it. You know what settling is: the moment you took the nearer, cheaper voice at its word — about who you are, about what was possible, about what you were worth — and called it realism. You know the slow decay that followed, so gradual there was never one day to point to. You may know the fourth day: something in your life that died for real, with witnesses. And you may know the valley — the place in you that even the people who love you stopped asking about, because everyone, including you, closed the case.

Every serious philosophy and every clinical discipline eventually meets that valley and goes quiet, because their instruments require something living to work with. The claim of this paper — weigh it as you will — is that there is a voice whose reach does not depend on what remains, and that the question asked over the driest bones in the oldest valley was not rhetorical. *Can these bones live?* was asked by Someone who already intended to answer it.

No demand accompanies this. Belonging, in the house that publishes this paper, precedes expectation. But you should know that the question has been asked about your valley too — and that "past saving" is a verdict no one competent has actually rendered.

IX. For the Church and the Academy: Locating the Framework

Theologically, the resets organize familiar loci along the single axis of *depth of death*. The Hope Reset describes the continuing ministry of the indwelling Spirit in perseverance and sanctification (Romans 5:5; 8:11). The 4th Day Reset describes restoration mediated through the word of Christ and the ministry of the body — grace arriving through presence (John 11; cf. Galatians 6:1–2). The Ezekiel Reset describes the sovereign, monergistic act classically named regeneration — the new heart no human agency assists (Ezekiel 36:26–27), which is why the valley is stripped of every human agent before the word is spoken. The New Creation Reset is consummation (2 Peter 3; Revelation 21–22). The framework's contribution is not novelty in any locus but the **pastoral diagnostic that connects them**: the question "how deep is this death, and

which voice can still reach it?" tells a shepherd whether a soul before him needs daily vision renewed, a community that will stand at a tomb, or intercession before the only Voice left in range — and it forbids the cruelest common error, which is prescribing self-effort to bones that need prophecy.

Pastorally, the framework supplies what most restoration ministry lacks: a category for the person past community reach. Churches are competently organized for movement one (formation practices) and reasonably organized for movement two (care teams, restoration processes). Almost no church has a theology — and therefore almost none has a practice — for the valley: the member who vanished years ago, the leader whose collapse ended every relationship, the veteran whose moral injury outlasted every program. Ezekiel 37 assigns that case not to a better program but to prophetic intercession: someone commanded to speak God's word over bones everyone else stopped visiting. A church that recovers this category stops closing cases God has not closed.

Within Troika's own architecture, the resets sit beneath the existing offerings rather than beside them: the 4th Day Reset, long taught, now shows itself as the middle movement of a larger arc; the post-failure restoration framework operates chiefly in movements two and three; and the formation pathway's first stage, Death, is revealed as not one thing but three, each with its own address. The ABC mapping follows the depths: the Hope Reset guards **Attitude** (the interpreting heart), the 4th Day Reset is walked out in **Behavior** (the community that unbinds), and the Ezekiel Reset is the remaking of **Character** at the root — the heart of stone exchanged for flesh.

X. What This Paper Does Not Claim

It does not claim a technique. None of the movements is a method a practitioner performs on a soul; each names a work of God and identifies which voice He has ordained to carry it. The paper equips discernment, not procedure. It does not claim that the three movements guarantee any outcome on any timeline. Ezekiel was asked the question precisely because the answer belonged to God alone. It does not claim the New Creation Reset as a pastoral instrument. It is horizon, not tool, and preaching it as escape rather than promise abuses it. It does not claim that the valley category excuses the church's absence. That the Father can reach the abandoned does not license abandoning; the 4th Day Reset exists because the community is *commanded* to stay near and unbind. And it does not present interpretive scaffolding as canon. Certain connective readings offered during this framework's development — a Romans 8 spine for the whole arc, Isaac and

Calvary, the tempo of creation's decay against the individual's — remain open observations, deliberately excluded from the body of this paper. All Scripture is quoted from the NIV84. The framework stands under the text, not beside it; where any sentence of this paper is found to strain its anchor passages, the sentence yields.

XI. Conclusion

Every serious tradition of human repair eventually meets a case it cannot restart, and quietly stops speaking of it. This paper has tried to speak of it anyway, at four depths, because Scripture does. The question in the valley was never rhetorical, and the answer was never in doubt to the One who asked it — only to the man standing in the dust, handing the question back because it was the only honest thing left to do.

Can these bones live? Sovereign LORD, You alone know. And You already answered.

The Resets will receive full treatment in a forthcoming volume. This paper is the introduction the volume will assume. Scripture quoted from the NIV84.

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