

## **Week 4: Sitting with the Bones: Why #NotAllMen is Not Alright**

### **PENTECOST**

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27;



*Figure 1: eric-prouzet-571YWyzVEok-unsplash*

### **PRAYER FOR DFV PREVENTION MONTH**

God who brings new shoots from old stumps  
flesh and breath from dry bones  
and goodness from chaos:  
we pray for members of our community  
whose lives are limited by the effects of family violence and abuse.  
Make us people of deep listening, of courageous conflict  
and commitment to the ways of healing and reconciliation,  
that our communities might be places  
where love and peace prevail  
and even the least of us belong.  
We pray this through Jesus who journeyed through death to life  
that we might do the same. Amen.

## STORY TELLING

Dali sat uneasily, thinking about her nervousness and her resolve. Sitting with her friend Pat was a natural thing to do but the topic of this conversation was very different from their regular conversations over coffee. But she couldn't keep this to herself anymore. She needed support. In the middle of their normal small talk about TV shows and the kids' schools, she began...

"Pat, I'm going to leave Mark... I have to," she said.

Eyebrows raised, Pat exclaimed, "What!? Really? Why?" Mark and Pat had been friends since Uni days, longer than he had known Dali.

"He's different when work gets more difficult. He gets stressed" Dali said. "I say the smallest thing and he blows up."

Pat looked down. "I've never seen him like that. He gets quiet, but..."

"Sometimes he pushes me, Pat. He holds me down. By the neck."

"Mark does? I can't believe it!" Pat was shaken. He tried to say calming things. "Have you reported it? So awful!" He looked up at Dali.

"Mark!? I can't believe it. Well at least we're not all like that. I've never touched Astrid like that. I wouldn't do that. Women are to be

respected. I do whatever Astrid tells me!” Pat kept spluttering out more words, but he left as soon as he could.

### **PAUSE FOR REFLECTION**

What stands out to you from these stories? Did any new idea or images emerge? What responses do you notice in yourself as you read or hear the story and reflection?

### **READING THE SCRIPTURES**

### **EZEKIEL 37.1-14**

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.”

## **REFLECTION**

Pat sat in his car, parked by the side of the road. He felt out of breath, confused. Fishing his phone out of his pocket, he began a post. “Not all men beat their wives. It’s not right to say this. Only some do and it’s very wrong. But we shouldn’t all be tarred with the same brush. Some of us are good guys!” Pat pressed ‘send’, dropped his phone on the passenger seat and drove home, still feeling unsettled.

Have you seen the hashtag #NotAllMen around? Especially prominent in some circles on social media, it’s regularly quoted by men during discussions of feminist issues such as family domestic violence. On the surface it might seem a reasonable statement of fact, just setting the record straight. There are bad guys out there, but some of us are okay!

But it’s not helpful. If solutions to family domestic violence are about listening and believing victims, changing systems and educating men about better ways to resolve problems, then the hashtag

#NotAllMen and the idea behind it does nothing to support those processes.

The familiar Ezekiel passage reminds us of this. Most commentators I've read consider this passage to be metaphorical in aim rather than literal or physiological. But consider the movement from the two states of being for the bones in the story. The valley of dry bones is traditionally seen as the negative state for this piece of geography. The act of God with the prophet's help is to restore the bones to life, creating a 'vast multitude' in verse 10: the positive state. But let's stay with the bones for a while. The passage from Ezekiel reminds us that there might be some learning to come in sitting with the bones, the dryness, the bleak situation.

There can be little doubt that the current state of Australian life is not the apex of possibilities. That 'creation groans' in the Romans passage reminds us of the imperfections of our daily lives. Figures for family domestic violence are intolerably high. Some women still fear the upheaval of escaping from their circumstances. And yes, men are still overwhelmingly the perpetrators.

But not all men? What might be unhelpful about saying that? When this point is made it invariably serves to draw the conversation away from a more supportive, listening stance back to a male focus that most public discourse these days already serves. It works to impose a masculine agenda on an issue where it is not required. It is a way of drawing attention back to maleness when others should have the focus here. In doing so, the fragility of the male ego is often on display: Not me! I'm not to blame! The further problem is that men

in question then absolve themselves for any responsibility of a society-wide problem.

But these passages from Scripture have something to teach us here.

The Acts passage of Pentecost, with its oft-heard story of what many consider to be a pivotal moment in the birth of the church speaks to us. The writer of Acts creates a vivid, movie-like narrative of flames and voices and chaos. There is a conventional reading. If the Holy Spirit is credited with enabling people to speak loudly in unusual languages that only some others can understand, it seems correspondingly possible that the Spirit can enable some of us to remain quiet when the situation calls for it. Though 'filled with the Spirit' might be a phrase that suggests ebullience and effervescence, might not it also engender a spirit of silence or restraint when necessary? Men tempted to type #NotAllMen might draw on the Spirit to listen and support instead, realising that attempts to re-direct blame for family domestic violence should not be the focus. They should not be the focus.

As we've read, the passage from Ezekiel points to the opportunity for some learning in 'sitting with the bones'. Addressing the wounds of our cultures involves understanding those wounds and the deep scars they cause. This takes thoughtfulness and listening! Instead of intoning #NotAllMen, men might be better served by asking ourselves some hard questions: Following the metaphor, what is our responsibility for this situation of arid dryness? And once we own that responsibility, how can we support and amplify other voices prophesying to restore life?

Ezekiel's passage makes it clear that some things must die for new things to be born. If that 'new creation' that Paul talks about in Romans is a [utopian cosmopolitan community](#) as Karin Neutel puts it, then it will be one in which the inappropriate blame shifting of #NotAllMen will be unnecessary. We will speak out when injustice is present. We will be quiet to let other voices be heard. We will all work to make things new.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your experience of the #NotAllMen hashtag? Have you seen it around? In what situations have you seen it or heard about it being used? Is it life-giving?
2. We often associate action with speaking out. But action can also be about being silent when the moment calls for it. Can you think of other biblical stories where this rings true? Start with John 8:1-11 or Matthew 27:12-14...
3. 'Sitting with the dry bones' to ask oneself hard questions can be challenging. Can you recall other significant moments in your life when you've done this kind of self-examination? How has that gone?
4. This devotion suggests our reaction to family domestic violence should not be the focus of the conversation, victims and their situations should be. What do you think?

## FURTHER RESOURCES

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NotAllMen> - If you've never heard of the hashtag, have a look here to get a briefing.

<https://www.elle.com.au/news/not-all-men-response-24856> == Here's an Australian perspective on the issues raised.

<https://inbreakthrough.org/six-reasons-notallmen-fails/> - Here's a quick summary of reasons to reject the NotAllMen hashtag.

## **CLOSING PRAYERS**

Creator God of bones and life,  
We walk with you as you walk with us.  
Enable us with the grace to be silent when silence is called for;  
To be an insistent voice when injustice is present;  
To be thoughtful when all is noise and chaos;  
To be silent when other voices should be amplified;  
To listen and support when that takes strength  
And to love when loving is dangerous.  
In Jesus' name we pray.  
Amen