

The Word of God

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[0 : 00] Would you stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together again Hebrews chapter 4 verses 12 through 13.

! The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, in discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word.

Would you please be seated? Amen. Many of you have commented to me positively about the amount of scripture I use in my sermons.

And the reason for that is the core conviction that we share in this church that the Bible is God's word. That every word in the Bible is uniquely inspired by God, holy without error as originally given by God, God is true, authoritative, and sufficient for faith in practicing the Christian life.

[1 : 36] I put as much scripture in my sermons as I use in my sermons as I use in my sermons as I can because God's word, as we've read in our text this morning, is living and it's active.

God uses his word to give us life and sever sin from our lives. I have two reminders that I see each week which remind me of the task that God has given me to preach his word, not my words to you. One is a sign in my office. It's on the wall to my right of my desk. It's a quote from R.C. Sproul, and it says this, you are responsible to preach and teach what the Bible says, not what you want it to say. In my office at home where I write my sermons on Thursday, there's a statue of a lion above my desk where I write. And that statue of that lion reminds me of a quote from another great man of the faith, Charles Spurgeon, who said this, the Word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose and the lion will defend itself. In other words, God's Word is powerful. It doesn't need my help. It doesn't need anybody else's help. My job is to open the book, unleash the lion, and get out of the way. And so I love passages like Hebrews chapter 4, verses 12 through 13. This passage for a preacher should be like a hanging curveball for a major league hitter, which he easily crushes over the fence for a home run.

It's a very clear statement about what God's Word is and what God's Word does. Many Christians recognize these verses recognize these verses because they are frequently quoted. However, few realize the context in which they were originally written. In Hebrews chapter 4, verses 12 through 13, it's one of those go-to passages to show the positive aspects of God's Word, but its context is negative. The writer of Hebrews presents these aspects of God's Word as a warning to his readers. The theme of chapter 4, verses 1 through 11, is God's rest. Beginning in chapter 3, verse 7, the writer of Hebrews uses Psalm 95 to warn his audience, those who were tempted to neglect the great salvation offered to them by Jesus Christ or to drift away from their confession that Jesus Christ is the Christ, the Son of God, because of the persecution they were experiencing for their professed faith in Him. And so the writer of Hebrews urges them not to be like their ancestors who belong to the generation that was shut out of the promised land because of their unbelief. He's warned them about the danger of being shut out of the eternal rest and promised land God provided to them now in Jesus Christ, a rest in a promised land foreshadowed in the Old Testament but is now fully realized in Jesus Christ, God's Son. Look again at Hebrews 4, verse 10. The writer says, For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. In other words, this is one way we can know that we are truly saved. We've heard the gospel, the good news, and that hearing was united with faith. We have trusted in the finished work of Jesus Christ to save us. There's nothing else for us to do. There's nothing else for us to add. There is nothing that we should subtract. As Jonathan Edwards said, the only thing you contributed to your salvation is the sin that made it necessary. The warning here is for those tempted to drift back into old covenant beliefs and rituals and practices that Jesus is coming, dying, and rising again, fulfilled and nullified,

but which they still believed were necessary to save them. And so in verse 11, the writer of Hebrews gives a word of encouragement, but he backs it up with another warning. He says, let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedient. He wants them to avoid what happened to Israel when they disobeyed God's word because they acted in fear of men instead of faith in God. They trusted in their feelings to preserve their lives instead of having faith in God, who is the source of life and who saved their lives from slavery in Egypt and who by his word promised a flourishing life for them in the land that he had promised to give them. In Hebrews chapter 4, verses 12 through 13, the author depicts God's word as a sword, evoking the moment when God led Israel to the edge of the promised land, the land of Canaan. There, the people rejected God's word, resulting in those who did not believe being barred from entering the promised land. Remember, God delivered Israel from slavery in

[7 : 24] Egypt through 10 plagues. Pharaoh finally let God's people go. God parted the Red Sea after Pharaoh changed his mind and his people crossed through it safely, but Pharaoh's army was swallowed up in it and drowned.

God then leads the Israelites in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He leads them to the land he's promised, to the land of Canaan. And once they get there, Moses chooses 12 men, a spy from every tribe, to go spy out the land. They come back to the people with the report that the land is just as God said. It's flourishing with milk and honey. However, 10 of those spies report that the land is also occupied by powerful men who live in fortified cities. Caleb, one of the 12 spies, attempts to quiet the people's concerns over that report. He encourages them to go up. Let's go up. Let's take it.

Let's be faithful. But the people moan and they groan. They weep and they wail. They turn on the Lord. They turn on Moses. They wish they had stayed in Egypt. They provoke God's wrath and he shut that generation out from entering the promised land. Only Caleb, Joshua, and those under the age of 20 would enter it, but only after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness as the generation of doubters died in the wilderness. After Moses informs the people of the consequence for the rejection of God and disobeying his word, they regret it. They regret acting in unbelief and they decide to act without realizing it was too late. Numbers 14:39 through 45 pick up the events after God tells his people through Moses that they will not enter the promised land. When Moses told these words to all the people of Israel, the people mourned greatly. And they rose early in the morning and went up to the heights of the hill country saying, here we are. We will go up to the place that the Lord has promised for we have sinned.

But Moses said, why are you now transgressing the command of the Lord when that will not succeed? Do not go up for the Lord is not among you lest you be struck down before your enemies. For there the Amalekites and the Canaanites are facing you and you shall fall by the sword. Because you have turned back from following the Lord, the Lord will not be with you.

[10 : 21] But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, although neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses departed out of the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them and pursued them even to Horma. The writer of Hebrews portrays God's Word as a sharp, double-edged sword. And he does so, I think, as a sobering reminder to not disregard what Israel did in the wilderness. He's warning them about the consequences of rejecting the salvation rest that God offers them today. He's warning them against the deceptive thought that salvation can be based on or earned through heritage, good works, or observing Old Testament religious rituals. And he tells them that God knows the true intentions of their hearts.

He sees through their good works that they use to hide their sin and cover up their unbelief. God knows the truth. God sees the truth, and his Word is his instrument, his weapon to reveal and expose the truth. And so the main idea for this morning's sermon is that God's Word reveals truth and exposes the truth. God's Word reveals truth and it exposes the truth. You've probably heard the expression, sticks and sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. It's not true.

Words have power. Words can make people cry or laugh or laugh and cry. Words can start wars, and words can make peace. Words issue commands, commands that if obeyed result in good. Or punishment or punishment if disobeyed. Words accomplish things. And since that's true for us, how much more true is it then when it comes to God's Word? When a person comes into contact with God's Word, it will do something. It will either result in blessing if believed and obeyed, or

judgment in neglect, in neglect, in disobedience. The writer of Hebrews has already demonstrated that truth through the example of the Israelites who failed to enter the promised land. Look again at chapter 4, verse 2. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened. The Word of God came to them first as a promise, as good news, but it did not result in blessing because it was not united with faith by those who heard. Israel did not believe. Their unbelief was disobedience. They were not free to pick and choose from God's Word whatever they liked and disregard whatever parts they didn't like. God's Word came to them just as it comes to us as His authoritative Word for our lives. They were to hear it, believe it, and obey it. Any other response invited God's Word to become His sword of judgment. Again, I see this as an allusion to Numbers chapter 14, verse 43, where as a result of God's oath, the wilderness generation fell by the sword after it was too late for them. But the original audience of Hebrews, having heard God's word as it is fulfilled in His Son, Jesus Christ, were in danger of something far more fearful than being shut out of an earthly promised land. They were in danger of being shut out from God's eternal promised land, an inheritance entered only through faith in Jesus Christ, who is the incarnate Word of God, the author of life in our faith, the source of salvation. The writer of Hebrews expressed this truth very clearly in the very beginning of his letter. Hebrews chapter 1, verses 1 through 4, again, says, long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by their prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom He also created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become as much more superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs. God's Word reveals the truth of who He is and exposes the truth of who we are.

[15 : 45] It exposes the true motivation behind what we think and say and do. It exposes what we truly believe.

It shifts, it sorts, it severs, it shows any trace of unbelief. Thus, the writer of Hebrews warns his readers in this passage again about the perils of unbelief. All will be uncovered. No creature is hidden from God's sight. All are naked and exposed to Him, and we will give an account to Him. Did we hear God's Word and neglect it, rejecting it? Did we hear God's Word and add to it or subtract from it? God knows. You can deceive yourself. You can deceive everyone else with your actions, with good works that appear to be genuine, when in reality you are a whitewashed tomb. God sees through the facade and will expose the truth. That should terrify those of you who have not truly believed.

God's Word today issues a warning to you, but in giving that warning, it also reminds you of the grace of God towards you. His grace towards you today to bring you here to hear His Word, and I hope that you'll respond in faith before it's too late. For those of you who have experienced the grace of God and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, this passage with its warnings should actually comfort you.

You've heard the good news. You've trusted in Jesus Christ. You've entered the narrow gate.

You're walking the narrow path. You've entered God's rest, and you're striving to enter God's rest.

[17 : 55] And so you want to hear His Word because you want His Word to expose those areas of your life where you're struggling with temptation, where you've succumbed to sin, and you want God's Word. You want His sword to strike, to kill, to cut sin out of your life because you want to be more like Jesus. For those of us who have been saved, His sword operates more like a surgeon's scalpel. It cuts and it wounds to bring healing and health. God's Word reveals the truth of who He is and His expectations. His expectation is that we hear His Word in faith.

God's Word also exposes the truth. It exposes the true intentions of our heart. It exposes what you try to and want to hide. And my hope is that all of us this morning hear God's Word and what He says in His Word about His Word that we would all receive it in faith and thank Him for clothing our nakedness with the righteousness of His Son, Jesus Christ. And so in our text this morning, we see four ways God reveals the truth and exposes the truth. The first way, God's Word lives. Beginning of verse 12, for the Word of God is living and active. Some people view the Bible as just a book filled with helpful information. Some people view the Bible as a relic from ancient times written by superstitious religious people. Some people view the Bible as an encyclopedia of facts about Jesus and about God, about salvation, and they treat it merely as a reference tool. Some people say they

believe the Bible is God's Word, but they don't read it or respond to it in ways which would support that claim. They see the Bible as a stale, static, or even lifeless thing. They think the Bible is boring. I heard someone say one time, if you think the Bible is boring, the truth is you're boring. Here in verse 12, the writer of Hebrews makes a declaration which shatters any thought that the Bible is a boring old book. He says God's Word is alive. The Greek word translated as living is *zeo*. It means to live, to be possessed of vitality, to exercise functions of life. So what does it mean that the Word of God is living? Well, God is the creator of life. All life derives from God. Just as God breathed life into Adam, so he has breathed life into his Word. Paul talks about that when he writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3, 16 through 17. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. God is the source of life. God is the source of life, and in his Word we encounter him. In his Word, we meet him. In his Word, we learn from him. In his Word, we engage with him. In his Word, we have fellowship with him. And through his Word, he breathes life, his truth into us. Psalm 1.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. In Matthew chapter 7, Jesus concludes his sermon on the mount, commanding his audience to hear and to act on his words, to build their lives on the truths on the truths which he has revealed to them. Because judgment will come. But only those who hear and act in faith in his commands will be left standing in the end. Matthew 7, 24 through 27.

Jesus says, Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. God's word is living, and it is active. The Greek word translated as active is *energous*, from which we get our English word energy. In other words, God's word does stuff. It achieves things. Isaiah 55, 10 through 11 testifies to this.

[23 : 50] God says, For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. It doesn't matter your gender, it doesn't matter your age, your education, or anything else. God's word is living and active. And friend, if you read it, if you trust it, if you obey it, God will change your life through it for the better, because his word lives. The second way, God's word pierces.

As we continue in verse 12, the writer says, It's sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, to joints and of marrow. God's word is not only living, it's penetrating. We often think of swords as long swords wielded by knights on horses, but this sword referred to the Roman short sword called a *gladius*.

The *gladius* was about two feet long. It was a very sharp sword. Though it was short, it was designed that way for quick, penetrating stabs that could cut through the enemy's armor in close combat.

God's word can cut and penetrate the hardest substance on the planet, the human heart. It's so accurate and it's so precise that it can pierce through the most difficult things to separate. It can pierce through the invisible soul of a person. God's word cuts to the core.

[25 : 44] Sometimes like a *gladius*, it strikes out of nowhere. St. Augustine was a brilliant man who prior to his conversion studied philosophy and indulged in much sexual immorality. One day as he was feeling torn between his desire to commit his life to Christ and his desire to continue in his life of sin, he took a walk in a garden. And as he was walking, he heard children playing and singing, and they kept singing, take up and read, take up and read. Augustine immediately ran to the place where he'd recently left his friend. And there he found Paul's epistle to the Romans. He opened it

up and he read Romans 13, 13 through 14. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. Those words in that instant pierced Augustine's heart, pierced Augustine's heart, and God saved him, and God transformed his desires, and he became one of the greatest Christian theologians of all time.

Now, I don't recommend a Bible study where you just pick up the Bible and turn to some random passage and point your finger and read, but it proves the point that God's Word pierces. It cuts. It cuts. What needs cutting. God's Word is also discerning. God's Word discerns. As we continue in verse 12, in discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart, God's Word pierces our hearts, and once it gets there, it exposes our true intentions. The Word of God is not just a way for us to get to know God, but to get to truly know ourselves. James 1, 23 through 24 says, for if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror, for he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. God's Word discerns the true motivations behind what we believe, what we say, and what we do. And that's not always comfortable. But if you're a believer, you know it's good. Do you remember that time you first heard your voice in a recording?

[28 : 23] Exactly. You probably said, that's not what I sound like. And then you back that up by saying, is that really what I sound like? It's an uncomfortable experience. You thought you sounded better than you actually do. In my preaching class in seminary, our professor recorded our sermons.

And our assignment after we preached was to take that recording home and watch it and evaluate ourselves. And that was incredibly painful. Counting all the times that I said, uh, or um, or noticing how awkward some of my facial expressions were, or my hand gestures were, how robotic they looked.

But realizing that that sermon was worse than I thought. But in seeing that, I saw what I needed to change so that I could improve. And that was the point of the practice. That's what God's Word does for those of us who believe it. You see where you need to change.

And when God shows you where you need to change, you learn to say, thank you. Thank you for using your Word to sharpen me, to sanctify me, to make me more like you, to make me more like Jesus. But that's not the case for everyone.

The Pharisees heard Jesus' words as he revealed and as he exposed the true intentions of their hearts. And in John 8, 45 through 47, we see one of those interactions that Jesus had with them.

[30 : 22] Jesus said, God's Word discerns truths that people, some people, want to keep hidden.

It discerns sins that people don't want exposed. It discerns and it discloses the true intentions of their hearts. And because of that, they hate God.

How about you? Do you like what you see in God's Word? Are you thankful for what he reveals in his Word about you?

Are you grateful that God loves you enough to show you where you need to change? And he uses his Word to help you change by the indwelling of his Spirit?

Or do you read the Bible and are always thinking of somebody else who needs to read this passage? It's never you.

[31 : 46] It's always somebody else. Or do you read the Word and say, I don't like what that says. I'm not going to believe it.

I'm not going to do that. What helps me before I read the Bible and to study for my sermons is to just pray a short prayer.

And it basically goes like this. Lord, teach me. Lord, convict me first. Lord, help me to obey. Lord, make me more like you.

That simple prayer has changed the way that I've approached God's Word, the way that I've studied God's Word. And when God's Word exposes my sin, though it's painful, I thank him for it because it is only those who truly love you who are willing to help you get better.

And now the fourth way, God's Word convicts. Verse 13. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him whom we must give an account.

[33 : 03] God sees everything. And that can be discomfoting for those who have something to hide from him. Proverbs 15.3 says, The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

The Greek word in Hebrews 4.13 translated as exposed means to twist the neck or to take by the throat. It pictures an animal about to be sacrificed or a wrestler who has his opponent by the throat and there's no escape.

The meaning here is that all creatures are in the grip of God. And in the grip of God, they are totally vulnerable, completely helpless, and absolutely exposed to his eyes.

The imagery forces us to think of ourselves as naked, held helpless, without an excuse before God who knows all things, who sees all things, who knows all that we've done, who knows all that we've said, who knows all that we've thought, and who knows every motivation behind every action we ever made.

God's omniscient eye sees all. God's omniscient eye sees all. God's omniscient eye sees all. You can deceive others. You can deceive yourself.

[34 : 45] But you cannot deceive God. You can make excuses. You can cover your tracks. But God will expose whatever you are trying to keep hidden.

So it's better to uncover it. It's better to disclose it to him now. It's better to confess it to him now. And it's better to seek his forgiveness and obey him now. Because there's no hiding from God. And he will see everything.

You cannot win a game of hiding seek with God. I remember as a kid one Saturday morning, weather must have been bad because we decided to play hide and seek in my friend's house. And I found this great spot to hide down in his basement. And his basement, like most basements do, did not smell very good. It was dark. It was dingy.

[35 : 54] It was dingy. But I hid in a great place. And nobody could find me. I was the last one to be found. And I was in this place where, on the one hand, I wanted to win.

And I wanted to show them, you know, how great of a hider I am. On the other hand, I really wanted to be found. Because it was dark. And it was scary in that basement with all of those noises.

And so eventually I gave myself up. Because I was ready for the game to end. I was ready to be found. Do you want to stop hiding?

Do you want to be found? God calls out to you through his word. He's calling out to you today. End the game. End your game.

Go to him. And seek him. While he still may be found by you. The truth is, God knows exactly where you are.

[37 : 06] And he knows everything that you've done. And he knows what you're trying to hide. In Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve are deceived by Satan.

And they eat of the fruit that God forbid them not to. And God comes into the garden. And what do they do? God, God, we're so glad you're here.

We can't wait to tell you everything that we've just done. We've been sinful. And we know that we're naked. And we don't know what to do. Now they hide. Amen.

They hide from God. And God knows where they're at. But what does God do? Say, okay, you want to play your game?

Go ahead and hide forever and see where that gets you. Now what does he do? He calls out to them. Where are you? And he knows where they're at. And he knows where they're at. And they come out.

[38 : 05] And God asks them some questions. And through asking those questions, he gets to the issue at hand, which he knew. And after pronouncing to them the consequences, the curse of sin as a result, what does God do after that?

He makes a sacrifice. He makes a sacrifice. We don't know what animal it was, but some animal gave its life. We're animals.

That God would make clothes to clothe Adam and Eve. Those who are created in his image. Because he loves them.

And even in that curse, there was a promise from God. The first mention of the gospel that God would send one, one day, who would undo the curse of sin.

And that one is Jesus Christ, his son, who willingly gave his life, who willingly endured the cross, who shed his blood and who died for our sins.

[39 : 13] Enduring the punishment we deserved for what we've done. And then he rose again on the third day. And God says it is the person who trusts in him, who puts their faith in Jesus, who realizes that they've sinned and who doesn't hide it anymore.

And who goes to him and says, Lord, forgive me. I've sinned against you. And I know that Jesus is my only hope to be forgiven and saved by you.

And it's that one whom God clothes in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, his son. So that even, believer, when we sin, we have a father we can go to and we can seek his forgiveness.

And though he may not always forgive us the earthly consequences for our sin, he keeps us and he saves us forever. But if you don't know Jesus Christ, if you've heard his word and neglected his word and rejected his word, God today is calling you to come to him.

To hear and unite that hearing with faith. And be saved. Before it's too late. For those of us whom God has been gracious to save, what should we do with what we've heard this morning from God's word?

[40 : 41] I think there's many things. But one of those things is this. To build your life on God's word. To build your life on God's word.

In order to build your life on God's word, you've got to know what God's word says. And you've got to use God's word to inform your every decision. And you've got to use God's word to instruct your family.

You've got to use God's word to shape your understanding of this world of your life and everything. And if you do that, you are one who, like Jesus said, built your house on the word of God.

And when the rain falls and when the floods come, you will be standing. Because you're standing on Jesus, the word of God. Another way that we can build our lives on God's word, again, it goes back to just knowing God's word.

So I want to close with God's word, having the final word from Psalm 119, 10 through 11. This is my encouragement for all of us. God's encouragement for all of us through his word.

[41 : 49] That we would do this. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for what we have heard in your word today. God, I pray that this truth would change the ways that we view your word, if there is a change needed.

That, God, we would seek you more in your word. That we would be students of it. That we would store up your word in our hearts.

That we would not sin against you. That we wouldn't neglect it. That we wouldn't reject the parts that we don't like.

But that we'd know that your word is living and trust in that. And that we would be willing to spend time with you to learn from you. That you would use your word to expose the areas in our life that need exposing.

[43 : 17] So that we can seek your forgiveness for those things. And for God, those who have heard your word and have been deceived into thinking that they are actually doers of your word when reality is they are not.

God, we pray in your grace that you would expose such ones. And that they would turn to you and seek your forgiveness. And Father, I pray that as a church we would continue to be committed to being built on your word.

That we would prioritize the teaching and the preaching of your word. That we would prioritize singing songs that are based on your word. That we would prioritize discipling one another and encouraging one another and counseling one another and confronting one another with your word. That we would, Lord, that you would be pleased. That you would be at work here. And that you would be glorified in our lives.

And in our church. Thank you for who you are, Lord. Thank you for what you've done. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

[44 : 39] you