

Power of the Word – Hebrews 4:12

Intro. Read through **Hebrews 3:7-4:12**, underling (or stressing) every one of the twelve occurrences of the word “rest.”

At first glance we notice:

1. **God wanted to give the Israelites rest in the promised land.**
2. Here rest means: **abiding security and peace**
3. He wanted to give them rest, but they didn't trust **Him**.
 - a. Their hearts were hardened in unbelief

Likewise, God wants to give us abiding security and peace. Both now (spiritually) and in heaven (eternally).

1. But we must take Him seriously at His Word, not spurning or doubting it.
2. The writer says: **“Let us then make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall into the same pattern of disobedience. For the word of God is living and effective.”**

Notice the most important point of this verse:

1. In order to enter our heavenly rest, the word of God must be living and effective in our lives.

In order to be living and effective in our lives, whenever we read a passage of Scripture, we must learn and understand

the context of the passage we're reading. In fact, to know God's word, we must understand what God's word is like and what it can do for us!

- I. The Bible is like a **lamp to our feet** ([Psa. 119:105](#)). Two familiar biblical images combine in this verse:
 - A. life is a path ([vv. 32, 35, 101, 128](#); [16:11](#); [23:3](#); [25:4](#))
 - B. God's Word is the light that helps us follow the right path ([v. 130](#); [18:28](#); [19:8](#); [36:9](#); [43:3](#); [Prov. 6:23](#); [2 Peter 1:19](#)).
 - C. It has well been said that the greatest ability is dependability, and this especially applies to the Christian life.
 1. We want God to be faithful to us, so is it wrong for God to expect us to be faithful to Him?
 2. Faithfulness is an evidence of faith, and faith comes from hearing and receiving the Word of God
 - a. [Romans 10:17](#) “ **So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.** “
 - b. [2 Thess. 2:13](#). “ **But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.**

D. The ancient world did not have lights such as we have today; the people carried little clay dishes containing oil, and the light illuminated the path only one step ahead.

1. We do not see the whole route at one time, for we walk by faith when we follow the Word.
2. **Each act of obedience shows us the next step**, and eventually we arrive at the appointed destination.
 1. If we are faithful ([Rev. 2:10](#)).
 2. If we do His commandments (Rev. 22:14).
3. We are told that this is "***an enlightened age***," but we live in a dark world ([John 1:5](#); [3:19](#); [8:12](#); [12:46](#); [Col. 1:13](#); [1 Peter 2:9](#)).
4. Only God's light can guide us aright.
5. Obedience to the Word keeps us walking in the light ([1 John 1:5-10](#)).

II. The Bible is like **bread for the soul** (Matt. 4:4). But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

- A. **The first temptation** ([vv. 1-4](#)). This involved the love of God and the will of God.
1. "Since You are God's beloved Son, why doesn't Your Father feed You?"
 2. Why does He put You into this terrible wilderness?"

B. **This temptation sounded like Satan's words to Eve in [Genesis 3](#)!**

1. It is a subtle suggestion that our Father does not love us. But we know different!
2. But there was another suggestion: "**Use Your divine powers to meet Your own needs**."

C. When we put our physical needs ahead of our spiritual needs, we sin.

1. When we allow circumstances to dictate our actions, instead of following God's will, we sin.
2. Jesus could have turned the stones into bread, but He would have been exercising His powers ***independently of the Father***; and He came to **obey** the Father ([John 5:30](#); [6:38](#)).
 - a. Came to do the will of the One who sent Him.

D. The Lord quoted [Deuteronomy 8:3](#) to defeat Satan.

1. Feeding on and obeying God's Word is more important than consuming physical food.
2. In fact, ***it is our food*** ([John 4:32-34](#)).

III. It is like a **hammer that shatters the rock** ([Jer. 23:29](#)).

A. The message of the true prophet is like a hammer that can tear down and build up (see [Jer 1:10](#)) and even break the hardest rocks ([Jer 23:29](#)).

1. The Word is like fire that consumes waste and purifies whatever it touches.
2. Jeremiah had the Word burning in his heart ([20:9](#); see [Luke 24:32](#)) and on his lips ([Jer. 5:14](#)).
3. He was God's assayer, using the fire of the Word to test the lives of the people ([Jer 6:27](#)).

- B. There are false prophets and teachers in our world today ([2 Peter 2:1](#); [1 John 4:1-6](#)), people who claim to know God's will because of their dreams, their study of astrology, or their special "spiritual" gifts.
1. Some of them have invaded the church ([Jude 3-4](#)).
 2. Whatever anyone says who claims to be speaking for the Lord must be tested by the Word of God.
 3. **"To the Law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"** ([Isa. 8:20](#)).

IV. The Bible is like honey in the comb ([Psalm 19:9-10](#))

- A. ***Fear of the Lord*** ([v. 9](#)). This is an unusual name for the Scriptures, but it reminds us that we cannot learn the Word of God unless we show reverence and respect for the God of the Word.
1. To teach the Bible is to teach the fear of the Lord ([Psalm 34:11](#); [Deut. 4:9-10](#)), and the mark of a true Bible student is a burning heart, not a big head ([Luke 24:32](#); [1 Cor. 8:1](#)).
 2. While some of the fears people have might be distressing and even defiling, the fear of God is clean and maturing.
 3. We do not decay or deteriorate as we walk in the fear of the Lord ([2 Cor. 4:16-18](#)).
- B. ***Judgments of the Lord*** ([v. 9](#)). This can be translated "ordinances" or even "verdicts."
1. It refers to the decisions of a judge.
 2. Throughout the Bible we see the Lord passing judgment on what people and nations do, and His rewards, rebukes, and punishments help us

- understand what pleases Him.
3. In the nation of Israel, the ordinances instructed the officers and judges in settling problems between individuals and in meting out punishments to guilty offenders.
 4. Christians today are not under the Old Testament law, but how those laws were applied helps us understand the righteousness of God and our need for His grace and strength.
 5. This should cause us to realize how important it is for us to be obedient to His Word.
- C. The way we treat the Bible is the way we treat the Lord, so it isn't difficult to determine if we are rightly related to God.
1. Do we ***desire His Word*** because it's precious to us ([v. 12](#)), even more than wealth ([v. 10](#); [119:14](#), [72](#), [127](#), [162](#)) or tasty food ([119:103](#); [1 Peter 2:2](#))?
 2. Do we find satisfaction in "feeding on" God's Word? (See [Matt. 4:4](#); [Job 23:12](#); [Jer. 15:16](#).)
 3. Would we skip a meal to spend time meditating on the Scriptures?
 4. Do we attend church dinners but not church Bible studies?
 5. Furthermore, ***do we accept the warnings of the Word and act upon them?***
 6. To know the warning & not heed it is sin ([James 4:17](#)).
 7. Do we ***enjoy the blessing of the Lord*** because we've obeyed His will?
 8. To have an appetite for God's Word is a mark of a healthy Christian whose priorities are straight.

9. The Lord has sent the Holy Spirit to teach us His Word, and if we *walk in the Spirit*, we will learn & live the truth ([John 14:26](#); [16:12-15](#); [1 Cor 2:9-10](#); [1 John 2:20-29](#)).

V. The Bible is like rain and snow that water the earth ([Isa. 55:10-11](#)).

A. How does God go about calling and saving lost sinners?

1. **By the power of His Word ([Isa. 55:10-11](#)).**
2. **God's Word is seed ([Luke 8:11](#)).**

B. Just as the rain and snow are never wasted but accomplish His purposes, so His Word never fails.

1. **"The Word of God shall stand forever" ([Isa. 40:8](#)).**
2. We never know how God will use even a casual word of witness to plant and water the seed in somebody's heart.

VI. The Bible is like gold that enriches us ([Psalm 19:9-10](#)).

A. Unless we have the right relationship with the Lord so that God is our Father and Jesus is our Redeemer, what we see in creation and what we read in the Bible will not do us much good.

1. Like gold that enriches our pocket book, God's Word enriches our souls and our lives.
2. The Magi in [Matthew 2:1-12](#) started on their journey by following God's star, a special messenger in the sky to direct them. Then they consulted God's Word and found that the King was to be born in

Bethlehem; so they went to Bethlehem and there found and worshiped the Savior.

B. When you study God's creation with a Bible in your hand, you can't help but see Jesus!

1. He is seen in the vine ([John 15](#)).
2. He is seen in the sun ([John 8:12](#); [Mal. 4:2](#)).
3. He is seen in the stars ([Num. 24:17](#)).
4. He is seen in the lambs ([John 1:29](#)).
5. He is seen in the apple trees and lilies ([Song 2:3, 16; 6:3](#)),
6. He is seen in the seed planted in the ground ([John 12:23-24](#)),
7. He is seen in the bread on the table ([John 6:35](#)).

C. The Word in the hand is fine; the Word in the head is better; but the Word in the heart is what transforms us and matures us in Christ ([119:11](#); [Col. 3:16-17](#)).

VII. The Bible is like fire that warms or burns us ([Jer. 23:29](#)).

- A. We have already looked at [Jer. 23:29](#), but let me mention this in relation to this verse:
1. Jeremiah raises the question: **"Does not my word burn like fire?"**
 2. The answer for Jeremiah is **"yes"** ([20:9](#)).
 3. Both fire and hammer are agents in the refining process. Cf. [Jer. 4:12](#) where God's word is a blast of wind. (See Jer. [23:32](#)).

VIII. The Bible is like **seed planted in the heart** ([Luke 8:11](#)).

- A. This parable shows that Jesus was not impressed by the great crowds that followed Him.
 - 1. He knew that most of the people did not really "hear" the Word and receive it in their hearts.
 - a. They did not obey it.
 - 2. He gave this story to encourage the disciples in their future ministry, and to encourage us today.
- B. When you consider how much teaching, preaching, and witnessing goes on in the course of a month or a year, you wonder why there is such a small harvest.
 - 1. The fault does not lie with the sower or the seed.
 - 2. The problem is with the soil.
 - 3. The human heart will not submit to God, repent and receive **[OBEY]** the Word, and be saved.
- C. **Faith is not a matter of IQ or education**; it is a matter of humbly preparing the heart to receive God's truth ([James 1:19-21](#)).
 - 1. The wise and prudent are blind to truths that are easy for the babes to understand ([Mat. 11:20-26](#)).
 - 2. We must **Hear and share the Word** ([Luke 8:16-18](#)).

IX. The Bible is like **water for washing** ([Eph. 5:26](#)).

- A. The husband's love will also be a *sanctifying* love ([Eph. 5:26-27](#)).
 - 1. The word **sanctify** means "to set apart."
 - 2. In the marriage ceremony, the husband is set apart to belong to the wife, and the wife is set apart to belong to the husband.
 - 3. Any interference with this God-given arrangement

is sin.

B. Today, **Christ is cleansing His church through the ministry of His Word** ([John 15:3](#); [17:17](#)).

- 1. The love of the husband for his wife ought to be cleansing her (and him) so that both are becoming more like Christ.
- 2. Even their physical relationship should be so controlled by God that it becomes a means of spiritual enrichment ([1 Cor. 7:3-5](#)).
- 3. Both husband and wife are to show the kind of love that is mutually rewarding and sanctifying.
- 4. The marriage experience is one of constant growth where Christ is the Lord of the home.
- 5. Love always enlarges and enriches, while selfishness does just the opposite.

C. **We must let the Word of God cleanse us and enrich us.**

X. The Bible is like a **mirror for seeing and correcting ourselves** ([James 1:22-25](#)).

- A. The main purpose for owning a mirror, to be able to see yourself and make yourself look as clean and neat as possible.
 - 1. As we look into the mirror of God's Word, we see ourselves as we really are. James mentions several mistakes people make as they look into God's mirror.
 - 2. First, **they merely glance at themselves**.
 - a. They do not carefully study themselves as they read the Word.
 - b. Many sincere Christians read a chapter of the Bible each day, but it is only a religious exercise

and they fail to profit from it personally. Their conscience would bother them if they did not have their daily reading, when actually their conscience should bother them **because they read the Word carelessly.**

c. A cursory reading of the Bible will never reveal our deepest needs. It is the difference between a candid photo and an X ray.

3. **Second mistake** is that ***they forget what they see.***

If they were looking deeply enough into their hearts, what they would see would be unforgettable!

a. We tend to smile at the "extremes" of people back in the days of the great revivals, but perhaps we could use some of that conviction.

b. John Wesley wrote about a preaching service: "One before me dropped as dead, and presently a second, and a third. Five others sunk down in half an hour, most of whom were in violent agonies" (*Wesley's Journal* for June 22, 1739).

B. Before we consign these people to some psychological limbo, remember how saints in the Bible responded to the true knowledge of their own hearts.

1. Isaiah cried, "**Woe is me! for I am undone!**" ([Isa. 6:5](#))

2. Peter cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" ([Luke 5:8](#)).

3. Job was the most righteous man on earth in his day, yet he confessed, "**I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes**" ([Job 42:6](#)).

C. They make a **third Mistake**: ***they fail to obey what the Word tells them to do.***

1. They think that **hearing** is the same as **doing**, and it is

not.

2. We Christians enjoy substituting **reading** for **doing**, or even **talking** for **doing**.

3. Some churches hold endless workshops and conferences about topics like evangelism and church growth, and think we have made progress.

4. While there is certainly nothing wrong with conferences and workshops and meetings, they are sinful if they are a substitute for service.

XI. The Bible is like nourishing meat and milk for the soul

([Heb. 5:12-13](#)). The writer here deals with the question, "***What are the marks of spiritual immaturity?***"

A. Dullness toward the Word ([v. 11](#)).

1. These believers started on their "backward journey" by ***drifting from the Word*** ([Heb. 2:1-4](#)), and then ***doubting the Word*** ([Heb. 3:7-4:13](#)).

2. As a result, they were now "dull of hearing"; that is, unable to listen to the Word, receive it, and act on it.

3. They did not have the attitude of the Thessalonians: "**For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe**" ([1 Thes. 2:13](#)).

4. One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression, or backsliding, is a dullness toward the Bible. Sunday School class is dull, the preaching is dull, anything spiritual is dull.

5. The problem is usually not with the Sunday School teacher or the preacher, but with the believer himself.

B. Inability to share (v. 12a). The ability to share spiritual truth with others is a mark of maturity.

1. Not all Christians have the gift of teaching, but all can share what they learn from the Word.
2. One of the hardest lessons children must learn is the lesson of sharing.
3. The recipients of this letter had been Christians long enough to be able to share God's truth with others.
4. But, instead of helping others to grow, these Hebrew Christians were in need of learning *again* the simple teachings of the Christian life.
5. They were experiencing a second childhood!

C. A "baby food" diet (vv. 12b-13). Milk is predigested food, and it is specially suited to babies.

1. But only those who have teeth can enjoy meat.
2. The writer defines the "milk" as "the first principles of the oracles of God" ([Heb. 5:12](#)).
3. The "**meat**" of the **Word** is the teaching about our Lord's ministry *now* in heaven as our High Priest.
4. The writer wanted to give this "meat" to them, but they were not ready for it.

D. The "milk" of the Word refers to what Jesus Christ did on earth—His **birth**, **life**, **teaching**, **death**, **burial**, and **resurrection**.

1. The "meat" of the Word refers to what Jesus Christ is now doing in heaven.
2. We begin the Christian life on the basis of His finished work on earth. We grow in the Christian life on the basis

of His unfinished work in heaven.

Of course, even the maturest adult never outgrows milk. As believers, we can still learn much from our Lord's work on earth. **But we must not stop there!** We must make spiritual progress, and we can do this only if we learn about Christ's priestly ministry for us in heaven. (See [Heb. 13:20-21](#) for a summary of what the Lord wants to do for His people now.)

E. Unskillful in using the Word (v. 14). As we grow in the Word, we learn to use it in daily life. As we apply the Word, we exercise our "spiritual senses" and develop spiritual discernment.

1. It is a characteristic of little children that they lack discernment. A baby will put anything into its mouth.
 2. An immature believer will listen to any preacher on the radio or television and not be able to identify whether or not he is true to the Scriptures.
- F. Just as our physical bodies have senses without which we could not function, so our inner "spiritual man" has "spiritual senses."**
1. For example: "**0 taste and see that the Lord is good**" ([Ps. 34:8](#)). *Sweeter than the honeycomb!*
 2. "**But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear**" ([Matt. 13:16](#)). *Understanding!*
 3. As we feed on the Word of God and apply it in daily life, our inner "spiritual senses" get their exercise and become strong and keen. Paul called this process exercising ourselves unto godliness ([1 Tim. 4:7-8](#)).

- The ability to discern good and evil is a vital part of Christian maturity.
- The nation of Israel in Moses' day lacked this discernment and failed to claim its promised inheritance.
- The readers of this letter were in danger of making the same mistake.
- It is impossible to stand still in the Christian life: we either go forward and claim God's blessing, or we go backward and wander about aimlessly.

XII. The Bible is like a double-edged sword (Heb. 4:12).

- A. In comparing the Word of God to a sword, the writer is not suggesting that God uses His Word to slaughter the saints!
1. It is true that the Word cuts the heart of sinners with conviction ([Acts 5:33](#); [7:54](#)), and that the Word defeats Satan ([Eph. 6:17](#)).
 2. The Greek word translated "sword" means "a short sword or dagger."
 3. The emphasis is on the power of the Word to penetrate and expose the inner heart of man.
 4. The Word is a "discerner" or "critic."
- B. Of course, God sees our hearts ([Heb. 4:13](#)); but we do not always know what is there ([Jer. 17:9](#)).
1. God uses the Word to enable us to see the sin and unbelief in our own hearts.
 2. The Word *exposes* our hearts; and then, if we trust God, the Word *enables* our hearts to obey God and claim His promises.

3. This is why each Christian should be diligent to apply himself to hear and heed God's Word.
4. In the Word we see God, and we also see how God sees us.
5. We see ourselves as we really are.
6. This experience enables us to be honest with God, to trust His will, and to obey Him.

Remember: We don't get into Heaven if we are not obedient to God and His word (See [Rev. 22:14](#)).