

Keep Moving Forward Series

Move Forward Toward Rest (Hebrews 4:1-3)

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Move Forward Toward Rest

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Our Desire for Rest

1. Most people enjoy time off from work. We look forward to vacations. Our heart can get set on retirement. Some of us even go so far as to enjoy a sick day. Even though we may not be feeling well, it can be nice to let go of our normal burdens and work responsibilities. Rest is good.
2. Due to illness, I slept in longer than normal a few mornings this week trying to get some extra rest to recover as quickly as possible. I also didn't work a regular full day two times this week because I just didn't have the normal strength and stamina.
3. On Monday, I only had the strength to work a few hours while taking the rest of the day off. I put in an extra long day on Tuesday which caused me to have to pull back on my workload for Wednesday.
4. Even though I wasn't feeling well, which is unpleasant, there was still a part of being sick that was nice—getting some extra rest and not doing my normal full workload. I took extra time off to recover, and I worked from home two days. Working from home is a bit more comfortable than being at the office.

B. There is a good and natural desire for rest when work and the labor we engage in becomes overly burdensome. While it is good for us to work, be productive, and creative, work has become corrupted by the brokenness of the world and the human condition. There is a longing in our soul that yearns for meaningful contribution but in a way that is not depleting and taxing. This is our soul's desire for rest.

C. Rest is not only good and appropriate, but also a promise God gives to those who trust Him. God intends for us to experience and enjoy rest in a way that is beneficial and complementary to our work. While the rest and refreshment our soul's crave usually isn't found adequately in this life, the perfect balance of satisfying work and replenishing rest is offered by God in eternity. It is this desire and pursuit of rest from the burdens and difficulties of life that the author of Hebrews brings to our attention in chapters three and four.

II. Hearing God's Voice (Heb. 3:7-11)

- A. Hebrews is essentially a written sermon. As such, the author of Hebrews expresses His message by drawing information from Scripture. Most sections of this letter begin by drawing attention to elements of and examples from the Old Testament. Once ideas are grounded in God's word, the author moves his audience to the spiritual lessons he wants them to take to heart. In the second major theme we will be covering, the author of Hebrews emphasizes God's promise to enter His rest. God promises blessings and benefits to those who respond positively to what He says. This theme is captured in the idea of rest.
- B. The author highlights the importance of God's rest by using the example of an entire generation of Israelites missing out on God's promises and God's rest found in a life built in the land promised by God—a good and fruitful land. Although the Israelites heard the message of God, they did not benefit from that message because the people didn't respond to the message the

way they needed to. Instead of doing what God said to do, the people disobeyed God which caused them to miss out on the blessings God intended for them to experience. While God lovingly and generously makes promises to humanity for their good, only some people receive these promises.

- C. The people of God need to respond positively to the message of God by listening to God when He speaks. God is still actively using His word to work in people's lives,
⁷ Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, ⁸ Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As on the day of trial in the wilderness, ⁹ Where your fathers put Me to the test, And saw My works for forty years. ¹⁰ "Therefore I was angry with this generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they did not know My ways'; ¹¹ as I swore in My anger, 'They certainly shall not enter My rest.'" (Heb. 3:7-11)
- D. Pay attention to the way the author of Hebrews understands the nature of the Bible and how God speaks through it. The Holy Spirit is still speaking through the words found in the Old Testament. This message is found in Psalm 95:7-11. Hebrews was written between 560 and 1560 years after the Psalms and yet the author assumes it is still relevant and God is still using His word in people's lives.¹ The Holy Spirit, as God, is speaking and we can hear His voice through the words of Scripture. Just because the Bible was written thousands of years ago, doesn't mean God is no longer working through it. The Bible is still relevant for our lives today.
- E. This Psalm is reflecting on the events in the history of Israel when the generation whom God rescued out of slavery in Egypt regularly disobeyed God and were punished by God as He didn't allow them to enter the land He promised to His people ("on the day of trial in the wilderness", v. 7 and "saw My works for forty years", v. 9). The book of Psalms is being used to refer to the forty years of wilderness wandering experienced by the first generation of Israelites after leaving Egypt (Num. 32:13)—one year for each day the good land was spied out (Num. 14:34).² The first generation who had seen God's work and heard His message from Moses wandered in the wilderness for forty years until all of them died off.³ The second generation, with a few exceptions (Joshua and Caleb), were the ones who were allowed to enter the Promised Land, the land of Israel, and create a life there.⁴
- F. The reason God gave for why He punished the people and didn't allow them to enter the land that was promised was because they refused to believe in Him and they consistently disrespected Him (Num. 14:11). These people looked down on what God had to say with contempt and refused to trust Him.⁵ Despite seeing God's presence and witnessing all the miracles God performed on their behalf, the people regularly complained against God. Even in this punishment God kindly provided for all their needs (Dt. 2:7). God is so good and gracious!

¹ Hebrews is typically dated between 64-70 CE while the Psalms are dated 1500-500 BCE. Minimally then, there is a five hundred and sixty year gap between the writing of these two books but up to a 1570 year gap.

² Exodus 16:35, Numbers 14:26-35

³ Not even Aaron (Num. 20:24) or Moses (Dt. 4:21) entered the land that was promised—although both were blessed by God in the afterlife.

⁴ Numbers 14:30-31, 26:65, 32:11-12

⁵ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Numbers 14:11 "be disrespectful" and "not believe"

- G. Those whose hearts were fully set on God were able to enter the land God promised (Num. 14:20-24, Dt. 1:36, Josh. 14:6-14). In the first generation, the faithful were few. The people who lived before God with faith—active trust in God—were blessed by God and inherited the promises God made. Those who trusted God had a type of animating force to their life—they were motivated differently.⁶ Faith expresses an uncommon attitude toward God that accepts God’s authority and guidance in their life as they respond positively to His word.⁷
- H. The author of Hebrews is using the contrast between the faithful and the unfaithful as observed in the first generation of Israelites to point to an important spiritual lesson he wants the church to understand and react to. Here is the pattern of life being used by the author of Hebrews: 1) Those without faith live a life of disobedience to God and are rightly punished for it while 2) those with faith live a life of obedience to God and are rightly rewarded for it—by inheriting the promises of God. These Biblical truths are what the author of Hebrews is drawing the attention of the disciples toward.
- I. Most Israelites didn’t believe God would do what He promised. The people who were already in the land were too powerful and the Israelites knew they couldn’t drive them out with their own power. The Israelites didn’t trust God, so they refused to go take the land—until it was too late (Num. 14:1-10, 39-45). Even though God promises to give the descendants of Abraham the good land, the people in general didn’t believe what God said because they didn’t trust Him to tell them the truth.
- J. This negative example is applied to disciples in the church as a warning (Heb. 4:10-11). If we decide to disobey God, just as they did, we will experience the same fate as they did—punishment because of the guilt from disobedience. If God is working in our soul, we need to listen to God’s word (“Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me”, v. 8). These individuals who didn’t trust God caused their own heart to be or make stubborn.⁸ Being resistant to the work God wants to do in your life is the definition of what it means to be hard hearted. This type of heart attitude makes God angry (“as when they provoked Me”, v. 8)—see also Mk. 3:5. Since this dynamic is a real spiritual danger we all face, we need to make every effort to enter the rest that God graciously makes available to us by putting effort into our pursuit of God, our relationship to Him, and a life of obedience to God’s word.
- K. This hardness of heart led to two significant consequences. The first was a heart that keeps straying away from God (“They always go astray in their heart”, v. 10) and the second is a lack of knowledge about God and His ways (“they did not know My ways”, v. 10). Those who have a stubborn attitude toward God will be negatively affected by their inappropriate and unjustified attitude. This movement away from God and ignorance are both culpable because they are the consequence of an improper attitude toward God which is under our control. Those who have access to God’s word and still fail to understand Him are at fault.
- L. The outcome of having a hard heart toward God is missing out on the blessings of God (“They certainly shall not enter My rest”, v. 11). God’s promises will not apply to those who have

⁶ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Numbers 14:24 “different spirit”

⁷ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Numbers 14:24 “fully”

⁸ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 3:8 “Do not harden”

stubborn and hard hearts—those who lack trust in God. Those who refuse to obey. We should not think that every promise God makes is automatically received by everyone, there are conditions to meet to experience the benefits of God’s promises.

- M. Are you hardening your heart toward God? Do you resist and refuse to do what He tells you to do? When the Holy Spirit uses God’s word to draw you closer to Himself, do you pull away? If you feel the pull of the Holy Spirit in your heart drawing you toward God and a life of obedience to Him, act now. Don’t put it off. Don’t delay it. Don’t think about resisting God until you’ve had the chance to live your life and have some fun first. There is no guarantee that you will have the ability to turn to God in the future. In fact, resisting God today hardens our hearts, increases sin’s influence in our lives, and makes it more difficult to turn to God tomorrow. If you don’t want to respond positively to God today, you will be less likely to want to do so tomorrow. Right now is the best opportunity you will ever have to move toward God.

III. The Promise of Entering God’s Rest (Heb. 4:1-3)

- A. Now that the theme has been clearly identified in God’s word, the author moves to the lesson that should be taken away from the Biblical truth that has been identified. Through Biblical instruction, we have come to understand while God is speaking through His word and those who disobey God’s message will be punished, we are prepared to hear the spiritual lesson that needs to be learned. God offers us the spiritual benefit of rest, but we need to continue to be faithful to receive it. Disobedience prevents us from receiving the benefits and promises of God.
- B. The spiritual lesson the author of Hebrews wants disciples to understand from the Old Testament text is summarized this way,
- ¹ Therefore, we must fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short *of it*. ² For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also *did*; but the word they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united with those who listened with faith. ³ For we who have believed enter *that* rest, just as He has said, “As I swore in My anger, They certainly shall not enter My rest,” although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. (Heb. 4:1-3)
- C. Let’s start by noticing the promise of rest is still open and available to people today (“a promise remains of entering His rest”, v. 1). The accessibility of this promise is repeated in Hebrews 4:9. While the Israelites were promised rest when they reached and conquered the land of Israel, disciples are promised rest from all the difficulties and challenges of life when they enter eternity—this is clearly communicated in chapter 11. There is a heavenly home that everyone who lives with faith has their hope set on (Heb. 11:16, 39-40).
- D. Rest in the ultimate sense being used in this text happens when this life is over (Rev. 14:13). The full expression of the blessings and benefits of Jesus are experienced when God fulfills completely every promise made to those who believe in Him. In this life as we live in this world, God’s promises are only partially fulfilled (Heb. 2:8). While faithful disciples do enjoy many advantages in this life, the maximum enjoyment of what Jesus offers is still future (Mt. 11:28-29).

- E. Disciples live the Christian life with a specific attitude (“Therefore, we must fear”, v. 1). Knowing that it is possible, and many people will, come short of inheriting the promises of God; disciples pursue God with an attitude of seriousness knowing what is at stake. Disciples regard God with an attitude of respect and reverence.⁹ Those who understand the magnitude of who God is and the role He plays in their life and the world, energetically obey God’s word. They listen with faith (“those who listened with faith”, v. 2). Not everyone who hears God’s word benefits from it, only those who respond the way God requires benefit (“we have had the good news preached to us, just as they did; but the word they heard did not benefit them”, v. 2).
- F. Pay attention to the warning being offered here along with the promise: don’t come short of entering God’s rest. Some people will miss out on the promises and blessings of God because they refuse to trust Him. They will spend eternity separated from God and everything good. In fact, this is everyone’s natural spiritual condition, we fall short of the glory of God (Rm. 3:23). Unless we change from our natural condition, we will come up short of God’s promises. All come short, only some enter God’s rest and receive His promise of eternal life.
- G. Are you living your life in such a way that you will enter the rest of God when this life is over? Will God say to you, well done good and faithful servant? Are you listening to God’s word with faith? Do you have an attitude of respect for God? Those who trust God allow God to tell them what to do with their life. God’s word informs disciples how to think. God’s character shapes who disciples are. God’s commands tell disciples how to act in a moral way.

IV. The Desired Response (Heb. 3:12-15)

- A. Considering what has been said so far, the author of Hebrews strongly encourages a specific type of response to God and His word,
 - ¹² Take care, brothers *and sisters*, that there will not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another every day, as long as it is *still* called “today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ if we keep the beginning of our commitment firm until the end, ¹⁵ while it is said, “Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.” (Heb. 3:12-15)
- B. A condition must be met by everyone who enters the rest offered by God (“if we keep the beginning of our commitment firm until the end”, v. 14). Our commitment to Jesus must stay strong for the entirety of our lives. We hear the often-repeated advice throughout Hebrews, keep moving forward. We can’t drift, neglect, or fade away from the message of Jesus. Those who fulfill this requirement with endurance and perseverance toward God’s word are connected to Jesus in a way that will benefit from God’s promises (“For we have become partakers of Christ”, v. 14).
- C. We must avoid the mistake the first generation of Israelites made, having a heart that refuses to believe God’s word—which is evil (“Take care, brothers and sisters, that there will not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God”, v. 12). Unbelief isn’t morally neutral, it’s immoral from God’s perspective. The same warning we heard in the

⁹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 4:1 “fear”

first message is being heard again—avoid the danger of falling/drifting away from God. This happens when individuals abandon the cognitive position that accepts Jesus as the communicator of God’s true message.¹⁰ Disciples should be diligent to be on the lookout to ensure this doesn’t happen to them.¹¹ Fostering a deepening attitude of trust in Jesus is critical. Dealing with questions and doubts is important. Disciples can’t develop the attitude that doesn’t trust in or rely on Jesus.

- D. An important factor that encourages and enables disciples to stay connected to Jesus in a healthy way is good relationships with others who are following Jesus (“But encourage one another every day”, v. 13). Disciples earnestly support one another and call one another to a response or action.¹² Regular and ongoing contact with other disciples in Jesus centered relationships provide accountability and encouragement to stay connected to Jesus. This encouragement happens every day.
- E. Notice the nature and effects of willfully choosing to disobey God and sin through unbelief and disobedience. Rebellion against God makes our attitudes stubborn and inflexible toward God (“hardened by”, v. 13) and it deceives us so we can’t see, understand, or accept God’s true perspective (“the deceitfulness of sin”, v. 13).¹³ Sin always has negative effects on us even though it can be pleasurable and enjoyable (Heb. 11:25).
- F. Are you fostering healthy relationships with others who have a passion to pursue and obey Jesus? Are you living your Christian life in isolation? Healthy disciples develop relationships with others with whom we can go through life together in a way that encourages us to be faithful to Jesus so that we are not deceived and hardened by sin or doubt. We need to be open and honest with others about our spiritual questions and struggles so that we can find the support we need. When we live our Christian life in isolation, we become much more vulnerable to the negative influences of sin that might cause us to fall away from God. Don’t allow this to happen to you, the safety of your soul relies on it!

V. Conclusion

- A. Once again, we hear a strong warning from the author of Hebrews about our spiritual health and the condition of our soul. It is easy to drift away from God and abandon Him. We must actively protect ourselves from this fate and resist it by taking proactive steps to keep moving forward in the Christian life. Our Jesus journey should be participated in with an attitude of seriousness because the stakes are high.
- B. Playing around with and entertaining sin in our life will always have negative consequences on us. The more sin we allow into our life the more likely it is that we will move away from God. This is simply how sin works in our lives. Therefore, we need to watch out for the influences of sin in our lives because our spiritual health depends on our attitude of alertness.

¹¹ Therefore let’s make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by *following* the same example of disobedience. (Heb. 4:11)

¹⁰ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 3:12 “falls away”

¹¹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 3:12 “Take care”

¹² Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 3:13 “encourage”

¹³ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 3:13 “hardened by” and “deceitfulness”