

Striving to Receive God's Word

Culture of Grace: Practices & Habits of GracePoint Church / Hebrews 4:1-13 / December 28, 2025

Introduction:

Here at GracePoint, we break in each new year by covering culture building means of grace in our "Culture of Grace Series." Means of grace are things God has called us to pursue that are designed to be channels for His grace to flow into our lives. Three primary means of grace are the Word, prayer, and worship. So, we open each year desiring to strengthen our commitment to these things. This morning, we will consider the significance of the Word which Hebrews 4:12 describes as, "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." To understand what this is fully communicating, we need to see how it fits in the context. Note how verse 12 begins, "For the word of God is." This tells us that this statement is giving a reason or a ground or a support for what has come before it, particularly verse 11, which is the culmination of an entire argument in verses 1-10. So, let's begin with the main point of verses 1-11, which hold a call to,

Live in the Hope of Rest

Verses 1 and 11 give similar calls. Look at verse 1, "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it." Now, move down to verse 11, "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience." Verse 1 calls us to fear not entering the God's promised rest and verse 11 calls us to strive to enter that rest, showing what we fear. We fear falling by a particular sort of disobedience. Verse 1 and 11 both hold out the promise of God's rest as worth pursuing and warn of missing it. In verses 2-10, we are given compounding reasons and conclusions to explain why we should fear and what this disobedience is. There's a lot here, but I will move quickly through it to focus on the main point. Start in verse 1 and read through 2, "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 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." First, we are given a reason to fear. We should fear failing to enter God's rest because there are people who received good news just like us but failed to benefit from it. Who are these people? They were identified in chapter three. After calling us to hold fast to our confession of hope in the gospel, the author quotes Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3:7-11, saying, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, "They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways." As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."'" David wrote Psalm 95 to call Israel not to turn away from God like their fathers did in the wilderness because God promised that those who rebelled would not enter his rest. The author of Hebrews is saying, "those in the wilderness heard the good news just like us but it didn't benefit them." Why? Our passage says it was because they didn't believe like those who listened to God. Hebrews 3:19 says it more plainly, "they were unable to enter because of unbelief." The warning is to fear unbelief because it will keep you from God's promised rest that still stands. Next, we are given reasons it still stands in verses 3-5, "For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, 'As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest,"' although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.' And again in this passage he said, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" Without getting lost in the weeds, the point is God's promise still stands for those who have believed because this place of rest it was not ultimately tied to the exodus or Canaan, but to God's rest at creation. Notice how he continues in verses 6-10, "Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.'"

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.” Because this rest remains available, and there are people who failed to enter it because of their unbelief, David still speaks when he says “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” And we know this still speaks because God spoke this through David after Joshua led them into the promised land. This brings us to his conclusion in verses 9-10, “So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.” The Sabbath rest remains available to God’s people because it is a rest from our work like God rested from his work. This is the promise of the gospel, rest from our labors. This rest is both experienced in salvation now and will be fully realized in salvation to come. Before we move on, take in what this is telling us. To believe is to live in the hope of rest. Rest from our burdens, strife, anxieties, and sorrows. Is this not the ultimate longing of our hearts? Yet, as one commentator rightly said, “‘Rest’ is a quality which has elude man’s quest” (Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 117). People seek rest in many ways—through retirement, medication, vacations, and even various vices—yet it always seems to elude us. Hear God holding out the promise of true rest and saying to your heart, “you will find it through belief.” Make sure this is where you begin today. Rest is unattainable apart from Jesus Christ. He died to purchase your rest, and God says come to Him through Jesus to find it. Believe today and find that rest. Then, understand the call of verses 1 and 11. Because this is God’s promise to those who believe, we fear unbelief because it steals our rest now and strive to not fall into unbelief because it will keep you from God’s full and final rest to come. That is the exhortation, but here is where it gets important to understand the connection between verses 11 and 12. Striving carries the idea of an intense and strenuous effort to reach the desired goal. That sounds like work, doesn’t it? But the rest God promises involves resting from our works now. How is this not a contradiction? Because the link between verses 11 and 12 shows us we don’t strive to work harder,

We Strive to Receive God’s Word

Verses 12 and 13 show God has given us a powerful tool. Notice the flow of verses 11-13, “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For 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, and 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 account.” Because the disobedience is unbelief, the way we strive to reach God’s rest is through belief, which comes by receiving God’s word. By receiving it, I mean trusting it, embracing it, and letting it satisfy our souls. Verse 12 is designed to give support for this, “For,” or because, “the word of God is living and active.” What does it mean that it is living? Listen to a repeated command from chapters 3 and 4. Three times, in 3:7-8, 15 and 4:7, Psalm 95:7-8 is repeated, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” As the words God spoke through David in Psalm 95 still spoke to Israel after the wilderness, they still speak to the original recipients of this letter and to us today. Not only does God’s Word still speak, but it is “active,” or “effective.” How? By piercing to the depths of the thoughts and intentions of our hearts in a way that exposes us before God. That sounds harsh at first, but it is actually a beautiful promise. Look at Hebrews 3:12-13, “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” This is similar to the call of our passage. We don’t want to stray from God, so we should ensure our hearts are believing by exhorting one another every day, which involves encouragement and rebuke by speaking God’s truth to each other. Note the purpose, “that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” John Piper unpacks this well, saying, “The only reason anybody sins is because at some level they are (culpably) deceived. They start believing the lies of sin instead of the promises of God. Sin whispers through the desires of the flesh and the rationalizations of the mind... you will not have a chance in the future if you don’t cheat on this test... you will lose the one person who seems to care for you if you don’t compromise your sexual standards...”

you won't have job security if you speak up about the dishonest practices at work... your life will be wasted in this relationship if you don't get a divorce... only a fool would go on looking weak instead of getting some kind of revenge. Every one of those statements is a lie. It's what Hebrews 3:13 calls 'the deceitfulness of sin.'... those lies sometimes lodge themselves very deep in the heart as thoughts and intentions that seem unshakably true because of the hardness of deception... In that condition unbelief has the upper hand." To fight unbelief, we need God's Word cut through sin's deception, exposing things we don't even realize are in our hearts. And what the Word exposes, God will refine. So, here is the full exhortation of our passage. Pursue God's Word because its power helps you fight unbelief to live in the hope of rest. Now, to conclude our time together, I want to end with two ways to lean into this exhortation in 2026. First,

1) Purposefully Approach God's Word

When we understand the danger of unbelief and the powerful purpose of God's Word in fighting sin's deception, it should change our approach to God's word. Let's take our weekly corporate worship alone. Each week, we come here in one of three states with our faith. We are either walking in faith, wrestling with unbelief, or sin has deceived our hearts and is leading us towards unbelief. In any of these states, God's Word still speaks and is effective. If we are walking in faith, God's Word will strengthen faith for an upcoming battle. If we are wrestling with unbelief, the word of God will revive faith. And if we are being deceived by sin, God's Word will expose that deception. So, each week, we should purposefully come to worship knowing our need to have the word of God discern the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Everything changes when you approach God's Word understanding its power and purpose. You see truths about God as designed to anchor your heart in the power of His promises. You notice promises with commands, so instead of them feeling like a chore, you see how they expose unbelief in His goodness. Then, as you turn to Him, you discover the power His Word gives you to rest in Him. Purposefully approach God's Word with a desire for it to do its penetrating work to live in the hope of rest. Second,

2) Humbly Trust the Spirit to Work through the Word

One of Satan's greatest deceptions is making you think you have to fight in your strength. Never forget, we enter God's promised rest through belief, not work. Do you ever hear a command or encouragement from scripture and get discouraged because it feels daunting? Maybe even now, you're thinking, "wait, I have to strive to believe?" The purpose of calls like Hebrews 4 is not to load you down with burden, but to lift that burden by revealing the source of power. Turn to 1 Thessalonians with me. In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, Paul says he is thankful for this church because of their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of how in our Lord Jesus Christ." If we stopped there, we are tempted to focus on their strength. But verses 4-5 say, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." The word came in power and in the Holy Spirit. In other words, God was at work. So, what part did they play? Look at verse 6, "you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit." They received the Word with full conviction and the Spirit worked. We strive to receive the Word with the conviction that it is God's living and active word, and when that is combined with the Spirit in us, the battle with unbelief is waged. This is why Paul calls the word of God, "the sword of the Spirit." We don't strive to work, we strive to trust. God does the work. Family, there is always a promise with the call. Consider our passage. This call is bookended with powerful promises. Listen to Hebrews 3:1-6, "Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house... Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope." Now, look at Hebrews 4:14-16, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Our passage is meant to discern the thoughts and intentions of your heart, not to leave you discouraged, but help you cling to the hope of your gospel confession and Jesus’ faithfulness. To give you confidence to draw near to God for mercy and grace in whatever state your faith is in. So, let His word pierce your heart, but then, humbly trust the Spirit to fight your unbelief. That is striving to live in the hope of rest. We strive to trust in all that God has promised to be for us. Trusting in the power of His Spirit working through the power of His Word.

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, I want to invite you to change the way you live today. Draw near to God’s throne in confidence because of the hope of your confession. If you are full of faith, seek to receive God’s Word for a battle that lies ahead of you. If you are wrestling with faith, receive God’s Word to revive your faith. And if you have been trapped in sin’s deception, hear God’s Word exposing your unbelief and seek to find grace to help in your time of need. We invite a response to the Word each week because that is what it means to receive it. So, respond today, whether it is by coming to kneel before God in a posture of humility, receiving prayer from a member of our prayer team, or singing in faith for those around you. Draw near to the throne of grace because of your faithful high priest, Jesus Christ. Would you pray with me as we respond together?