

Reading as Conversation

September 4, 2022

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Mark 4:22-24

Session Outline

1. God's Word Speaks (Hebrews 4:12)
2. God's Word Is Profitable (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
3. God's Word Requires a Response (Mark 4:22-24)

Theological Theme

God's Word is living, active, and practical for daily life. We should recognize the importance of Scripture and be committed to knowing it and obeying it.



Leader Guide

Reading as Conversation

Introduction

There are leadership courses taught on it. Marriage counselors refer to it often and anyone who wants to have healthy relationships needs to know how to do it well. Listening is a skill that some people do very well, but most people could do much better.

Because communication is vital in any relationship, there are some things we can be intentional about to improve our skills in this area. Communicating involves both talking and listening and we all need to be challenged about how well we listen. Too many people spend more time thinking about what they want to say next than they do really listening to what the other person has to say. Just as this can be an issue in our interpersonal relationships, it can also affect our relationship with the Lord.

- ❓ Who is the best listener you know? What makes them a good listener?
- ❓ Do you ever struggle to listen to the Lord? What makes this difficult?

Session Summary

God uses His Word to speak to His people, and it is the wise believer who knows God's Word, listens to His Word, and obeys His Word. Scripture has been given to guide people to be in relationship with the Lord. It is full of instructions, warnings, and advice for daily living.

God's Word is written and available to anyone who seeks to know it. For those who desire to live a godly life, Scripture is clear and practical. Every person must decide how he or she will approach God's Word and how it will be received.

1. God's Word Speaks (Hebrews 4:12)

One of the primary ways God speaks is through Scripture. Though the words were written thousands of years ago, Hebrews makes it clear that every word still matters and is relevant today. In describing the Word as “living and effective” the writer of Hebrews stressed how applicable it still is. Think about how Scripture is living to you. Think about a time you read something in the Bible and immediately saw how it related to a specific situation you were facing this year. The Bible contains timeless truths that apply in every age.

God's Word is not just living, it is also effective. The word translated as “effective” carries the implication of being active or powerful. This should be an encouragement to believers that when we dedicate ourselves to knowing and obeying the Word of God, we are investing ourselves in something that matters. When we take God's Word in and apply it to every area of our lives, it will equip us to live victorious lives in the battles we continually face.




How have you seen the reality that God's Word is living and effective in your life?

The illustration of Scripture as a sword gives a visual that speaks volumes. A two-edged sword is one that is sharp on both sides. It can cut in any and every direction. That is exactly what the Word of God does for believers. It slices to the heart of the matter in the things we face and in our own hearts. Have ever felt like a sermon was written and preached precisely for you even though it was taught to many other people at the same time? This helps us understand what it means to say Scripture cuts and opens you up to the truth. This is so valuable, as we are in constant need of wisdom and discernment. We live in a world with many competing voices shouting that they know the truth about what we should be doing. But God's Word is the absolute truth, and the Lord speaks to us directly through it.



Describe a time when a sermon or teaching from the Bible seemed like it was written exactly for you.

The double-edged sword of God's Word also has a fine sharp tip that pierces with precision into our hearts and minds. God's Word can get into very difficult, deep places. The division between bone and marrow or soul and spirit describe areas that are nearly inseparable. Not just any tool can facilitate that kind of division but the Scriptures can. The Bible is God's way of speaking into the deepest parts of us so we can know His heart and how He wants us to live.

-  Application: What is situation you are facing where you need the Word to cut through the surface about and reveal truth?


2. God's Word is Profitable (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

How is it possible that words can be living, effective, and profitable to those who hear and live it? This passage tells us all Scripture is God breathed. This means it was inspired by Almighty God, and He gave it directly to be recorded and used by those who seek Him. This describes more than just being inspired or motivated to write something. There are many who have written and developed things that feel inspired or even anointed, but Paul stressed to Timothy that Scripture is different because it came directly from God. This is true for every Word of Scripture, not just select parts. That is what sets it apart as the primary Word we need and why it is considered so profitable.


God-breathed

The Bible originates with God. Claims of origins carry great significance because authority lives in the Creator. This is why people invest such Herculean efforts in trying to disprove God as the earth's Creator and in questioning the authenticity of the Bible. Admitting to God's authorship is an acceptance of his authority over every aspect of life. By stating that Scriptures are God breathed, Paul established the Bible's claim as God's authoritative Word over all people.

These verses list several specific ways Scripture profits the person who studies and applies it. The first is by teaching. God's Word is truth and teaches us what we need to know about God as well about mankind and the whole world. In a world that constantly promotes human wisdom and false teachings about both god and man, we need to be focused on truth and how it applies to our lives. When you aren't sure who or what to believe, you can have confidence that Scripture alone is infallible and inerrant.

-  What are some lies that the world teaches about God or people? How does the Bible speak to these same things? Why is it crucial we listen to God through His Word? How do we practice this?

Since no one is perfect aside from Jesus, we all need correction at times. It is easy to let wrong thinking or a bad attitude slip into your life. Sometimes sin seems less dangerous than it is, and we justify our behavior, but the truth is we all need to recognize when we are choosing the wrong things. When we refuse to acknowledge our need to hear God's voice and follow His guidance, we give in to our selfish nature that draws us toward arrogance and pride. God's Word is our great measuring stick that shows us the truth we need to realize where we fall short and guides us back on the right path.

-  How has Scripture shown you where you need to make a change recently? How did you respond?

Most of us appreciate when someone points out an issue and offers a solution to fix the problem more than if they just point out the issue with no suggested solution. That is exactly what the Word of God does when it reveals where we go wrong but teaches us how to live in righteousness too. Righteousness is the goal for any Christ follower. The phrase “training in righteousness” reinforces that this is a process. Training is about conscious effort over time to see a desired result. None of us reads the Bible one time and automatically starts living the way it describes. This process takes time and intentionality based on the Word of God.

The good news is that Scripture makes clear the goal for our lives. According to these verses in 2 Timothy, the end goal is for every believer to be complete and equipped for the life God has for them. When we listen rightly, God’s Word does a work in our lives that only He can. When you know and obey the Word you will reap the benefits that Scripture describes including being complete as a Christian and equipped for the life that God has for you. Part of Paul’s emphasis on being complete and equipped was to remind us that God’s plans are bigger and more eternal than our own. When we surrender our plans to God’s, He can do far greater with our lives than we could ever imagine.




Application: How is God using Scripture to equip you for His purposes? How are you seeking to listen to Him through His Word regularly?


3. God’s Word Requires a Response (Mark 4:21-24)

In the book of Mark, Jesus taught a parable that helps us understand our responsibility when it comes to the Word of God. The Word is truth and therefore reveals and exposes truth to all people. Our job is to not to hide the light but to help others see it for themselves. If you know the truth and believe the truth, you have the responsibility to do something with it. God did not give us the truth so that we would keep it for ourselves but so we could share it with the world. The goal in our sharing is that others would experience the same truth we have.

If you’ve ever had a conversation with someone who is distracted and not paying close attention, you know there is a difference between hearing and really listening. It is possible to hear sounds coming from someone’s mouth without receiving or understanding anything they said. That is what Jesus stressed when He instructed, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen.” Once we hear the Word of God, we are then responsible for how we handle that Word or what we do with it.


 How would you describe the difference between hearing and really listening?

One of the things to recognize about God's Word is that you always have a choice in how to respond to it. You get to decide if you will choose to believe what it says more than what the world says. While you get to choose how you will respond, God's Word always requires a response. There is no room for excuses or shifting responsibility to someone else. God's Word requires and deserves a response from every person who has the opportunity of hearing or reading it.

 How have you responded to God's Word to this point in your life? How is God speaking to you about that today?

Jesus told us we are accountable for what we know and how we respond. That is why it matters who we listen to and who we put ourselves under to learn from. We want to be taught by those who take into consideration the whole counsel of God's Word and not those who pick and choose the parts they will teach and believe. Scripture tells us God will respond to us in the same measure as we respond to Him. Jesus made it clear that we will receive more understanding of God's truth as we respond to and steward what we have already received. Do you cherish the Word of God as you should? Do you find it life giving and satisfying or are you uninterested and going through the motions when it comes to hearing it?

The good news is that when you hear the Word of God and receive it with joy and thanksgiving, God will continue to feed you from His Word to enable you to grow and thrive in righteousness. Developing godly habits in relation to knowing and living out Scripture will reap rewards that are immeasurable.

 Application: What godly habit about receiving and listening to God's Word do you need to commit to develop in your own life?

Conclusion

God's Word is His conversation with His people. We need to be intentional about how we communicate with the Lord and that includes the way we respond to what He says to us through Scripture. Because everything in the Bible is God-breathed and inspired by Him, it all carries ultimate weight and should be valued. We need to know what the Lord has to say to us, and His Word is the primary way He speaks.

The Word is living and effective, and it applies to our daily lives. Those who learn the Word and obey it will experience benefits that come from this godly practice. The truth of the Word leads to correction when you are in the wrong. It also offers course correction so that you know how to change to pursue righteousness. Because it is a process to become the person God designed us to be, this training in righteousness is ongoing, and we can develop godly habits to keep us on task until we become complete and equipped through His power.

Now is the time to start on those godly habits. Why not continue the conversation the Lord started with you? You can begin conversing with others about what you have learned this week in the Word. Choose to live differently as you put the truth in to practice in your own life. Memorize the Word so that it is hidden in your heart and never apart from you. There are many ways you can choose to respond to God's Word. The key is to be intentional and get started.

- ❓ What has God revealed to you about your need to further listen to Him through His Word?
- ❓ Who will you talk to about God's Word this week? How does listening to God's Word enable you to speak to others about Him?
- ❓ What new habit will you commit to in order to listen to God's Word regularly? What action do you need to take today?

Prayer of Response

Close in prayer, thanking God for His Word. Ask Him to give you ears to listen and respond as He calls you to today.

Additional Resources

- *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee, Douglas Stewart
- *Living by the Book* by Howard Hendricks, William Hendricks
- *According to Plan* by Graeme Goldsworthy

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Call to Action

Memorize 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Apply the questions to the passage; and read three chapters from the Bible this week with a listening posture.

For Next Week

Session Title

- Reading For Intent

Main Passages

- John 5:39-40

Session Outline

1. The Word Proves True (John 5:37-42)
2. The Word Must Be Treated Correctly (2 Timothy 2:14-17; Revelation 22:18-19)
3. The Word Keeps Us from Sin (1 John 2:3-6)

Memorize

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

- Hebrews 4:12

Historical Context of Hebrews

Purpose

The author of Hebrews wanted to exalt Jesus Christ. A verbal indication of this desire is the consistent and repetitive use of the Greek word *kreitton*, which means “more excellent,” “superior,” or “better.” This word is the common thread that binds together the complex and subtle theological argumentation of the book. In comparison to everything else in the divine plan for creation and redemption, Jesus Christ is superior. The author described the superiority of the new covenant to the old covenant because he wanted his readers to remember that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the law and God’s promises in the Old Testament. In this light, readers should be careful about “recrucifying the Son of God and holding him up to contempt” (6:6). The author wanted to move these believers from their arrested state of development into a pattern of growth in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Author

The text of Hebrews does not identify its author. What we do know is that the author was a second-generation Christian, for he said he received the confirmed message of Christ from “those who heard” Jesus himself (2:3). Because Paul claimed his gospel was revealed directly by the Lord (1Co 15:8; Gl 1:12), it is doubtful that he was the author of Hebrews. The author was familiar with Timothy, but he referred to him as “our brother” (13:23), rather than as “my true son in the faith,” as Paul did (1Tm 1:2).

Scholars have proposed the following persons as authors: Luke, Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Apollos, Timothy, Philip, Peter, Silas, Jude, and Aristion. Ultimately it does not matter that the identity of the author is now lost. We should be satisfied with the fact that early Christians received the letter as inspired and authoritative Scripture and that its value for Christian discipleship is unquestioned.

Setting

The author of Hebrews knew his recipients well since he called them “brothers and sisters” (3:12; 7:5; 10:19; 13:22) and “dearly loved friends” (6:9). Like the writer, they were converts who had heard the gospel through the earliest followers of Christ (2:3). Scholars have speculated that those to whom the book was written were a breakaway group such as a house church that had separated from the main church. Another theory holds that the recipients were former Jewish priests who had converted to Christianity, and that they were considering a return to Judaism (at least in conformity to certain practices) in order to avoid persecution from fellow Jews. Another theory holds that the group was not necessarily Jewish since Gentile Christians also revered the Old Testament as Scripture.

Special Features

The epistle to the Hebrews is a tribute to the incomparable Son of God and an encouragement to the author’s persecuted fellow believers. The author feared that his Christian readers were wavering in their endurance. The writer had a twofold approach. (1) He exalted Jesus Christ, who is addressed as both “God” and “the Son of Man,” and is thus the only one who can serve as mediator between God and humanity. (2) He exhorted his fellow Christians to “go on to maturity” and live “by faith.”

Extended Commentary

Hebrews 4:12

4:1–16 The author now drew the readers into examining their own personal faith as the Word of God shines its penetrating light upon the heart. Faithfulness begins with a proper internal disposition. The living and effective Word of God probes into the deepest part of a person like a surgeon's knife to discern his innermost thoughts and intentions. God's Word reveals to him both his ingrained wickedness and the saving way of faith. At that critical point, when the divine judge reveals himself through his Word, the hearer must make every effort to enter the divine rest by believing.

If the result of unbelief and disobedience to God is exclusion from divine rest, then the result of true faith and faithfulness to God is entrance into everlasting divine rest. Such a rest was not available through the ministry of Joshua in the OT since it was reserved for the ministry of the NT "Joshua." The name Jesus is a Greek derivative of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "the Lord is salvation." The ministry of Joshua did not bring people Sabbath rest. Only through the superior ministry of Jesus the Son of God may a person enter divine rest. Only through the great high priest, who has come from heaven and identified with human beings in their weakness, may we approach the throne of grace with boldness.¹

2 Timothy 3:16-17

3:16–17 Inspired means "breathed out by God." Because Scripture comes from God himself, it is profitable in many ways, ultimately leading us to righteousness, maturity, and service. All Scripture refers to the OT, but by implication to the writings of the NT as well (1Tm 5:18; 2Pt 3:15–16).²

Mark 4:22-24

4:21–34 Mark concludes his section on Jesus teaching in parables with four epigrams (vv. 21–25), two parables about the kingdom of God (vv. 26–29, 30–32), and a brief explanation of Jesus's parabolic teaching method (vv. 33–34).

4:21–23 Lamp refers to a small clay lamp that was placed on a lampstand to maximize illumination. The lamp represents Jesus. A basket refers to a grain container that would hold about two gallons. The rhetorical questions assume that light should not be hidden. The sayings in v. 22 are an example of synonymous parallelism that emphasizes that Jesus is only temporarily to be concealed.

4:24–25 Pay attention to what you hear reinforces vv. 9 and 23 and the emphasis on hearing in vv. 13–20. Jesus's words to his disciples are almost the opposite of those given to outsiders in v. 12. Hearing is vital (Rm 10:17), and God will grant more revelation and understanding to those who listen to and respond. Some will neither hear nor benefit from revelation (Mk 4:25).³

References

1. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

Author Bio

Gordon Fee (Reading the Bible for All It's Worth)

Gordon D. Fee (PhD, University of Southern California) is Professor Emeritus of New Testament Studies at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia.

Douglas Stuart (Reading the Bible for All It's Worth)

Dr. Douglas Stuart (Ph.D., Harvard University) is professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is an internationally known scholar who works in many ancient languages including Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Egyptian, Ugaritic, Akkadian, Syriac, and Arabic. He is an expert in the cultures of the Middle East, as well as a pastor and father of eight.

Howard Hendricks (Living by the Book)

Dr. Howard G. Hendricks remains a legendary figure in the memory of countless Christians worldwide. In sixty years at Dallas Theological Seminary, "Prof" Hendricks is estimated to have taught more than 30,000 students, and through them now impacts tens of millions throughout the world. He ministered in more than eighty countries through speaking engagements, radio, books, and recordings (including the DVD series, *Living By The Book*). For a period of time he was also a Bible teacher and chaplain for the Dallas Cowboys football team. Dr. Hendricks and his wife Jeanne were married for sixty-five years, and he was the father of four children, five grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

William Hendricks (Living by the Book)

Bill Hendricks is Co-Founder and President of Global Centre for Giftedness, which seeks to mobilize a worldwide movement of Giftedness Guides -- people who know how to help others discover their giftedness and then apply those insights to the major areas of their lives. This is an outgrowth of his longtime consulting practice, the Giftedness Center, which helps individuals think through strategic life and career decisions. In addition, Bill serves as the Executive Director for Christian Leadership at The Hendricks Center, a leadership development initiative of Dallas Theological Seminary. He holds degrees from Harvard University, Boston University, and Dallas Theological Seminary, and is currently a doctoral student at Bakke Graduate University. He is married to Lynn Turpin Hendricks and is the father of three accomplished daughters.

Graeme Goldsworthy (According to Plan)

Graeme Goldsworthy is an Australian Anglican and Old Testament scholar. He was formerly lecturer in Old Testament, biblical theology and hermeneutics at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia and continues to teach there part time. Goldsworthy is the author of *According to Plan*, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, *Gospel Kingdom*, *The Gospel in Revelation* and *The Gospel and Wisdom*. He has an MA from Cambridge University and a ThM and PhD from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia.