

Striving To Enter God's Rest

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much, Elliot. Like he said, yeah, it is really, really good to be back. I feel like I've risen from the grave. It's been a hellish two weeks, and COVID, man, it laid me flat, turned into ammonia, all that good stuff. And anyways, the miracles of modern medicine mean that I get to be here with you all. And yeah, it is, I cannot tell you how nice it is to be up and back and around and to see your faces. Love being here with you guys on a Sunday. And I also just want to say thank you so much. I mean, I have felt just love poured out to us. My family have as well just poured out to us. We've got care, way you guys have all cared for us in practical ways, which is bringing meals and all that. I mean, Haley was having a time. She was picking up the pieces that I was leaving behind because I couldn't get out of bed. And so, you know, with all that she already does as an awesome mom and employee and all that stuff, she was running like crazy. You guys really helped out our family a ton. You guys are just an amazing community. And so, I just want to thank you all for just the way you've loved us in practical ways, praying for us. We definitely felt very, very supported. So, thank you. All right, enough of that. We're going to get into Hebrews. We're continuing on through this amazing letter, which apparently isn't a letter. It's more like a sermon that was preached to a church and recorded, but we have the benefit of it now, it preaching to us as well. So, if you have a Bible, turn to Hebrews chapter 4. That's where we're going to be today.

If you don't, don't worry about it. We're going to have the verses up on the screen. Quick disclaimer, this passage isn't the easiest to follow. It kind of circles around some stuff and repeats itself.

And so, you know, some scripture is plain and straightforward, and this doesn't happen to be one of those, unfortunately. But still, there is a lot of good stuff to pull out of it. And if you're new to Christianity or you're here exploring the faith, we are so glad you're here. And just hang in there. I'm going to read a lot of scripture here, and it may be a bit confusing at first. Just hang in there. I think it's going to help us all. So, without any further ado, let's get into it.

Verse 1 of Hebrews chapter 4. It says this, 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. For we who have believed entered that rest, as he has said, As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.

All of 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. 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. 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. 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 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. Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,

[4 : 25] Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. This is God's word. So this is a big passage, a lot of stuff in there. Let's be honest, a little hard to follow. He seems to be jumping around and referring to scriptures. He's in Psalm 95 in one point, then back to Genesis 2 in another, and then back up to Psalm 95 again, and going all over the place and trying to unpack this thing of entering God's rest and the importance of entering God's rest. But if I could distill this passage down for us, what it does, it gives us a sober look at the Christian life. And it reminds us, actually, that we're saved by faith alone. It's not your works. It's not your efforts. We're saved by faith alone. But as we journey through the wilderness of life, that faith gets tested, right? Life happens.

Life gets tough. Life gets overwhelming. But the promise here is that if we hold fast to our confession to the very end, we will enter God's rest, right? God's rest, aka heaven, aka eternal life.

And that is the great reward for disciples of Jesus, for followers of Jesus. God's rest is our great reward. And we need to remember that. We need to remember that we have a reward at the end of this life. See, rewards, what they do is they help us push through present suffering.

The promise of future rewards can give us strength to persevere and cope with present difficulties, right? Think of Olympic athletes. They train hard every day. They push through injuries. They eat the worst tasting meals. Why do they do that? Why do they do that? Because they have a reward that they're looking to, a gold medal that they're trying to attain. They do it for that prize. Or think of the pregnant mom who goes into labor. You moms that have babies, you all are crazy and amazing.

Like going through that, it is a phenomenal thing to behold. And I just, we've had four kids and every time I've fallen on my knees and think, Lord, thank you, you made me a man. But you all go through and endure this amazing pain of childbirth. And what do you do it for? You push through that pain in those moments for the reward of a son and a daughter. The Christian life can feel a lot like that. We go through seasons where it's hard to keep the faith. Life gets full of distractions.

[7 : 16] Life fills us with anxieties. Life hits us with incredible disappointments and setbacks. And we get tempted to try to fix these things ourselves when things aren't going well, when life seems to be getting out of control and difficult. We try to go and we try to make our life perfect and complete again. Man, maybe if I just had a little more stuff. Maybe if I just had a little more money.

Maybe if I could just have a little more fun and a little more pleasure. And little by little, what we do is we begin to live life for a different reward than God's rest.

And for a little while, those little things we chase after, they seem to work. They seem to bring the satisfaction and the release and the relief and the joy that we're looking for. They seem to provide this sense of rest from the difficulties of life. The problem is they never last. And we have to realize that when we try to create our own rest, it only ends up disappointing us. Which is why we have to move on to the next thing and then that gets stale and we got to move on to something else. But the thing is, God's rest is better than any version we can create for ourselves. You know, one of the great tragedies I think that plagues the church and can plague us as followers of Jesus is that we spend too little time studying and thinking about what eternity, what God's rest is going to be like. We're too preoccupied with this life. And so we have little concept of how great our heavenly reward is going to be. Now, I'm not adhering to a kind of Christianity that keeps its head in the clouds like all the time. You know that old saying, being so heavenly minded, you're of no earthly good. Like, that's not what I'm advocating here. But still, I think we lack a good vision of what awaits us in God's rest, what awaits us in eternal life. And if we are to persevere in our faith here, where it's tough to do that, we need to understand what awaits us in God's rest.

There's a lot of funny ideas of what heaven's going to be like, right? I remember growing up and you read comics and it's like angels on clouds by themselves playing a harp with a halo in a weird robe. And I remember reading those things as a kid and being, if that's what heaven's like, I'm not very interested in that, right? And the only reason I wanted to go to heaven was because hell seemed a lot worse. That was pretty much it. But fortunately, the Bible doesn't leave us with this idea of heaven being you on a cloud with a harp playing whatever, having a jam session for eternity. The Bible gives us insight into what God's rest is going to be like. And this passage talks a little bit about that. He talks about God's rest and how God rested after creation right from the beginning of the Bible in Genesis, right? It said God rested from all his work. And so the first understanding of God's rest that we're given from this passage is that it's an environment of abundance and completion and harmony. When God finished creating on the sixth day, he looked it over and he said, ah, it is very good. Not just good, very good. There was nothing missing, nothing undone.

Now, I don't know about you, but I find it hard to rest when things are unfinished, which is why it's hard to rest in this life for us. Something always feels unfinished, doesn't it?

[11:02] You got chores, you got a mortgage to pay off, you got car payments, you're raising kids, you've got work projects, and then there's just also just the craziness of life and the fallenness of this world, right? The brokenness all around us. We see poverty and addiction and racism, and we want to see those things end. We want to see those things undone. And we work hard to do that. And yet they still persist. They still exist. And so we keep fighting because the work is unfinished. There's always something unfinished in our lives and in this life. And that is why we will never be fully at rest here. It's the reality. But it says here, it reminds us here that on the seventh day, the Sabbath day, God rested. He said, it's all done. It's very good. It's finished. Imagine, guys, imagine a place where that can be true. We have a hard time imagining a place like that because we have no concept. We lived in a world, we live in a world where everything is always unfinished.

But imagine a place where that can be true. Nothing's undone. Nothing's unfinished. Nothing is nagging at the back of your mind. All the bad things are conquered and ended. That is the environment of God's rest that is waiting for us one day. And here's the thing, it's more than just a place of completion. It's also a place of abundant provision. See, in this passage, it also talks about Israel entering God's rest, talking about Israel coming into the land of Canaan, the promised land, right?

And actually in Joshua 1, I think it's verse 19, he actually says, like, I am giving you this land as a place of my rest. So Israel knows this. These Hebrew audience knows that that's what God is talking about, right? He's referring to that, but that rest is pointing to the ultimate rest in God.

And so the land of Canaan, what it does, it gives us insight into what God's rest is like even more, right? It was described as a place flowing with milk and honey. Kind of a weird sounding, but like, I don't know how many places, man, I want to go to, you know, I want to move to such and such a place because it sounds like a place that's flowing with milk and honey. I'm like, ah, we kind of like, I guess that means something good. Not sure what's going on there, but here's the whole idea here is that it is a fertile land. It is a land that is going to produce and provide for all their needs.

They're not going to be lacking anything. They're not going to be needing anything. It's a place where God's people were going to be fully satisfied. And it was also going to be a place where they were going to be safe from their enemies. They wouldn't have to fear about their next meal or the next harvest or the next battle. They would be safe, strong, well-nourished, well-fed, always full.

[14 : 19] And that's the nature of God's rest. We find peace and satisfaction for our starving souls. It's a place of unceasing joy and celebration. This is the great reward of God's rest. We have to look forward to you as followers of Jesus. And if you're not yet a follower of Jesus, we're putting that picture towards you to see, hey, that place of God's rest is the most amazing thing you could ever experience. It's going to be like, unlike anything we've experienced or can experience here on earth. And we need to keep this in front of us because it's easy to take our eyes off the reward of God's rest. It's easy to do that. Let's be honest with ourselves.

None of us should think that we are above that possibility of taking our eyes off that reward. We aren't any better than the Christians that the letter of Hebrews was written to. These Hebrew Christians, let me help you with the context of what they were living through for their faith, being persecuted for the name of Jesus. They were put in chains. They were in prison.

Their property was stolen. Some of them were sawn in two. They really experienced the cost of following Jesus. Probably a lot more than you and I experience in our lives. And so what's happening is they were starting to lose heart and they were starting to lose the faith. They were starting to drift away. And man, is this really worth it? And that is the great danger when trials hit any of us.

Trials become really big. They become so big, they dominate our minds. They fill our hearts with fear and anxiety and worry. And if we're honest, our trials, what they do is they start to seem bigger than even God. So what can we do to fight and hold fast to our faith firmly to the end? Well, this passage offers us some great wisdom. Hebrews 4.1, it starts out this way, 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. So the first thing we see here that it teaches us is no, you're not invincible. Know that you are not invincible. It says here, let us fear. No exceptions. Everybody.

As we follow Jesus, we can't get cocky. Doesn't matter what's going on in your life, how close you feel to God in any given point, how much you're reading the Bible and praying and going to church.

[17 : 01] I seem to be doing all the right things. Things are rocking. Don't get cocky. Actually, what we need to do is we need to grow in humility because you and I are most in danger of falling when we think we can't. You and I are most in danger of falling when we think we can't.

This happened to me years ago with pornography. I thought I had it kicked. It had been years since the last time I looked at it. I was confident. I was too confident and I got cocky and I let my guard down and then it blindsided me again. And that was super humbling. I thought I was above it. I thought I wasn't going to be that guy anymore. I was convinced I had the formula. I had it licked.

Then it hit me again. There are plenty examples, guys, of godly men and women who let their guard down and sin took them out. It happens all the time. And you and I have to be sober and realize that we are not above any type of sin. We are not above any type of temptation. And one of the essentials actually to help us realize that we're not invincible is community. Hebrews 4.2, the next verse, it says, 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. So we see here two types of people, those who had faith and believed and those who didn't. And here's tip number two, get around people of faith.

If you're a follower of Jesus, get around people of faith. Get into community where people believe faith and they listen. They hold fast to their confession of faith. It says here, those who failed weren't united by faith with those who listened. Who do you spend your time with?

Who do you spend your time with? Get around people. Here's a little tip. Get around people whose faith is greater than yours. You could look at them and say, man, how that person follows Jesus, I want to follow Jesus like that. Those are the people you should be fellowshiping with because what they're going to do is they're going to pull you up. They're going to raise, you're going to just get into their slip stream and their faith is going to raise the tide of faith in your own life. But here's the thing, don't just be a taker. You also need to get around people that need your level of faith. And you might be thinking, whoa, whoa, whoa, man, I'm just a rookie at this, right? There's an old saying, in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, right? You don't need to have faith way up here.

[19 : 50] To count and help anybody else. You just need to have faith. And people need your faith. People need the faith you got to encourage them, all right? We say here that lone rangers are dead rangers.

It's true. Don't follow Jesus alone, guys. You can't. Get around others who are going to raise the tide of your faith. We absolutely need each other to stir and provoke each other's faith so we don't get complacent. Like it says, and it warns us here in verse 11, let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. Let us therefore strive. Another translation puts it this way, let us make every effort, every effort to enter that rest.

On our own, it's easy to get complacent with our faith. Let our guard down, even drift away. But in community, we're there to encourage each other. We're in there to give each other courage and strength and hope to lift each other up when we need it. Now, it's good to encourage and, you know, be kind of a cheerleader. But I'm not talking about kind of mindless cheerleading here. Like rah, rah, rah, just do whatever you want. It's no big deal. Now, I'm talking about helping each other staying rooted and growing and grounded in the gospel. See, our hope to enter God's rest isn't our performance. It's the gospel's power.

You know, right on the heels of the command that we just read, for us to strive to enter that rest, make every effort, the rider then goes on and gives us the reason and the hope as to why we should make every effort. Verse 12, it says, 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. The gospel, God's word, is the most powerful weapon you and I have available to us. Our job is to learn it, to read it, to meditate on it, and to surrender to it.

The gospel, what it does, man, it breaks down our walls. It breaks through our barriers. It uncovers our sins. It cuts through our pretense. It pulls us out of hiding. This verse says the gospel, what it does, it goes deep into our soul like a surgeon with a scalpel. It gets to that place inside of us where our will and our passions reside, the most authentic real you, right? Not the one that we tend to put forward for others to see. It gets to our soul. It gets to what our real will is. It gets to what our real passions and desires are. And it doesn't leave us as it finds us. It transforms us. It transforms our will to align it with God. It changes our hearts to actually want to enter God's rest.

[23 : 04] And it gives us faith that what God promised to us is true. Now, if you're here checking out Christianity and the gospel, this idea of the gospel, maybe it's a new word, a new concept to you, let me explain this. The gospel simply means good news. It's good news of something that really happened.

And it's this. Jesus came from heaven. He was God in heaven. He came from heaven down to earth, and he lived a perfect, sinless life. A life we could never live. And he died on the cross as God's punishment for our sin. You and I, we deserve that punishment. But Jesus stepped in and he took our place. But he didn't stay dead. The grave couldn't hold him. He rose again on the third day, showing that he defeated sin and death once and for all. And it is through faith in that good news faith. And as it says in Hebrews 4, 3, for we who have believed enter that rest. Faith alone in the gospel brings us into God's rest. If you've never believed this good news, I invite you today to put your faith in Jesus. As the verse warns, today, if you hear his voice, if you hear God's voice, do not harden your heart. And that's my appeal to you today, is God's voice calling you to believe in this good news, in this gospel of Jesus Christ. My appeal, do not harden your heart. Don't put it off for another moment. Today is the day of salvation. All you have to do is repent and believe. That's what it says. That's the promise. That's what you trust in. Repent and believe. It's that simple. No other hoops to jump through. As the band comes up, we are going to respond in a moment as Christians by taking communion. Communion is a meal of bread and wine. We use grape juice.

If we were born a few centuries before, we'd be able to drink wine, but hey, it's all good. Communion is a meal of bread and wine that represents the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross.

The Bible tells us that communion is a time to push pause and to examine ourselves, to examine where our hearts are at, to examine how we are doing in our faith and holding fast to our faith. Now, what we're going to do is we're going to spend a minute or two in silent reflection just responding to what we've talked about today. And I want us to examine our hearts.

And I want to ask you to ask your heart, do business in your heart today, am I desiring God's rest? Do I have a picture of eternity that makes me long to be there?

[26 : 42] Am I putting my hope in something other than the gospel's power? So take a minute to reflect and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

And when you're ready, take communion.