

Riverview Baptist Church  
Sunday School Teaching Plan  
March 9, 2013  
Hebrews 4:12-13  
“The Weapon of God’s Word”

**Memory Verse**

*“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12, NIV*

**The Big Idea:**

Sermon Scripture: *Living in Accountability (Hebrews 4:12-13)*

Sunday School Scripture: Hebrews 4:12-13

Sunday School Title: *“The Weapon of God’s Word”*

ESS: Believers should use the weapon of God’s word to identify our own sin and unbelief as we battle against anything that separates us from God’s rest today and for eternity.

**REVIEW:** Last week, we talked about the rest God offers us. Think back over the past week. Was there a time when you were able to rest in God despite the week’s busyness? In your life, what helps you find and dwell in God’s rest?

This week, we will continue to discuss rest, but we will focus on the role God’s word plays in our discovering and dwelling in God’s rest.

- What role does the word of God play in your everyday life?
- How does the word of God benefit you in your everyday life?

Today, we’ll focus on Hebrews 4:12-13, but to fully understand these two verses, we have to connect them with the passage we studied last week (Hebrews 4:1-11).

***READ Hebrews 4:11-13***

**1. THE GOAL: ENTERING GOD’S REST**

Last week, we discussed how God offered the Israelites rest in the Promised Land, and God still offers rest for us, too! As believers, our goal is to discover and dwell in God’s rest on a daily basis while on Earth, and look forward to the eternal rest we will have in Heaven. Remember, the rest God offers isn’t necessarily a break from physical work. Instead, God’s rest is a spiritual, emotional, and mental contentedness founded on faith in God. When we trust in God, rely on Him for all

things, and believe His promises, we can rest in Him even when the trials and challenges of life swirl around us.

**2. THE OBSTACLE: UNBELIEF**

So the goal for the wandering Israelites and for us today is to enter into God’s rest. However, one main obstacle stands in the way: unbelief. For the Israelites, their sins of complaining and negativity hardened their hearts to a point where they refused to believe God.

**READ Hebrews 4:1-3.**

The Israelites heard the message of God’s love and forgiveness, but the message was of no value to them because they did not combine it with faith. They heard, but they didn’t believe. They failed to believe God’s promises, and they lost faith that God was who He said He was. Are we any different?

*Describe a time in your life when it was difficult to trust God. How did you maintain your faith through that difficult situation?*

So the Israelites’ unbelief kept them from living content lives, and ultimately it kept them from entering the Promise

Land. Our unbelief has consequences, too. When sin hardens our hearts and we fail to believe God is who He says He is and can do what He says He can do, we too will experience restlessness in our day to day lives. And for those who live a life of unbelief, they may even forfeit the eternal rest God offers in Heaven.

### **3. THE WARNING: WORK TO ENTER GOD'S REST**

So the obstacle of unbelief is real, and the consequences are certain. To avoid this pitfall, the author of Hebrews issues a warning.

#### **READ Hebrews 4:11**

Here, readers are warned to learn from the Israelites mistakes and live differently. We are encouraged to “make every effort” to enter God’s rest. At first, it may seem like an oxymoron to work to achieve rest. What exactly does God expect us to do to enter rest? Is this pointing to a works-based salvation?

*What do you think the author means by “make every effort” to enter God’s rest? What must we do to achieve rest?*

As believers, the “work” we must do to attain God’s rest is simply this: *to believe*. God asks that we believe Him and His promises. He asks us to rely on Him for everything. He asks for our faith. And let’s be honest: sometimes it IS work to have faith. Sometimes it’s tough to keep trusting God. From a human perspective, things can seem impossible or dark or dire and trusting God can seem useless. But it’s at times like these that God provides us with a weapon to protect our faith and battle unbelief.

### **4. THE WEAPON: THE WORD OF GOD**

God asks us to believe Him. But He knows sin and unbelief will be obstacles for us. So to help us protect our faith and battle sin and unbelief, God has given us His word as a weapon.

#### **READ Hebrews 4:12**

There are many things God’s word accomplishes. The Bible tells us that the word of God comforts, encourages, teaches, and instructs. We could spend all of our lives cataloging the benefits of God’s word. But in this particular passage (Heb 4:12), the word of God is a sword. The word used here for sword actually indicates a small dagger with deadly, double-sided precision. The sword of God’s word is so precise, that it can make the most accurate of cuts in the most precise place. Once thrust in us, this sword of God’s word can even divide the joint from the marrow and the soul from the spirit. And this sword has the power to judge our thoughts and hearts. Now the word *judge* does not mean to *condemn*. Instead, it means to *assess*. So the sword of God’s word cuts into the deepest places within us to assess what’s there. Is it good? Is it bad? Do our thoughts, attitudes, and priorities please Him, or not?

At first glance, this may not seem like a positive thing. After all, who wants to be cut open and have all their innermost thoughts and attitudes exposed? How, you might ask, does this help us defend our faith and fight unbelief? By penetrating deep within our hearts, the sword of God’s word exposes the areas where we harbor sin or struggle with unbelief. The sword of God’s word provides an unparalleled opportunity for us to see our lives – our hearts – through God’s eyes. Our sin is exposed for what it is. Our unbelief is held up to the light and revealed. And this cutting open and exposing provides times for self-examination that are absolutely necessary for our relationship with God now and for eternity.

- *How could self-examination be necessary for the believer in daily life?*
- *How does it relate to salvation and eternity?*

Just like the Israelites, we are striving to enter God’s rest. In order for us to enter God’s rest for our lives today and for eternity, we must trust God. We trust God by knowing His promises from His word. And the more we read and memorize His word, the more the word interacts with us. It shows us God, and it shows us our own hearts in comparison. The word holds up Jesus as our savior and magnifies Him as the model we should strive to imitate. And as we read God’s word, the sword penetrates deep within us to reveal the areas where we fall short in obeying or believing. Though these revelations may be painful, they are necessary if we are to recognize the areas of sin and unbelief and deal with them.

Imagine a professional athlete. Through hours of rigorous training and practice, he constantly assesses and reassesses his strengths and weaknesses. He wants to know his strengths to capitalize on them. And he wants to identify his weaknesses in order to find a way to deal with them and improve them. He would be foolish to ignore his personal weaknesses, because those are the very elements that hold him back! The athlete realizes that the only way to improve and ultimately win is to identify and deal with his weaknesses. As believers, we must do the same thing. We must constantly be studying God's word so that we can live like Jesus. But we must also allow the word to reveal our sins and unbelief so that we may ask God to strengthen us.

## **5. THE END RESULT: JUDGMENT**

God's word assures us that if we work to know His word and believe it; if we fight against sin and unbelief with His power word, we will enter His rest. And that rest is available for us now, in our day to day lives. And that rest is also available for eternity in Heaven. But before we enter Heaven one day, we will all stand before God's judgment.

### **READ Hebrews 4:13 and Hebrews 9:27**

One day we will each stand before God, and we must give an account for our lives. But before we even speak, everything will be revealed. Hebrews 4:13 tells us that nothing is hidden from God. Everything in all creation, including us, our lives, and our hearts, lies like an open book before Him. This passage tells us that our innermost beings will be "uncovered and laid bare" before Him. The original Greek words used here actually paint a picture of a warrior reaching out, seizing another warrior, and pulling him by the throat so that the two stand face to face. Another usage of the original Greek depicts a criminal under judgment. While facing his accusers, the criminal would have a dagger strapped around his chest pointing upward to his throat. This would prevent the criminal from bowing his head and would force him to look directly into the eyes of the judge (McArthur). Regardless of whichever meaning the author originally intended, his implied message is clear. One day, each of us will stand face to face with God. There will be no secrets. All our thoughts, attitudes, priorities, words, and actions will be known for what they truly are. Since the Day of Judgment is sure and inevitable, the author of Hebrews encourages us to examine ourselves today! Hebrews encourages believers to use the weapon of the God's word to help us recognize our sin and unbelief, that we may wage war on anything that separates us from God's rest today, and for eternity.

**CONCLUSION:** Believers should use the weapon of God's word to identify our own sin and unbelief as we battle against anything that separates us from God's rest today and for eternity.

### **APPLY**

This week, spend time in God's word. You may even want to specifically read Psalm 26. Pray that God would use His word to reveal to you areas in your heart or life where sin or unbelief may be preventing you from resting in Him.

**RESOURCE:** Word Study from John McArthur's sermon "Entering God's Rest," preached April 23, 1972. Transcript is available online: <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/1609/entering-into-gods-rest?term=entering%20god>

**STUDY NOTES:** *(These are for your personal study. This is NOT the lesson.)*

*Study Guide by David Guzik, 2001. Available online: [www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik\\_david](http://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david)*

**For the word of God:** God's Word has diagnosed our illness with a surgeon's precision. It has seen our hearts, and discerned that we are too ready to follow in the failure of the children of Israel, to give up belief.

When the **word of God** exposes our weakness and unbelief like this, it demonstrates the inherent power, sharpness, and accuracy of the **word of God**. It bears constant reminding that as we submit ourselves to the **word of God**, we do it for far, far more than intellectual knowledge of the learning of facts. We do it for the *ministry of the Word*, because God *meets us* in His Word, and the *Holy Spirit* works powerfully through the **word of God**.

**Is living and powerful:** No wonder the writer to the Hebrews can say this. The Bible isn't a collection of musty stories and myths. It has an *inherent* life and power. The preacher doesn't make the Bible "come alive." The Bible *is* alive, and gives life to the preacher and anyone else who will really receive it.

**Powerful** (translated *active* in the KJV) reminds us that something might be *alive*, yet *dormant*. But God's Word is both **living and powerful**, in the sense of being *active*.

**Sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow:** God's Word can hit us with surprising precision, and the Holy Spirit empowers the ministry of the Word to do deep work in our hearts. Often people wonder how a preacher's message can be *so relevant* to their life. They sometimes honestly wonder if the preacher doesn't know some "inside information" about their life. But it isn't necessarily the preacher at all. It is the sharpness of the Word of God, delivering the message in just the right place.

**Even to the division of soul and spirit:** Is there a deliberate and significant difference between **soul** and **spirit** here? Certainly, there is *some* distinction between **soul** and **spirit**. "The New Testament use of *pneuma* for the human spirit focuses on the spiritual aspect of man, *i.e.* his life in relation to God, whereas *psyche* refers to man's life irrespective of his spiritual experience, *i.e.* his life in relation to himself, his emotions and thought. There is a strong antithesis between the two in the theology of Paul." (Guthrie) But the stress of this passage isn't to spell out a theology of the difference between **soul** and **spirit**. "Attempts to explain [these terms] on any psychological basis are futile. The form of expression is poetical, and signifies that the word penetrates to the inmost recesses of our spiritual being as a sword cuts through the joints and marrow of the body." (Vincent) However, it is important to understand what the Bible means when it speaks of and makes a distinction with **soul and spirit**. The Bible tells us that people have an "inner" and an "outer" nature (Genesis 2:7, 2 Corinthians 4:16). The inner man is described by both the terms *spirit* (Acts 7:59, Matthew 26:41, John 4:23-24) and *soul* (1 Peter 2:11, Hebrews 6:19, Hebrews 10:39). These two terms are often used synonymously, but not always. We can say that **soul** seems to focus more on *individuality* and life (often being defined as *the mind, the will, and the emotions*). The **spirit** seems to focus more on supernatural power and life in an individual. That there is *some* distinction between the spirit and the soul is made obvious by passages like 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12. The fact that the terms are *sometimes* used interchangeable is shown by passages like Job 7:11 and Isaiah 26:9.

Because the soul and spirit both have reference to the "inner man," they are easily confused. Often an experience which only "blesses" the **soul** is supposed to be something which builds up the **spirit**. There is nothing wrong with "soulish" excitement and blessing, but there is nothing in it that builds us up **spiritually**. That is why many Christians go from one exciting experience to another but never really grow **spiritually** - the ministry they receive is "soulish." This is why the Word of God is so powerful and precise; it can pierce **even to the division of soul and spirit**, which isn't easy to do. The outer man is described by the terms *flesh* (Colossians 2:5, Matthew 26:41, Galatians 5:16-17) and *body* (Romans 6:6, Romans 8:13, 1 Corinthians 6:13 and 6:19-20). The terms *flesh* and *body* also seem to include aspects of our person such as the senses and habits. When we allow our flesh to direct our thoughts and actions, it ends in spiritual ruin. God wants us to be directed not by the **spirit**, not by the *flesh*, or even the **soul**.

**All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account:** There is no one hidden before God. He sees our hearts and knows how to touch them, and we must **give account** for how we respond to His touch.

**Naked** reminds us of the way God saw through Adam's feeble hiding. God sees through our hiding the same way.

**Open** is the ancient Greek word *trachelizo*, used only here in the New Testament. It was used of wrestlers who had a hold that involved gripping the neck and was such a powerful hold that it brought victory. So the term can mean "to prostrate" or "to overthrow;" but many scholars do adopt the simply meaning of "open."

Remember the context. The writer to the Hebrews trusts that he has pierced the hearts of his audience, who were contemplating "giving up" on Jesus. In this passage, he has made it plain that they can't give up on Jesus and keep it "hidden" from God. The word of God has discovered and exposed their condition.