

June 15, 2014
Community Baptist Church
Sunday Morning Service
Fathers' Day
643 South Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study Hebrews 4:11-13

1. In what ways is the Word of God alive?
2. What results from the fact that the Word of God is active?
3. What is “rest” the author of Hebrews wrote about?
4. Since the Word of God is so effective, what should we do with it and how?

WHAT EVERY FATHER NEEDS **Hebrews 4:11-13**

In recent days, the comic strip *Marvin* has featured Marvin's father, Jeff Miller, deciding that it would be good father/son time for the little tyke to accompany him on hikes in the great outdoors. In typical Jeff Miller fashion, they ended up in a beautiful patch of poison ivy that left them with the predictable results of incessant itching.

Dads, I hope that you like to get out of the house and do things with your kids. Being in God's great creation is a wonderful way of pointing out to your child many of the evidences of the Creator's self-revelation, or the marvels of His work. You might consider hiking, or bicycling, or bird watching, or maybe even bird killing (hunting). If you like water, you can kayak or canoe rivers, lakes, or the back waters of the inter-coastal waterway. You might even like fishing.

But, maybe you are a bit reticent to take up my challenge because you are fearful. What if you get lost? What if you don't know how to paddle a canoe, or stay out of poison ivy, or to bait a hook—much less clean a fish? And what about all those dangerous things like snakes and bears and mosquitos that carry the West Nile Virus? Well, in the first place, unless you are a horse, the West Nile Virus is not going to be much of a risk to you. And snakes and bears generally won't bother you if you don't bother them. But isn't there a book about how to survive the great outdoors? Something you could read first to learn how to stay out of trouble? Maybe you could find a guide who is very knowledgeable of these things having had much experience in the wilderness.

Now that I have all the fathers thinking about the great outdoors, let me propose that leading a family through this world of sin and depravity is a lot like hacking your way through an unknown jungle. You, Christian father, are like William Robinson, from the well-known story of *Swiss Family Robinson*. You are responsible to not only help your family survive, but to teach them to thrive in a hostile environment to which it would be easy to succumb. By the way, did you know that the story *Swiss Family Robinson* was written by a Swiss pastor named Johann David Wyss and edited by his son Johann Rudolf Wyss? Wyss wrote the story with the goal of teaching his four sons about family values, good husbandry, the uses of the natural, and self-reliance.

So let's make life exciting, Dads. Stop seeing yourselves as unmotivated, blind followers of the latest Pied Piper who shows up on your television or computer. No longer are you just one of the faceless masses who falls in line with whatever the latest trend is for your family. No, you need to lead your family on an adventure—the adventure of non-conformity. You need to blaze a trail through this jungle of human depravity, sloth, greed, and plastic conformity to establish a life that shines glory on God their creator. Are you ready to go for it, all you Jeff Miller types? Grab your little *Marvins* and let's blaze a trail of non-conformity so that your family can reflect the glory of God.

Oh, by the way, don't get lost, or poison ivy, or snake bit along the way. You are going to need some equipment to help you make

wise decisions in the midst of a jungle of confusion. What will you need?

A Father Needs Certain Equipment.

If a father is going to lead his family on the right path, he will need a map. Of course a map describes the lay of the land so that the person who reads it will not be ignorant of what lies before him. A map shows the direction you need to go in order to reach your desired goal. Depending on the kind of map or its detail, it might show the road you need to take. Or if you are hiking, the map might have the trail marked out. It can tell you how and where to avoid rivers or steep mountains or other obstacles. Also, if you use a map while hiking, you discover that it reveals where the meadows are (nice places for setting up camp) and where the water is (necessary place for setting up camp). If you have a modern GPS (which is a cutting edge, technological map), it might reveal dangers to avoid such as bridges out, recent landslides, road construction, or even accidents. A frequent hiker or traveler really appreciates these kinds of aid.

However, even the best of maps is useless if you refuse to use it. A map can spell out in plain details the safest and easiest way to arrive at your destination; but if you don't consult it, it won't help you. Sometimes Dads can be overly confident, or even stubborn. to the point that they cause problems for the family by not looking at the map. Someone said that if God had chosen a woman instead of Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt, the people never would have wandered in the wilderness for forty years because she would have stopped to ask directions.

If we refuse to look at the map, we might put our families in difficult circumstances, stressful circumstances, or even dangerous circumstances. Unfortunately, that is not all that unusual of a circumstance. Sometimes we want to use a map on our own terms. Such is the case with me. I refuse to listen to that person—man or woman—on the GPS telling me to turn around and go the other way. I know where I am going; I just like to have the statistics of the trip at hand. Maybe there are a lot of fathers like that. We submit to using a map or GPS only in the most dire situations. Or we consult it for our own pleasure, not to be directed or corrected.

Another very useful piece of equipment is a compass. A compass tells you if you are going the direction the map revealed. Therefore, to draw a hypothetical situation, let's assume that we finally submit to the map. We understand where it says we need to go. We agree that we need to go northwest, for example. But how do we know which way is northwest? A good compass will always, accurately point north (unless a magnet or something like that interferes with it). If we know which direction is north, we can find east, south, and west easily.

The bottom line is that you must have the certainty of directions or you will get lost. You cannot always count on a precise discernment of "north" based on the movement of the sun from east to west, or knowing that moss grows on the north side of the tree. Or as Garfield said the other day, "I don't care which side of the tree moss grows on. I want to know on which side of the tree taffy grows."

But maybe there is a father who doesn't really like to use a compass because of the natural problem associated with that device. Which is . . . ? The problem with a compass is that it constantly corrects you. Sometimes the road you travel doesn't always go directly north or south. In times of uncertainty, you have to stay in touch with your compass even when it tells you that you are off the path.

A map is useful in finding the right route to your destination. A compass is very beneficial especially when you are trekking through the wilderness. But probably the best choice to guarantee you will arrive at your destination is to use a guide. A guide has already been there. He knows where the dangers, the troubles, the difficult spots are. He knows that you cannot always avoid these places, but at least he can forewarn you that they are coming. He knows how long the trip takes. He knows the landmarks along the way and can point out to you that you are making progress.

It is also true that a guide will teach and correct along the way. He will keep you from becoming lost or injured. But you have to listen to the guide or his experience and expertise will be of no value to you. If you choose to use a guide, you must be willing to stop doing the wrong thing and do the right thing when he tells you. Dad

needs people or items like these things to help direct his family to the proper destination.

The Bible is the Necessary Equipment.

The Bible is the best map, compass, and guide for any father who wants to lead his family through the jungle of life. It keeps us from getting lost along the way. The writer to the Hebrew Christians wrote, *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience (v.11)*. The implication of this statement is that somewhere, at sometime, there were people who did not/will not enter God's promised rest. Indeed there were and will continue to be such people.

This author used the people of Israel as an example of people who rejected their map, compass, and guide and ended up dying in the wilderness. Notice what God said. *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'" (Hebrews 3:7-11)*.

We can look back at history and conclude that it was not wise for those Israelites to resist God's directing them. However, as we read the next verse, we discover that God also warned that the same kind of stubborn, self-reliant attitude can overtake any of us. *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God (Hebrews 3:12)*.

The instruction is clear. We all are commanded to strive to enter the God-ordained destination, which is His rest. The nation of Israel was supposed to travel to the Promised Land and inherit it. Most of them didn't make it because of disobedience. In a similar way, we who profess Jesus Christ as our Savior are traveling toward the everlasting rest in the presence of our God. The promise of His rest still stands (4:1). God calls it "His rest" and contrasts it with "His wrath" (4:3). It is a rest patterned after His rest on the seventh day after six days of creation. It is the wonderful promise of a ceasing from striving against sin in this world. It is a picture of salvation.

But if this rest is a picture of salvation, why does God command us to *strive to enter* this rest (v.11)? The fact is that salvation is spiritual warfare. Often God's drawing the sinner to salvation looks like severe and violent conflict against evil. Jesus pictured it thus: *"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force"* (Matthew 11:12). Even after we are saved, there is ongoing spiritual warfare. We are wrestling against spiritual powers that desire our failure. *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:10-12)*. We live in a dangerous environment. We must be busy in it. This is what "working out your own salvation with fear and trembling" looks like (Phil. 2:12).

Many people will go as far as religion but will refuse to trust Christ and, therefore, reach the destination of God's rest. They never get to the *striving to enter* part. Dads, you need to blaze the trail for your family so that they can at least know about God's promised rest.

Disobedience caused many Israelites to forfeit God's promised rest. In the same way, disobedience causes us to wander in a very confusing world. Too often fathers are distracted by their world and fail to look at God's map, fail to read God's compass, and fail to follow the guide who is the Holy Spirit. That always results in disobedience to the Guide. Disobedience will cause us to wander in the jungle of sin, and those who follow us will never enter God's rest.

Second, God's Word, like a guide and compass, forces us to be honest with ourselves. *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 (v.12)*. The Bible is like a two-edged sword that has life. But unlike a normal sword, the Bible is living. Because God breathed it out, it is virtually the breath or the essence of God. Therefore, God's Word cannot be a lifeless or static writing as is the case with human writings. This book is so alive that it must create a cause-and-effect situation whenever it is proclaimed. Isaiah described that effect by writing, *For as the rain and the snow come*

down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Not only is the Bible alive, but it is active. The Greek word is *energeis* which obviously gives us the English word energy. The word reveals that the Bible is powerful and effective. It *works*. That is the Greek word *ergon* which is the root for *enegeis*. The work of the Bible is to cut like a sword. That it is alive and energetic seems good and positive. That the Bible cuts like a sword is fearful.

The Bible is more powerful than the broom in the poem about the Sorcerer's Apprentice. Goethe wrote a ballad about an old sorcerer who departed his workshop leaving his apprentice in charge of some basic chores. Before long the young apprentice grew bored and weary of carrying water and doing the other odd jobs. So, using magic he did not fully understand, the apprentice cast a spell on a broom to do his work for him. However, it short order it was obvious that the broom was out of control. Unable to undo the spell, and seeing no other alternative, the apprentice grabbed an axe and cut the broom in half. Much to his dismay he now had two out of control brooms and each time he cut a broom it reproduced. How fearful that a broom would have life.

In the most righteous way, and far from sorcery, the Bible is a book with life. It is the living Word of God. Through it God, the author of life, gives eternal life. Therefore, when this book is read, listened to, preached, and studied something always happens. The Bible dissects our most secret thoughts. It penetrates the most hidden part of the person. The soul and spirit are words that speak of our essential being. It is the eternal part of us that will never die. What is true in the soul and spirit is the ultimate, final condition of a person.

The Bible penetrates the heart where are found the thoughts and the intentions. It judges our reflections, our opinions, our reasons for why we do what we do. It reveals the truth about us even when we seek to hide it.

The primary application of this truth is regarding those who fall away into disobedience and fail to arrive at God's rest. Therefore, the

text teaches that the Bible forces unsaved people to realize that they are not right with God. The Bible leaves us with no secrets, standing wide open before God. A religious sinner might be able to deceive peers and family but can never deceive God. The Bible makes the truth obvious to the sinner's conscience. Maybe that is why Bible preaching and teaching makes sinners uncomfortable.

Secondarily, this same principle applies to believers who flirt with disobedience. A true believer is uncomfortable with sin, especially when he or she reads the Bible. Believers have the wonderful privilege of being corrected and disciplined by the Bible. It is our compass, our map, our guide to keep us on the right road.

Third, the Bible motivates us by reminding us of the future. *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 (v.13)*. That is the destination to which we are headed on this road of life. There are no secrets kept from God. God knows every detail about us, whether it is thought or deed. Does that truth cause us concern to wonder what God thinks? We know what God thinks because He has given us His Word.

Therefore, the thing that should drive us to obedience is the fact that we must all give an account to God. Our lives are open books to God. In the end, He is going to require an accounting. For the sinner that is a fearful proposition. The books that record all his or her works will be opened (Rev. 21:11-12). All works will condemn all sinners to eternal punishment.

Not only sinners, but also saints will give an account to God – though it is true that we will not be condemned by our works since we have been justified by Christ's sacrifice. However, at the same time, *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (2 Corinthians 5:10)*. In that judgment, works not built on the foundation of Christ will be destroyed (1 Cor. 3:13-15). Righteous works, on the other hand, works that are built on Christ, will bring glory to God for eternity (2 Cor. 4:17). It is right and wise for fathers to be very familiar with the map, compass, and guide God has already given to us. But familiarity alone is not sufficient to lead your family to God's rest.

A Father Needs to Use the Equipment He Has.

What good is a map if you don't understand the legend and how it applies? What good is a compass if you don't know how it works? What good is a guide if you stubbornly refuse to put into practice the lessons he teaches you? You need to know your map, compass, and guide. You need to know the Bible. To know it, you will have to read it. We cannot emphasize enough the regular reading of God's Word. You will never know what the Bible says if you don't read it. And you will never read it if you don't block out time to do that very thing. Generally, if you do not set aside a time in the morning (or whenever you start your day), you will never get around to it. I recommend that reading your Bible should be among the first things you do as you begin the day.

Be aware that Satan does not want you to read the Bible. Your flesh does not want to read the Bible. Since reading the Bible is such a warfare, it must be good for you. It's like physical exercise: most people do not enjoy the process, but they want the results. To get the results of knowing God through His Word, you have to read it. Even a cursory reading of the Bible washes us. Do not be concerned that you do not remember everything you read. No matter how much you read, you will almost always find a truth or principle that is helpful. Also, it is good practice to always begin reading the Bible with the prayer that God will show you what you need that day. If we read through the Bible every year, we will become more and more familiar with God and His instruction. At the very least, we can all listen to the Bible every day (ipad, computer, phone, "cassette tape").

Having read the Bible, the next step in using it to guide us and correct us on the journey is to meditate on it. All this simple task requires is for you to pick out a particular truth when you read. It may be about God. It may be about God's work. It may be about you. It may be about people you relate with. Then, at various times during the day mull over that truth. It might be necessary for you to establish certain times (like lunch) to sit down, undistracted, and think about what God is teaching you. What you meditate on will shape your thinking and, therefore, your decisions and ultimately your life. Your meditation will determine the way you lead your family.

It is good to read the Bible and it is good to meditate on it. But to get the most from your map, compass, and guide, you need to study it. This truly is a lot of work. You will need at least a good study Bible. A partner in studying is a good idea so that you can bounce ideas off each other. Good books about the Bible are good avenues of study. If you are determined to do this, you will be richly rewarded.

Okay, that all sounds good, but why all the work? Is it really necessary? Why not just decide to become a Christian and do whatever happens from that point? A true believer will have a hunger and thirst for righteousness. When that is the case for the father, he will have a strong desire to lead his family in righteousness. That means he will use the Bible.

To use the Bible, we must acknowledge that it can be applied to current circumstances. These lessons are caught when we learn to identify simple, clear Bible principles that will fit in real life. The Proverbs are full of these as it teaches us about ourselves and about the traits of other people, and how to respond to those traits. For example, what could be more practical than, *Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil (Proverbs 3:7)*. Surely the advice to a dad regarding women other than his wife, *Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes (Proverbs 6:25)*, is very useful. Or, to know that *a fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion (Proverbs 18:2)* will keep dads from wasting a lot of time.

Practice in this area will help you see that the whole Bible is full of principles that work in everyday life. When the light comes on in this matter, we will practice applying the Bible's principles to current circumstances. A compass is of no value if we don't use it. Therefore, we must apply the principles of God's Word to our own lives first. The Bible is full of these principles. Like, *let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer (Psalm 19:14)*. Or *fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! (Psalm 37:1)*. Or *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4)*. Or *finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if*

there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8).

Using the map, compass, and guide God has already given to us is really not difficult. It just takes a little practice. Learn to use principles you have discovered in the Bible to guide your family along the right path to God's rest.