

Hebrews Ch4v12-16 - Dependence On God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 June 2024

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] Thank you. So, Hebrews chapter 4.

And before we read, I just want to check, did everybody get one of these pieces of paper? If you didn't get one, it's got practicing dependence on the top.

If you didn't get one, just put up your hand and I think Sarah, is that Sarah? I haven't got my glasses on. Oh, they're all gone.

Okay, so just share them out if you have them anyway. Okay, no need, so having asked if you have one, just put it under your seat now, you're not to read it.

So, we'll read God's word, then we'll pray, and then we'll see what it has to say. So, let's read.

Hebrews chapter 4, starting in verse 12.

[1 : 27] For the word of God is alive 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.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses. But we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin.

[2 : 36] Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Let's keep our Bibles open. We're going to talk to God as we pray. Let's do that now. Our Father God, we come to you in dependence upon you.

We ask for your help, that your word would be active in our life, and that we may experience your grace.

Help us now, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, last week we started a new series, and we're asking the big question, what is a Christian?

So over the next few weeks, we're just taking a core theme each week and having a look at what the Bible has to say about it. Today, we're going to see that a Christian is someone who is dependent on God.

[4 : 01] Someone who is dependent on God. And I'm sure you can think of many ways in which you may describe this, but for our sakes today, and to focus on where we're going in the talk, I'm putting it like this.

Dependence is saying, without God, I do not know what I need, and without God, I cannot receive all that I need.

So without God, I don't know what I need, and without God, I can't receive, I can't get what I need.

And the way in which we express our dependence on God is what we've been doing throughout this morning, both listening to God through his word, the Bible, and speaking to God through prayer.

Because through the word of God, through the Bible, our deepest needs are revealed. And through prayer to God, our deepest need is received.

So let me say that again. Through the word of God, our deepest need is revealed. And through prayer to God, our deepest need is received.

[5 : 20] And these two themes are at the heart of our text. So chapter 4, verse 12, says the word of God is alive and active.

End of verse 12, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. So you see, God speaks to us through his word, it's active, and it reveals our deepest need.

Then have a look at verse 16. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

You see, we speak to God in prayer and we receive from God what our deepest needs are. So what we're going to do this morning is look at these two themes of the word, the Bible, and prayer.

And then we're going to see what dependence on God looks like in practice. So first, depending on God is listening to God.

[6 : 32] Depending on God is listening to God. Three things are going to help us to know what it means to listen. First, let's remember that God is a speaking God.

The writer of Hebrews, from chapter 1 onwards, has been urging his readers to listen to God's word. So have a look with me, chapter 3, verse 7, just to get the context.

So as the Holy Spirit says, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.

Well, what's the rebellion? Well, it was that time of testing in the wilderness. The writer is looking back to when God's people were rescued from slavery in Egypt and were on their way to the promised land.

But not long into their journey, they sought an independence from God. They stopped listening to the voice of God and listened to their own.

[7 : 44] So with that background in mind, look at verse 12. He says, see to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

He's challenging us. Don't have a heart that is closed to the voice of God. Verse 15. He wants us to get it.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. And in case we've missed the point, he reminds us again, chapter 4, end of verse 7.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. You see, we need to be people who have our ears open to listen to God.

And the way in which we primarily hear God speak is through the words that we have before us in our Bible that we're listening to.

[8 : 47] It's a little bit like a child's musical book. Maybe you've had some of these in your house at different times. When you open those books, you get a little tune that begins to play.

And then as soon as you close it, the music stops. It's not that the music has gone away. You just simply need to open the book and then you hear the music again.

Well, in the same way as we open up the Bible and read God's word, guess what? We hear God speak. Close that book.

And we silence his voice. So first, we need to be a people who are listening to the God who speaks. And when God speaks, God acts. His words have power. Look at chapter 4, verse 12.

[9 : 47] For the word of God is alive and active. God's word is living and transforming. So right now as we hear the word, as we read the word, the word of God is taking effect in your life and in my life right now.

Just as God spoke the universe into existence with words, so God acts in a powerful and transforming way through his words to us.

Look how the way, look in which the word of God is described. Continue on in verse 12. He says the word of God is sharper than any double-edged sword.

Not a sword that you're going to use in battle, but a sword that you're going to use to cut open. Continue on.

Verse 12. The word is sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

[10 : 56] You see, the point is, God's word is active. It's not passive. It's always at work. It takes effect. It does what God wants it to do.

Read God's word and God will act in it through your life. So in what way does God act? What impact does the word of God have in our life?

Well, God speaks, God acts, and God reveals. The word has many functions. So if you're reading the Bible, it'll say things like, the word of God nourishes you like food, or it cleans you like water, or it grows you like a seed in the ground.

And here the focus is primarily on showing us that God's word is a revealing word. Let's read all of verse 12 to get the point.

For the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

[12:08] Here's the revealing part. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. God's word, the sharpest of swords, is like a surgeon's scalpel.

You go into the operating theatre, and the surgeon will get out his scalpel, and it cuts right through, exposing the heart.

What we are really thinking right now, what we really believe, God's word reveals the real you.

A friend of mine recently had a heart attack. No one knew it was coming, not least himself. He was a very active guy. He was big into cycling. And it wasn't until he had to be rushed in for emergency surgery that they opened him up and discovered all kinds of blockages in his heart.

The surgeon's scalpel revealed the problem. Well, in the same way as we read God's word, it's saying it cuts right to the heart, deeper than we could ever imagine, and it reveals what needs attention, what needs to be done with our heart.

[13:34] You see, the big message is this. Through the word, whoops, too far. Well, you just have to listen.

I've missed out a point. Listen to this. The big message is, through the word, God reveals our deepest need. Through the word, God reveals our deepest need.

You see, without God speaking to us, we're actually incapable of knowing who we truly are and what we are in need of. We're dependent on God to show us our need.

Look at verse 13. Nothing in all of creation is hidden from God's sight. So everything can be seen. Every person. What they're thinking, what they're doing.

Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

God uncovers what is hidden in our hearts.

[14:38] He exposes the sin. He shows us what really matters, what we need to repent of, the things that we need to change in our life.

You see, reading the word is like entering into the surgeon's theatre where we come humbly and accept God's diagnosis of what our hearts are like.

So through the word of God, our deepest need is revealed. Second big idea, depending on God is not just listening to God, but speaking to God in response.

And again, three things to help us understand the speaking to God side of things. First, let's notice the access to God we have.

Look at verse 14. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God.

[15:47] Now, you may remember that we looked at Hebrews some time ago. The high priest was that person who was chosen by God to represent the people to God.

And though the high priest was great and had many privileges and responsibilities, their main responsibility was to represent the people, to give them access to God.

But the problem was every high priest that was appointed failed. They were sinful. So any access to God was only partial and temporary.

They could never enter into God's presence fully and completely. But we have, do you notice verse 14? It says we have not just a high priest, but a great high priest.

One who is better. One, look at the end of verse 15, who did not sin. Jesus, our great high priest, was perfect.

[17:01] He never did anything wrong or thought anything wrong. In fact, as we read through Hebrews, we'll discover that as the high priest, he took upon himself our sin.

And he was judged in our place for our sin. So that we, now through Jesus, may have full and complete access to God.

That's what it says in verse 16, isn't it? Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence. If we're trusting Christ, we don't need to fear.

We don't need to hide. We can come with confidence. Isn't that incredible? The God who speaks to us in his word invites us and says, I'm listening to you.

And the fact that God would make this known to us shows how much he loves us, that he wants us to talk to him. And for the Christian, we can speak with God anytime, anywhere, about anything.

[18:09] So God speaks, but God listens. We have access to him. not only access, look at the sympathy that we have from God.

We have a God who actually understands us. He's not so distant and far away that he doesn't know what's going on. No, he's close. Look at verse 15.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses. Now, to feel sympathy in this context does not mean, oh, I'm sure it's hard for you, but you know what, if you do better and, you know, if you work a little bit harder, then things will be good for you.

No, something deeper than that, it's saying, I understand you, I get you, I've been where you've been and because I've been there, I can help you.

That's what verse 15 is saying. Look at verse 15 with me. We do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet he didn't sin.

[19 : 33] Now, Jesus didn't suffer every temptation. For example, Jesus wasn't married, so he didn't struggle with the temptations that married folk might do. He died at the age of 33, yes, he rose again, but he didn't suffer the temptation that maybe somebody older did, but he suffered temptation in a way that we will never do because when we're tempted and the pressure comes on, we give in to temptation, we break, but Jesus didn't break.

even as the temptation increased and the pressure mounted, Jesus did not sin. Therefore, because he didn't sin, he is qualified to help us.

He knows what we need because he has lived as a human on this earth. He's experienced life in this broken world. Just look back with me to chapter 2, verse 18.

It makes it very clear. Chapter 2, verse 18. Because Jesus himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Isn't that encouraging for you and I? That when we face struggles like this, we have a God who isn't distant, but is close and understands and sympathises with us.

[21 : 10] He enters into our struggle. He feels for you. He draws alongside and says, I'm going to help you. So we have access.

We have sympathy. Therefore, we can come and ask God. We can ask him. Verse 16.

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace for our time of need. I don't know what you think of God, but he is not a tight-fisted Grinch.

God is a loving, generous Father who loves to give. In fact, God is the one who knows what is good for us. So in our need, we can run to God and ask him for our help in our need.

He gives us the supplies that is required for the Christian life. And in this context, he gives what we need in our temptations and trials. Mercy is what we need for our past failure and grace is what we need for the future challenges.

[22 : 26] And he gives it in bucket loads. It's overflowing. It's constant. But how much more is this true in every area of our life? What about in your times of suffering?

Maybe you've got an illness. Or maybe it's in time of loss. Or maybe you're hurting this morning because of what a friend has said or done.

Or maybe you're concerned for your family or your children. Well, we have an invitation here. Come to me. You have access to me.

I understand you where you're at. Come to me and I will give you mercy and grace to help you now in your time of need.

And when we think about it, as we go through the day, our needs increase. We have multiple needs. from the morning, from the minute we wake up to the moment we go to sleep.

[23 : 30] And all through the day, whatever need we have, God is sufficient. It's not just saying, here all, I have a little bit of mercy and a little bit of grace and you can choose when you have it, but you can only have it once.

No. It's there for us. He is sufficient. The Apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 8, I'm going to quote here a verse.

It says, God did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. How will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

If God gave you the greatest gift possible, the gift of his son, who died for you, and rose again to defeat death for you, if God gave the best gift ever, he says, how will he not also give you what you graciously need?

He'll give you everything else you need. So we can come with confidence and ask. So the big message from this second idea is that through prayer we receive our deepest need.

[24 : 50] In this context, God is revealing our sin so that he can provide healing for our sin. Like the doctor exposing the problem so he can restore the person's health.

Well, that is what God does. He reveals so that we can receive the healing. And how true is that in all of our Christian life.

He sees what's going on and he will provide for us. Now let's be clear before we move on. God doesn't give what we want, but what we most need.

He will never give anything that is harmful and he will never withhold what is best. Do you know that? He'll never give you anything that's harmful and he'll never withhold from you anything that is best.

God made you. He knows you and he will give according to your need. So here's these two big ideas, how we express our dependence on God.

[26 : 01] Through the word of God, our deepest need is revealed and through prayer to God, our deepest needs are received. So, you've got your piece of paper, now you can look at it, or maybe you've already read it.

And we want to think about how do we practice dependence on God? What's it actually going to look like for you and me to listen to God and to speak to God day by day?

Well, before we get into the detail, Day Northland, a pastor and writer says that reading the Bible and prayer is like breathing. It's a really helpful analogy.

Breathe in, breathe out. To breathe in is to live. Without breathing we die.

Well, just as we physically need to breathe, so we spiritually need to breathe. breathe in God's word and we breathe out in prayer.

[27 : 16] Inhale, exhale. It's oxygen for the soul. So what will this spiritual breathing look like?

What will speaking to God and listening to God look like? Well, I've got three things down there on your piece of paper. The first one says breathe regularly.

Breathe regularly. We need regular times to read and pray. Plan times where we prioritize listening to God and speaking to God.

We say, Johnny, look, I understand that, I know that, but I don't have time, I'm busy at work and then while I'm doing taxi for the kids and I drop one here and then I have to go and get the other one here and then I have to go back and I have to go to the shops and look, the way I look at it is if I can get here on a Sunday, that's good for me.

That'll get me through the week. Well, if you're here this morning and you're wondering if you are, you are, you are here, that's good.

[28 : 24] Welcome. It's great to have everybody. Gathering together is vital, but if that's the only time we breathe, ease, we're going to struggle in our Christian life, aren't we?

Look at the quote that's on your sheet by D.L. Moody, an American evangelist. He put it like this, a person can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough for the next six months or take sufficient air into his lungs at one time to sustain life for a week.

We must draw upon God's boundless store of grace from day to day as we need it. I guarantee you don't just have one meal on a Monday that lasts you for the rest of the week, right?

Unless you're on some weird, crazy, unhealthy dieting exercise. That'll kill you, so don't do it. Just as we eat daily and breathe regularly, so we need to read and pray regularly.

It's not a duty to perform a kind of a tick list and oh God will be pleased with me. No, it's oxygen for your soul. It'll actually grow you and nourish you and it will sustain you and change you.

[29 : 51] So let's breathe regularly. breathe intentionally. The second idea is let's breathe intentionally because sometimes you can go, well, what am I going to read today?

Close my eyes, flick through and oh, I'll read this. Well, no, let's have a bit of purpose about it.

Choose a book, choose Hebrews, whichever one you like, and say, I'm going to read a section at a time.

So let me show you a pattern how you can do this. This is something that I sometimes do, different ways of reading and helping us to get God's word into our life. So four things under breathing intentionally.

First come independence. We can pray to God before we read, we can pray, Lord, open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

Show me, reveal to me. Or a reminder that I cannot bear fruit apart from God, I can do nothing. You see, I'm asking God to reveal to me my deepest need.

[31 : 05] So we come to the Bible with an attitude of dependence. I need him. And as we do, the next step is we engage the mind.

We're well able to think, so we engage the mind. we read the text just as we've read from Hebrews 12 or from Hebrews 4 today. And we can ask simple questions like, what does it say about God? Well, we've learned that God is a speaking God. His word is active and alive. What does it say about myself and areas that I need to change? What's in my heart?

What commands am I to follow or promises to believe? Well, we've got a great promise that when we come to God and ask him for grace and mercy, he will give it. That's a command I can follow. So that's engaging the mind. And then we want to bring it to the heart deep down in our life. So from the answers we think, how does this apply? So how does this truth about God whose word is active and alive, life, how does that help me to thank him?

[32 : 20] I can thank God for that. What sin do I need to confess and turn from? Not just generally, but being more specific. Lord, I want you to change me because I get angry so often.

Or help me because I find that I'm not speaking the truth as I ought. What do I need God to ask for help, for change?

So we can do that simple exercise. And then the last one, experiencing the truth. That's taking it all into prayer and putting it all into practice.

So we can adore God, we can praise him and say thank you so much for your living word and the work it does in my life. We can confess, Father, please forgive me for the times that I have watched something this week that I ought not to have watched.

The things that I have thought that I shouldn't have thought, please forgive me. And then when petition we ask of God, Lord, would you give me mercy?

[33 : 33] And will you give me grace to help me live as I ought as a Christian this week? speak. So that's just something very simple. Breathe intentionally.

Have a focus and a pattern for our reading and speaking to God. And then the last one, breathe together. Sometimes we can get overwhelmed and anxious, can't we?

And we can get kind of out of breath and we can get challenged and someone needs to sit alongside us and help us to regulate our breathing.

They might even say, breathe with me, calm down, breathe in, breathe out. But we need to do that spiritually because it's hard sometimes to read and pray on our own.

And we need somebody who will get alongside and say, breathe with me, let's read God's word together, let's take it in, let's reflect on it, now let's pray it back to God.

[34 : 40] Pray with me. We need each other and that's why God has put us together in a church family, so that we can help each other. And if you want somebody to help you, well ask someone today.

I would be very happy, I'd love to meet with you and read the Bible. So what is a Christian? Well a Christian is someone who depends on God.

Through the word of God our deepest needs are revealed and through prayer to God our deepest needs are received. Let's pray.

Amen. Father, thank you that we have heard your voice through your word written down in scripture.

and thank you that you have heard us as we have prayed to you. Would you please help us to live our life dependent on you?

[35 : 56] That you would reveal to us what is going on in our life that we may come and ask for the things that we need.

Would you give us mercy and will you give us grace for our needs today? Thank you that you listen and thank you that you speak.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Well we're going to sing a song together that helps bring some of these thoughts and themes together.

speak oh Lord as we come to you to receive the food of your holy word. It's a prayer. A prayer that we would long that God speak into our lives.

Let's stand together if we're able to and we'll sing. Amen.