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**Series: The Living Word****Title: This is the Word of God****Text: Hebrews 4:12; Genesis 1:1-3**

Vince Lombardi, the famous American football coach of the Green Bay Packers, once gave a very simple speech to his football team. Lombardi held up a football and said, “This is a football.” His speech reminded his team of the game's basic object, which is often taken for granted. The same is true of the Bible. As followers of Jesus, we often take the Bible for granted, assuming that we know what it is.

Throughout the summer, we will examine various metaphors and images that Scripture uses to describe the word of God or the Bible. We often refer to the Bible as the word of God, but sometimes we overlook the depth of this fundamental description. Saying that the Bible is the word of God conveys a deeply theological idea that defines a book, somewhat like other books, yet also unlike any other. The Word of God is the primary metaphor for understanding the Bible.

Hebrews 4:12 is a foundational passage explaining the word of God:

*For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.*

- Whenever we read this verse, our minds automatically equate the phrase “word of God” to the Bible, the written word. However, throughout the book of Hebrews, the preacher argues that the word of God is verbal communication. God is a God who speaks.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, in *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically*, alludes to C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity* as he develops a “mere” Christian hermeneutic, principles for reading the Bible as Scripture everywhere, at all times, and by all Christians, regardless of theological presuppositions. In the Introduction, Vanhoozer articulates a theological understanding of the Bible, framing how we think about what the Bible is by starting with God, or theology (a word about God). Vanhoozer’s thoughts form the basis for the following main ideas.

**What the Bible *Is*: Divine Voice**

- Before the Bible, the written word of God, existed, the people of God heard the divine voice of God.
- The Bible records numerous times throughout history when God verbally communicated to his people. When God spoke to his people, the Bible often uses the metaphor “word of the Lord.”
- In Jonah 1:1, “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,” The phrase “word of the Lord” occurs 242 times in the Old Testament. In addition, the Lord is the subject of the speaking verbs over 400 times, underscoring the theological significance of God speaking.

- The Bible is the spoken word of God in the past recorded in an inspired written word preserved through the centuries, so that God can still speak through the written word today.

### What the Bible is *Doing*: Divine Discourse

- Discourse is meaningful communication between a speaker and a listener.
- It is more than words on a page. It is someone communicating something to someone for a reason.
- The Bible is God communicating truth to his people through human authors, in real situations, using different forms of writing, with the purpose of bringing his people into a relationship with him.
- In Hebrews chapters 3 through 4, Psalm 95:7 serves as a drumbeat used by the author to keep his audience's attention. The author quotes Psalm 95:7-8 three times in these two chapters. First, the author attributes the quote from Psalm 95:7-11 to the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 3:7-11, which begins, "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled." The author continues to quote through the end of Psalm 95, connecting Israel's refusal to listen to the Lord with the Lord's subsequent prevention of them from entering the rest of eternal salvation.
- We hear thousands of sounds every day: the buzz of our phones, music in our earbuds, voices all around us, requests and cries from our children, the roar of traffic, and the constant background noise. The overwhelming volume of this world can keep us from listening to the Lord, who still speaks today.
- The 'today' of the author of Hebrews and his original audience is, of course, long past. Yet God continues to address the church through this passage, such that the original readers' today (our yesterday) becomes today anew, for contemporary readers too. If the preacher of Hebrews could view the Spirit who spoke through David as speaking today (to his audience), then we should too.
- Transforming a past word to a prior generation into a present word for a preoccupied generation, the preacher concludes that God speaks to his people daily. The people of God have two responses to God's voice: listen or harden their hearts.

### What is the Bible *For*: Divine Purpose

- Why did God give us Scripture? Why preserve these writings? Why communicate his Word to generations of people through a written word, the Bible? The answer is relationship.
- The Bible is "holy" Scripture because God has set it apart for a divine purpose.
- In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul emphasizes the purpose of the word of God, "*You accepted what we said as the very word of God, which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe.*" The word of God works in the lives of God's people for his divine purpose to make us more like Jesus.
- Scripture is God's self-revelation of his covenant faithfulness to his people that he will always be with his covenant people. Scripture's ultimate purpose is for communion with God, a covenant relationship with the God who speaks and whose words are recorded in the Bible.

### Summer Reading Plan



Join us in reading one chapter each day through the Gospels using BibleProject's Gospel Reading Plan on the Bible App. Together, we are asking the Holy Spirit to speak through God's Word so that we are confronted by the life and teachings of Jesus and challenged to follow him in obedience. As we read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, our prayer is that we would hear God's voice, grow in faith, and become more faithful disciples of Christ.