

Metaphors Of God's Word

What God Designed the Bible To Do

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 10-Nov-18; Sermon #1460

If I were asked what activity other than my relationships with my family members has given me the most growth and pleasure over the length of my life, I would have to answer—reading. No, not baseball, not NASCAR racing, none of that stuff. I really enjoy reading. Perhaps that is true with you, too. Once I learned to read when I was about five years old, it has been rare that I have been away from a book for very long. Since that first reading of *The Ugly Duckling* to my mother, I have read literally many millions of words off the printed page and off the screen.

First, once I was beyond the "Dick and Jane" books, I consumed books like the "Encyclopedia Brown" mysteries, The Hardy Boys mysteries, I even read a few Nancy Drew's. I will let that out. *Chronicles of Prydain*, which may have been my first venture into fantasy literature. My oldest sister, Virginia, has always been a big reader. She opened the door to more mature reading for me, and that was about 1975 or 1976. I was somewhere around 9-10 years old. That was at the feast and she bought me three novels by, believe it or not, James Michener—*Centennial*, *Hawaii*, and *The Drifters*. You know, all of those are 850-1,200 page books. And after devouring those three, I was game for anything.

Then came my introduction in the sixth grade to the books of J. R. R. Tolkien. Particularly at that point, it was *The Hobbit*, which was assigned reading for my literature class that I was taking there in Columbia, South Carolina. From that point on, just about any time that I was not playing baseball, I could be found reading Tolkien, not Michener. I did read a lot more Michener too, but I could be found reading Tolkien's works so many times I lost count. I lost count after about a dozen. So it was pretty soon after I started reading those books that I could rattle off any fact about Middle Earth than anyone could ever want to know, and believe or not, much of that is still in my head. My dad once commented in passing as I was sitting on the couch reading for the umpteenth time one of those books, "If you only knew

the Bible as well as you know the *Lord of the Rings*." I have done my very best to rectify that since that point. And now I use the Bible every day, and I can say that I do know the Bible better than the works of Tolkien.

Maybe you likely did something similar when you were younger. Different authors maybe, different series. Back then many people got lost in things like the John Jakes "America" series. Remember that? I do not know how many books that ended up being, seven? People like to read Ken Follett or John Grisham or John Updike. Some like Stephen King, I cannot say I am one of them. Tom Clancy, Agatha Christie, Brad Thor, Isaac Asimov, Ann Rule, James Patterson (They are always good for one flight.), Clive Cussler (he is another one that is good for about that much), Kathy Reichs, Brandon Sanderson, Barbara Cartland, Louis L'Amour, Nora Roberts, J. K. Rowling, Dean Koontz, Michael Crichton, Leon Uris, Diana Gabaldon—I could go on and on with these people, authors whose fans are pretty rabid about their works. And that is just bestselling authors. There are so many other authors out there and so many books to read. Solomon wrote the truth when he said of the writing of books there is no end. It just keeps on going.

We get most of our education through reading, perhaps less now than in past, but it still substantially comes through reading. Yeah, teachers instruct us. They stand in front of the class and they often are teaching out of textbooks and textbooks are still required reading. We get much of our information off the Internet, which we must read off a screen rather than a page in a book. But we are still reading, even though platforms like Facebook and YouTube and others wants us to think that video is the way to go moving forward, that all the instruction will come that way at some point. Even so, if a person cannot read in this day and age, it is very likely he or she will have a severe handicap, both in terms of education and work. They will probably be stuck in a low-paying job for the rest of their lives.

Now most of our spiritual information comes through reading as well. Sure, we *hear* sermons. We do that a lot more these days than we used to when we would go to church and we would see somebody giving a sermon. Now we hear them on audio, we hear the Bible studies and whatnot. But all of that goes back to what we read in the Bible and we encourage you to read along and to study more. Herbert Armstrong frequently told us back there in the seventies and eighties, "Don't believe me. Believe your Bibles." And of

course, we still encourage you to read and study your Bibles, not just take our word for it because you guys are pretty smart people and we want you to believe the truth.

So you, as a son or a daughter of God, need to know your Bibles inside and out, because that is what is teaching us the way of God. God supplied His Word to us as a gift. We should never think of the Bible as anything less than that—a gift from God so that we would have reliable knowledge from Him and about Him and His way of life. We need to be able to look at our Bibles and say yes, this is the Word of God and it can tell us anything that we absolutely need to know about Him.

Without the Bible, though, we would be adrift on a sea of information. And any bit of that information would be just as valuable as any other bits of information and we would not have a clue about how to distinguish the truth from falsehood. Or like I just mentioned, whether one thing is more important than the other. It would just all be the same. But we have the Bible, and it makes those distinctions between truth and error and what is important, what is not important.

So reading, and I do not mean just reading, skimming, glancing through, I mean reading with discernment and understanding, is a vital Christian skill that we need not only to use but also to hone our reading and apply regularly in our lives. And of course, we need to be able to teach it to our children, this reading skill, so that they can develop themselves in this area so they will be good readers and being able to discern and understand what they read.

I think the church of God, this is my own personal belief here, should be right at the forefront of the push to educate our children in reading, writing, and literature. Mathematics to my youngest son, who is a math major, so I need to throw that in there. But I am concentrating on literature in the Bible, and I do not mean just the Bible. That is not the reason why I would like our children to be able to read well. But all literature, all good literature, I should say (make that distinction), because they need the skills and the background to understand, if nothing else, the many literary devices that God has employed in writing the Bible. The Bible is the world's foremost work of literature, and it has got just about everything in it that anyone could need to teach a course on literature.

Think about what is in there. You have history, you have songs, you have proverbs, you have autobiographies in terms of the Gospels. You have got prophetic literature, wisdom literature, which I kind of mentioned already. But inside all of those are all the little things, like parallelism and background and all those other things that you use foreshadowing what you would hear talked about in a literature class, because God has already employed those things in His Word.

As I said, the Bible is the foremost work of literature, not only in the world, but in the world since the beginning of this world. Not just now, but it has always been the greatest work of literature in the world, and only in that way and understanding it from a literary point of view as well as from a spiritual point of view, can we hope to get the most out of it because God put these things in there for a purpose.

So, as you may have surmised, this will be a sermon that digs into an aspect of the Bible as literature. But of course I will take a very spiritual approach in this. What I want to do in this sermon is deal with the Bible's description of itself. In particular, we will cover some of the metaphors that God uses to convey and illustrate what His Word is and does, and how it affects us when we read and apply it in our daily walk. Because the things that we are going to go over are very pointed actually in our understanding of what the Bible is and what it does and how we are supposed to apply it. I am hoping that these metaphors as we go over them—you all you know them all so they are not going to be anything new—will help us realize more deeply how God's Word works, what it has been designed by God to do. And this is all beyond to just give us knowledge.

We are going to start in our Bibles in John 6:63. I think this is a good place to begin because it illustrates Jesus' high estimation of Scripture, which He calls "My words." Obviously they are His words, not just the words that He spoke while He was alive as a human being here on earth. But all these words are His words, so I want you to think of it from that point of view.

John 6:63 "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."

We have to begin with the fact that He Himself is the Word. Remember, He is called the Logos there in John 1:1. He is the Word, and our Bibles are, as Mr. Armstrong often said, the Word of God in print. They are God's Word, set in ink on a page, and we have the ability to carry this around with us all the time and have them close to us, always in our minds and hearts. But there has got to be a distinction between the words that we see on the pages of our Bibles and the words that we see when we open a book like James Michener's *Hawaii*. There is a distinction there that we have got to recognize. They are two *different kinds* of words, even though they use the *same* words.

This is what God, or Jesus Christ here in John 6:63, is pointing out—that His words are different. We cannot read these kind of words in any other kind of book or magazine or textbook or blog on the Internet or whatever. Some of those things may contain some of God's Word if they are writing about this sort of thing. But these words in our Bibles are different from those other words. And so to describe this distinction, He says that His words are spirit and they are life. The other words are not.

What does He mean by this that they are spirit and life? Notice He begins this verse with a contrast between spirit and flesh. The spirit is what proceeds from God. It is that essence of Himself, His power that goes out from Him. It is a life-giving Spirit. Jesus Christ Himself is a life-giving Spirit, while the flesh, on the other hand, and what it produces, count for nothing. In terms of life, the flesh is worthless. It is impotent, it is impermanent. In fact, it ultimately actually produces nothing but death. All fleshly life ends in death.

The contrast between the life-giving Spirit and the flesh that ends in death is very stark and rigid. There does not seem to be anything that will bridge the two. Then Jesus adds His words to this contrast between spirit and flesh. He is God. The Spirit proceeds from Him and His words proceed from Him. We get the Spirit from God, and the words that He gives us are also from Him. They have the same source. What Jesus says here is that His words actually *are* spirit, both because they are produced by a Spirit Being and because they are of a supremely spiritual nature. He is not writing about physical things.

There may be physical things happening in the things that are in our Bibles. Obviously, we have got the history of Israel, we have got the founding of the church, a lot of physical things.

But He is interested in the spiritual part of that, the spiritual lessons that come out of those things. So they are living. I should just backtrack here because they are produced by a Spirit and are of a spiritual nature, His words then are living and produce more life. That is what they are based in. They are based in spirit, and because they are based in spirit and they emanate from God, then they are going to produce the same thing that God and His Spirit produce, which is life. They have this living quality. They have a quality that no other words, human words, have.

Like I said, His words may be the same nouns and verbs and adverbs and adjectives and prepositions and conjunctions and whatever else that we use to make ourselves understood. But His words, every one of them, are infused with His Spirit. And in that combination, words infused with spirit, they produce life. They produce godly life. They produce, ultimately, eternal life, if they are understood and followed by a person who also has God's Spirit.

We know that God has flung His Word out there to everybody who can read. And He has put ministers and evangelists and apostles and such out there to fling more of His words to those people who will hear, and we know that in most cases it does not produce anything. He has to reach in and to flip a switch or whatever in a person's mind so that he or she can believe. Once that person has God's Holy Spirit, God has worked with him or her to that point where they have been baptized and receive His Spirit, then they can start producing life because these words only produce the life when there is spirit at both ends of the communication process. And, of course, the person who is receiving those words with God's Spirit have to then put them into practice. It is not just receiving them. They have got to turn around and actually produce something with them or make a change by them.

Just as God spoke in Genesis 1 and the heavens and the earth were created, God's Word, even with us, works in the same way. We could call them creative utterances. That is what He is doing with all these words in the Bible. He is trying to create us in His image. He has given us, as Mr. Armstrong (I am quoting him a lot today or referring to him a lot) talked

about the Bible being God's instruction manual, and so God gives us His Spirit, He gives us His Word, to create us in His image. He has got a spiritual creation going, and when God speaks and it works on somebody who is in tune with Him by the Spirit, things happen!

Jesus here in John 6:63 is focused on spiritual things because that is what His word or His words are aimed at producing. He is aimed at producing a spiritual creation. The physical creation is finished. It is a completed work. God gave us this wonderful environment to live in so that His next act of creation could be done properly. So we would have all these other things that we would need for our physical lives but He is focused on the spiritual creation in us because the spiritual creation is the greater, more important part of His plan. That is ongoing.

So His words, just to sum all this up, are spiritual and they are life-producing. Because of these qualities that God's Word has, it is *dynamic*. It is not static, it is dynamic. It is lively. It is very active and constructive and powerful. The writers use many metaphors throughout the Bible to express or illustrate this dynamism. They had to come up with some way to let us know how the Word of God works as an active, almost alive thing so that we can understand that it is not just words on a page. They are not inert blots of ink on a page. They are alive, and they are working within us in a variety of ways, whether we know it or not. So the metaphors that we are going to go through are dynamic illustrations that describe these ways that God's Word works (That is hard to say. That is a lot of W's.)

We are going to go start with one or two, actually, that you all know very well. This first one was a memory scripture of Ambassador College.

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Most of these that we are going to go over are just single verses or maybe a verse or two to get the context. But here the metaphor is in two. Now it looks like it might be one just overriding the word light, but it is split into two in parallel. "Your word is a lamp." So that is the first one. And the other is "a light." Like I said, they are given in parallel. But even though they are given in parallel, which normally we think means that the first part of the couplet

and the second part of the couplet mean essentially the same thing. And in this case, they do essentially mean the same thing, but not *exactly* the same thing. There is a distinction to be made between the lamp and the light.

Both of them obviously illuminate the way in front of us. It drives back the darkness, so you have a light in a dark place. What gives? The darkness gives. The light in a dark room makes you able to see the whole thing. And it does not take a great deal of light to illuminate a room. Maybe not the way you want to fall on your furniture or this painting or whatever, but a small amount of light will chase the darkness into the corners or maybe completely out. That is one of the main things that is brought out in this particular verse.

But I want you to notice how the writer here in the psalms put this. "The word is a *lamp* to my *feet*," and then he says, "it is a *light* to my *path*." Two different things there that are being illuminated. I just should put this in here that this is a distinction to make us consider the two aspects of God's Word as a light. There is an internal and an external here. The psalmist is telling us that God's Word acts as a guide for how we walk. That is, it works *inside* us to instruct us in the steps that we should take.

The figure here is of a lamp that you hold in your hand, but it shines on your feet. It is a lamp to your feet, part of you. So the lamp here is kind of like, maybe we would give it a different metaphor in our own day, and we would say the lamp is like a map in a guide book that we are going to take on a hike, and this map and guide book, if we carefully study them, will help us plot a course that will be the most efficient and avoid the dangers along the way. It is something that prepares us for when we are going up on our hike.

So we have the knowledge that is given us in God's Word before we ever really strike out for where we are going to go. It is something that we study so that we know the right places to place our feet. That is something that is directed from inside of us. So this is the internal one, that it is a light to our minds. It is a light that gives us teaching that we need to know as we are going along toward the Kingdom of God.

And then comes the second half of the couplet. God's Word lights the path. This is external. We take it in an internal way but the what the psalmist is here doing is focusing our attention on these two different aspects. This one

is more external. It reveals the dangers on and around the path that we are taking as we walk so that we could avoid slipping and stumbling as we move through life. It is not only illuminating for us *how* we should walk, but it is telling us *where* we should walk.

It confounds the darkness in which Satan and this world tried to hide pitfalls for us to be tripped up and fall and become delayed or hurt or trapped. That is what a pitfall is. You do not want to fall into a pit.

So if we use God's Word properly, in this particular sense, and that it is lighting our path, what it does is exposes error. It exposes deceit. It exposes all kinds of sin before we step in it. We are walking down the path, and there is a temptation. Now we should know, because of the instruction of God's Word, that we need to avoid that temptation. And so, from what we understand, we tell our feet to walk a different way—to go around or whatever—so that we do not get tripped up by the temptation. It forewarns us about these things, and once we recognize them on the path, the light of God or the Word of God as a light, shed so much light on this it should dispel the darkness. It should dispel all the covering conceits that are on this temptation, whatever it happens to be, exposing them for what they are. And we say, "Ah ha! I don't want to go that direction. Let's skirt it and just avoid it altogether."

Now, a lot of times, we are not too swift, and we blunder into them anyway. But if we had really been studying God's Word and applying it, we probably would not have slipped up or blundered into the temptation.

So you see how these Bible metaphors work, these metaphors about itself. It is teaching us something that we need to understand so that our walk toward the Kingdom of God is successful. The Bible, God's Word, through these metaphors, teaches us something valuable about itself.

Let us do another one. There are seven of these in all. That one counted as one, not two. We are going to go to Proverbs 4. Obviously in context here, this is Solomon giving instruction to his son, or my own particular heresy on this is, this is actually David's words that he gave to Solomon. But that is just me. I should explain what I mean there. I think Solomon was using what David had given him when he was a younger child and writing it down for

us, because obviously this is done by Solomon. But in my own thinking about this, I think that a lot of these things originate with David, but that is neither here nor there.

Proverbs 4:20-22 [This is Solomon giving advice to his children.]
My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.
Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of
your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to
their flesh.

This one does not come right out and say the metaphor. It is kind of there written between the lines. But the last line about being health to their flesh is an allusion to God's Word being like a medicine or a tonic that one would take to become better, to be healed, be cured, or to maintain your bodily health. You know, we [my family] have been taking barley green and stuff like that for a long time. We take it pretty much every day, and it is supposed to do what it is supposed to do. So that is the sort of thing, some kind of tonic that you would take either to make you better or to maintain your health. It works both ways, so of course we need to consider this spiritually, not as a physical thing. God's Word then helps us to be spiritually healthy and full of life. This immediately made me think of the abundant life that Jesus talks about in John 10:10, where He says He has come to give us abundant life, and that is what He did when he provided His Word for us.

How does it work? How does it kind of work as a tonic or as a medicine? Well, I have also picked up two things here that we can consider in this vein. The first thing is that Scripture in us, remember it is a tonic that we take, that you swallow, works both to kill or mortify the flesh, that is the cells that are not good, things that are wrong within us. It helps us get rid of, cut out, or put off the thoughts, the words, the actions that will bring about death. Obviously, it wants to get rid of sin in us. God gives it to us so that we can be able to recognize sin.

At the same time, Scripture in us, or God's Word in us it (this is the second thing), feeds, energizes, and promotes right living that will end in life. And so it is kind of, as we find in another place in the Bible which will read later, a double-edged sword. It goes in us to kill what is bad, but it also goes in us to enhance what is good, or to add what is good.

A physical/spiritual parallel to add to this, which I alluded to already, is that when a person takes a medicine or some sort of health tonic for whatever problem he has, it is unusual or very rare for the person to take just one dose and be cured. Like I said, we have been taking these greens or whatever for years, and we probably will have to end up taking them for the rest of our lives to be able to maintain the health that we have. Usually, if it is like any kind of natural medicine or tonic, you have to take repeated doses, so many times a day for such a long time, for an extended period. And sometimes you have to take it for the rest of your life. It is something you just need to do for the particular thing to work.

This is especially true with natural remedies for things. They are not like the very strong chemical medicines that the doctors would give us and there is probably a good reason for that. Our bodies are not meant to take those really strong things all at once. It has a hard time handling it, but the things that we get from natural medicines are usually gentler, calmer, but they take longer to work.

We have got to think about this in terms of God's Word. We have to take our daily "doses" for the remainder of our converted lives to get the most from this spiritual medicine. We cannot stop. If we stop taking this important information from our God then our path to the Kingdom of God is going to be slowed or stopped, which means that our spiritual health goes right down the tubes. And so God's Word here is what keeps us spiritually healthy. It gets rid of the bad stuff and feeds and energizes and promotes right living so that we can have better life—the kind of life God lives.

Two down! Let us go to another one in Isaiah 55.

Isaiah 55:10-11 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

God's Word here is likened to rain and snow that falls on the earth and soaks into the soil and at the right time of year it allows seeds to germinate, plants to grow, come out and pop out of the soil, flowers to open, fruit to form, and ultimately food to be produced. In this way we are looking at the Bible being a force, or maybe call it a catalyst, that initiates a process, and also maintains a process, which we have mentioned already. But it initiates a process that causes useful growth and a beneficial end product.

This is a product, obviously, that God greatly desires to be produced. This is His endgame. Sons and daughters by the millions or billions, and His Word has a very instrumental part in all that, as we know. So we can say He is the instigator and the controller of this productive energy. He is the one that sends His word. He sends it to us at the right time, in the right place, in the right amount. And then it is up to us to use all of this to produce the fruit that He wants us to produce. Mostly, of course, becoming like Him, being in His Spirit image, His character image.

As He says there in verse 11 here, He does nothing in vain. He does nothing futilely. He does nothing that He is not going to get some sort of return from. God's Word will produce what He intends it to produce. So when He gives you an insight through His Word, He is working with you to produce something that you need in your life. How many times do we read the Bible and say, "I never noticed that before," and it sparks a thought and off we go, hopefully toward growth in producing something good.

This has a lot to do with what we find in Philippians 2. It is this process by which we work with God to produce what He wants to be produced.

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling [If we stop there, we would think it is all up to us. But then he goes on]; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

We naturally think that we are doing all the work. But God is the one that is actually instigating and controlling the process, with our cooperation of

course, and He is producing what He wants to be produced. So this metaphor of the rain, of the snow coming down out of the sky and starting this whole process going, feeds into this spiritual cooperation that we have with one another. He provides the raw materials, He provides the sun. He provides a lot of good things for us. But we, as the soil, still need to to make the effort to do what it is that must be done, which is to respond to Him in the right way.

Let us now go on to number four, which is in Jeremiah 23.

Jeremiah 23:28-29 "The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord. [verse 29 is where I am headed here] Is not My word like a fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

Here we have another double whammy in one verse—two metaphors. God's Word is both a fire and a hammer. Now you have to understand a little bit about the context here because most of Jeremiah 23 is about false prophets and empty preaching and deceitful preaching. Both of these descriptors, both of these metaphors, are agents of destruction. God calls His Word a fire. Fire is consuming, and He calls His Word a hammer and a hammer, as he says here, He does not want us to look at it in terms of pounding in a nail. He is talking about the big hammers that crush rocks. So He is talking about this tool or instrument that He uses to crush things, break things. He says His Word has this power. It has the power of fire, as it were, and the power of crushing or destruction, breaking, on the other hand.

This reminds me (I will not go there) of Matthew 21, especially in verse 24, right after He has been talking to the Pharisees and saying that He was going to have a nation to replace them. Right there in verse 24 He talks about the chief cornerstone breaking those who fall on Him and crushing those on whom He falls. God's Word—the real God's Word, the Spirit Being—has the same metaphorical power as the Bible does, as we see here in Jeremiah 23: 29. So the Word of God reveals sin, and it could condemn the sinner. Is that not what the Ten Commandments are? They are, Paul says, to tell us what sin is, and if we do not repent of it, we are going to die. And if we still do not repent of it throughout our lives having God's Spirit, we will die the second

death. It will be a witness against us. It testifies against those who reject God and rebel against Him.

Now we can look at fire not just as destructive, as consuming, but as purifying. It is a purifying agent. Peter describes trials in I Peter 1:7 as fires that are refining us. Throughout the Old Testament we find statements that things are purified *by* fire or purified *in* fire. Let me just give you a few of these if you want to jot them down. Numbers 31:23; Isaiah 48:10; Jeremiah 6:29; Ezekiel 22:18-22; Zechariah 13:9; and Malachi 3:3. Let me just go to that last one just to give you the gist of what some of these things are. He is talking about the messenger of the Covenant.

Malachi 3:3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Of course, to do this purging (not mentioned) but in the background of it all is high heat. Fire.

So these metaphors, in terms of fire being a purifying agent, mostly refers to refining metals. You throw the metal into a cauldron or whatever and you heat it up and heat it up and the impurities come to the top. You scrape them off and you keep doing that until you have a pure metal—pure silver, pure gold, or what have you.

But a few instances of those that I gave you show things being burned up completely. Of course, there is the the second death in the Lake of Fire as one of those things that burns something up completely. For instance, back there and in the Pentateuch contaminated clothes of a sick person were thrown onto a fire. The tent that they were living in was thrown onto a fire to get rid of all the contagion that may still be there. That is what God wants to do with disease and corruption. He wants to burn it up. He does not want to see it.

We will go back to II Peter 3. Peter talks about a fire that does just that.

II Peter 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and

the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Once God does all this with His fervent heat, as it says here, that is all that is going to be left. It is going to be the pure silver and the pure gold, as it were, with no impurities. So God's Word is a spiritual type of this fervent heat purifying our hearts and spurring holy conduct and godliness. So fire here back in Jeremiah 23:29 may suggest destruction or purification or both. That is what God's Word does. It purifies and if you are not willing to be purified, then it will destroy.

That was four and this is five coming up which occurs in Matthew 4. We will get one right out of the mouth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If you know your chapters this is where Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness. Of course, he has just tempted Him in verse 3.

Matthew 4:3-4 "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

So Jesus compares His Word to food that nourishes. It provides life. This is very similar to what we saw in John 6:63. This is an obvious metaphor that I am sure we have understood for many years. My dad did a sermon series of seven sermons titled *Eating: How Good It Is*, in which he went into this metaphor extensively. Jesus' emphasis here in in verse 4 is on two things.

First, every word of God is profitable. Every word of God is nourishing. That is the first thing. God wrote His Book very efficiently. There is nothing in there that should not be in there, and everything that should be in there is in there. In it is nothing extraneous, nor is anything vital left out. No matter if we are reading the history of Israel or the Law or the Psalms or the

Prophecies or the Gospels or the Epistles, or even the begats back there in various places in Numbers and Ezra and whatnot, even in the begats can be found spiritual information. At some level, there are things in there that we do not understand why God put them in there. But we have the assurance of our Savior that they are in there for a good reason. Every word of God is profitable for us.

The second thing that Jesus emphasizes here, is that life without God's Word in it is not really living. You can live by bread alone, as it were. But if you are not living by the Word of God, then that life is not worth very much. It is not going to produce very much. He is saying here that it is imperative that human beings include Scripture to the mix so that they can truly live. Remember what Jesus said? It is in Luke 9:60. He said, "Let the dead bury their own dead." Jesus is saying there that those who do not follow Him are dead. Those who do not have His Spirit are dead. They have only a physical, material, animal kind of life. Whereas those who know God, those who regularly eat this bread of life, and I should also add here, who have God's Spirit, because it is this combination of God's Word and the use of His Spirit, those kind of people have eternal life. John 17:3—Those who come to know God have eternal life. So that is what He is talking about here. Very similar to what we saw, again, in John 6:63.

But I want to notice something here about the full spectrum that is within the Word of God to be helpful and to produce life. Let us go to Hebrews 5, where the author writes:

Hebrews 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

I could probably just stay here, but I do want to add in verse 2 of I Peter 2 which says something similar.

I Peter 2:2 [He says] As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

These two verses back up Jesus' statement there in Matthew 4:4 that man cannot live by bread alone. The Bible can be, as these verses show, milk for

the newborn Christian, as it were, helping them to grow. And it could also be solid food that strengthens the mature. It is all in there. You remember the prophecy of Ezekiel in chapter 47. He went into the river and the water was over his ankles, and then he went up to his knees and then it was to his thighs, and then it was over his head. Well, that is a good metaphor, a good illustration for the way God's Word is. You can wade in ankle deep if you want to. But you can continue further on in, up to your knees, over your thighs. Or you can swim in it so that it is totally covering. There is that much depth in it, as it were, that you will never be fully satisfied in this life because there is just so much there, so many different layers of knowledge in God's Word.

It is one of His greatest attributes from our perspective that He can make something, and it could be used in so many different ways, whereas if we make something, it has one function and it does not work very good. But when He makes it, it works perfectly all the time, at whatever level we happen to be and need to use it for that particular thing. So Scripture is helpful and profitable for everyone, no matter where you are on the spectrum of conversion. It contains the basic principles that we need to know all the way through the very deep and very complex theological concepts.

Look how many books that it has produced because of it. All those commentaries and dictionaries and lexicons and papers from scholars—even our own articles and things like that. All these different levels and different aspects of God's Word has produced all of this information, and we are still not exhausting it and never will.

So the Bible has something for everyone no matter their smarts, their education, their background, their expectations, their desires, their skills, whatever. It does not matter who you are there is something in God's Word that can pique your interest and get you going and spur you to further growth.

Now let us go on to six. Go back a few pages to Ephesians, the sixth chapter.

Ephesians 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Here is part of the armor of God. It is the sword and notice again it is the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." You see this? You cannot separate the word and the Spirit. Let us go to Hebrew 4 where there is another similar verse.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Here the metaphor is that the Bible is a powerful weapon, like a sword that cuts straight through to the heart of things. Of course, the imagery here, especially in Ephesians 6, but it is also there in the background in Hebrews 4, combines this understanding that we have come to about the Holy Spirit and God's Word being inseparable, much like John 6:63. And it is true that God's Word and God's Spirit are inseparable. As I mentioned, His words originate in His Spirit. They work through His Spirit and create the fruit of His Spirit in us. The bare words without the Spirit, like I said, they are just normal words, but when they are combined with Spirit, then they are lively and dynamic.

Now here the Word of God is described as an offensive, attacking weapon. This is what we need to draw out when we need to repel our or God's enemies on a spiritual basis. What it does (flipping the metaphor to something else), it gives us the ammunition, as it were, to strike at the heart of the enemy with truth and with what God's will is. We can show them, both of those things—the truth of God and what God's will is—through God's Word.

In Hebrews the image is slightly different, because instead of pulling out the sword to strike at our foes, in Hebrews it is pointed back at us. That is how we are supposed to think of it. Because if we follow the flow of what the apostle Paul said (or whoever the author of Hebrews is), of his thought, he is talking about that. We need to make sure we are going to enter God's rest. That is up to us. That is part of what we have to do in cooperation with God to be in His Kingdom.

So the rest is still out there for the people of God. We have got to use the Word of God in a proper way, and many times and often and almost all the time, the proper way is to pull out the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and plunge it into oneself. The sword's target is what is inside us, the carnality and the sin that are still within us.

What it says here in Hebrews 4:12 is the Word of God examines us minutely and discerns our true state. If we went on to verse 13, there is another metaphor there of God being like a wrestler who has got us in a hold and we cannot turn our head away from His very piercing eyes. He knows us through and through. That is kind of how the idea of the sword here is: That it goes through and it plunges right down into us to the deepest recesses of our being, through the joints and the marrow and all that, and gets to the very center of us and finds out what we are really like. And we cannot get away from it. It is right there on its face. It is truth, and we better either face it and do something about it, or reject it and reject God.

So in a way, what it does, this double-edged sword, it judges us against the perfection and the purity of Jesus Christ, who is the true Word of God. It finds what is lacking in us, which is just about everything. We do not have to go very far before that sword is piercing something evil and that we need to get rid off. Of course, that it is likened to a sword means, implies, that what it finds should be killed, should be mortified, should be cut out or eradicated. It is quite pointed. (We like that kind of pun.)

That was number six. Let us go on to number seven. We have got time to get this in.

James 1:21 Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

What we want mostly there is the phrase "the implanted word."

I Peter 1:22-23 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one

another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.

This is one we learned very early in the parables that God's Word is likened to a seed. It puts down roots and bears fruit. We have kind of hinted at this already with the rain and snow one that we found in Isaiah 55. But here we have it front and center. Jesus uses this metaphor frequently. A farmer spreading seed that sprouts and grows to a harvest. James' use here suggests that God's Word is something that God specifically plants in us. It is the *implanted word*; that God found you to be good soil and He decided to dig you up a little bit, make a hole, put His seed in there, right in you. So it is something that God plants in us, expecting us to receive it in the right attitude, in the right way, and then to use it to produce fruit and ultimately to bring about salvation.

The idea here, the word picture that James is trying to get across, is that God's Word roots itself deep in us, goes way down, and over time it produces much fruit. Or it should. That is what Jesus teaches in John 15:1-8, where He is the vinedresser and He is going to cut things off that do not produce, and He will help in everything so we will produce. And He says, right there in verse 8, that God expects *much* fruit. So when He puts the Word in us and gives us His Spirit, He does not expect just a little plant and maybe one piece of fruit. He expects us to produce the fruit that leads to salvation.

Peter's usage is similar. That God uses His Word as the means by which we have been made alive spiritually. It was the seed given to us as a new godly, eternal life that changes us into His image. So very much similar usage here. And notice too that he says that the word is incorruptible. I will just throw that out there and let it go.

Let us conclude in II Timothy 3. This is kind of a summation scripture. What we are talking about is all the ways that the Bible describes itself, how it works within us. So we have another summation of these metaphors here.

II Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for

instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Here we actually get a bonus one, a bonus metaphor. God's Word is divine breath. I am not going to go on for very much on this, but the word "inspiration," as it is in ours, is hiding a metaphor. It is saying every word is God-breathed. Once again, we have this idea of Spirit and word combining together. So God's Word that is this divine breath that carries the power of God to complete and thoroughly equip everyone He calls. It has got everything that we need. He says it can provide teaching or knowledge to us. It can rebuke us when we need it. It can correct us when we need it. It can discipline us, or provide us discipline, teaching that is regular and whatnot that makes us have self-control and so much more. We can call the Word of God our "one stop shop," if you will, for all the instructions we need to be prepared for life in the Kingdom of God.