

Walton's Mountain to Vanity Fair

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 4:12

First, the conclusion: The primary source we need to read or hear every day is God's Word: The Bible. Then we must live it.

(Deuteronomy 6:2-9; Galatians 3:6-9)

The title above refers to a TV series and a book: "The Waltons," based on the life of Earl Hamner Jr. who grew up in rural Virginia during the Great Depression and WWII. The other is "Pilgrim's Progress," by Puritan preacher John Bunyan (1628-1688). It depicts the travels of a Pilgrim on a life journey to the Celestial City (heaven). He meets many challenges. Vanity Fair is an exciting worldly city, away from the road on which he was directed to stay. Tragedy is the result. Along with his companion, they consider where Truth should be found, and hard times avoided. We are all on a life journey. Each time we stray from the directed path, we do harm to ourselves and others. My earlier life resembled John-boy Walton. My "Vanity Fair" was seven years in the Navy (NYC, the French Riviera, San Francisco) and four years in college.

Key Verses: Knowledge we need to know, believe, and live (through God's help)

Psalm 119:160 *"Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endure forever."*

Hebrews 4:12-13 The power of the written Word: *"For the Word of God is alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

Hebrews 1:1-3 Jesus: The all-powerful Creator came to earth in humility. He taught, fed the hungry, healed the sick, brought the dead back to life, comforted many, forgave sins, the Lamb of God who died for the sins of those who accept him. He was raised from the dead for all to see and will come again in supreme power to cleanse the earth and give his people eternal life in heaven.

See also John 1:1-5, 9-14; Colossians 1:1-3; Revelation 1:5-8; Revelation 20

Do we understand this? Consider the words of **Hebrews 4:12-13**

"Alive and Powerful" – not words on a page, but God speaking directly to you and me: teaching, convicting, warning, admonishing, calming, comforting, saving.

"Sharper than any two-edged sword" – not cutting off your head or destroying your body, but saving, protecting, guarding.

"Piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and the joints and marrow:" Truth encompassing the entire self. God knows your mind, heart, soul, psyche, spirit, and your physical body.

“A discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Scripture gives us insight into ourselves. It shows us that God knows us entirely (Psalm 139) but loves us completely. We are His creation, meant to have fellowship with Him. He hears. He blesses. He forgives. He protects.

Will people refuse to believe the Word of God? God directs us to be salt and light to people in this world. We must not hide our light under a bushel (Matthew 5:13-16). Can we answer people’s questions through the use of Scripture?

Many will ask,

- “If these things are true, why does God allow evil?”
- “If the Word of God is powerful... if God is all powerful, why isn’t evil destroyed?”
- “Why isn’t there an end to suffering?”
- “Why aren’t those people healed, who pray for healing from cancer?”
- “What about people who keep praying for help to stop doing drugs or alcohol?”

Why? Why? Why? (This game is called “Stump the Professor”)

The truth is **many times we do not have the answer**. Here are some answers that Scripture does give us:

God’s ways are not our ways (**Isaiah 55:8-9**) yet he blesses us every day. Count your blessings (**Psalm 118**).

Suffering may be given or allowed to help us change our ways or to turn our eyes to him (Example: Paul’s conversion **Acts 9:1-18**).

God chastises those he loves. (**Hebrews 12:5-6**).

God still heals, but he’s not our genie. (**1 Corinthians 12:27- 31; James 5:13-15**).

Why does evil exist? God has given us a wonderful gift: freedom of choice (**Joshua 24:14-15**); he did not make us robots. Mankind’s free choices have brought sin into the world, have damaged the earth, have resulted in millions of deaths.

God gave us Truth, the Bible (**John 17:17, Psalm 119:160; Isaiah 45:19**). God promises to hear and answer the prayers of his people in his Will (**1 John 5:14-15**). We are limited; we cannot see the big picture. But we do have the responsibility to speak openly with people. God’s people have shared Truth with us and we as Christians need to share our faith with those who are lost (**2 Corinthians 5:18-21**) ; **Psalm 145**).

Our Mission: Hebrews 12:1-4 *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking to Jesus...”*