



# “Understanding the Bible”

## Section 1: What is the Bible?

### Unit 1.6: Wonderful Words of Life



#### I) Fully Alive & Fully Active

- In our journey to answer the question “*What is the Bible?*” we have explored many of the distinctive qualities of Scripture including its truthfulness, diversity, unity, authority, clarity, necessity, and sufficiency. In our final unit of this section, we now draw our attention to one final characteristic of the Bible that further distinguishes it from every other book in human history. This unique characteristic is the glorious truth that the words of the Bible are “*living and active.*” Hebrews 4:12-13 says, “*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. 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.*” Let us take a closer look at this passage and this claim to see how the Bible is fully alive and fully active in the lives of those who read and obey it.

#### II) Made Powerful by His Presence

- First, what makes the words of the Bible living and active is that these words were breathed out by a living God. When God spoke to the authors of Scripture, He did so through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and where the Spirit is present so is life. **John 6:63** proclaims, “*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*” This passage makes a bold proclamation that the Spirit of God cannot be separated from the Word of God because in the Bible we have eternal words of both *spirit* and *life*. This means that God not only sent His Spirit to inspire the writing of Scripture through revelation, but the Spirit remains tethered to the Word to help us understand Scripture through illumination.

#### III) A Mission-Accomplishing Messenger

- If God’s Word is living and active, this should give us great reassurance that all the divine power we need to reach lost souls rests not in our abilities, but simply in an open Bible. **Isaiah 55:10-11** promises, “*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.*” We need to remember that the church did not create the Word, but the Word created the church. Therefore, the power to accomplish God’s kingdom mission comes directly from God’s inspired Word. When we are faithful to read, meditate on, proclaim, and obey the Holy Scriptures, God will open our eyes and hearts to see His power for lasting change in our lives and our churches as we seek to fulfill His will.

#### IV) Seeking Life from its Source

- It is no coincidence that **Psalm 119** is the longest chapter in the Bible, but also the most prominent chapter in proclaiming the Bible as the source of all life. In Psalm 119:25 the psalmist says, “*My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!*” This verse begins a series of petitions throughout the psalm that make a direct connection between the life that God offers being found through the Word that God speaks. The psalmist claims that life can only be found through God’s Word (vv. 25, 107), God’s righteousness (v. 40), God’s promises (vv. 50, 116, 154), God’s law (vv. 77) God’s love (v 88, 159), God’s precepts (v 93), God’s understanding (v 144), and God’s rules (vv. 156, 175). This psalm reveals the joyous truth that by simply reading and obeying the Scriptures, we are given access to the only true source life through the words and Spirit of our living Creator.

## V) A Testimony of Transformation

- We find even greater support for the Scripture's living and active power when we witness the type of change that takes place as a person encounters the Bible's words of life through faith and obedience. Psalm 19:7-11 testifies, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."* In this passage, we see a testimony of holistic transformation and blessing from God's living and active Word when we read it. This psalm testifies that Scripture actively brings changes to our lives in the following ways:
  - a) Revives our soul (v 7a)
  - b) Gives wisdom to our minds (v 7b)
  - c) Brings joy to our heart (v 8a)
  - d) Opens our eyes to see truth (v 8b)
  - e) Provides us with divine warnings (v 11a)
  - f) Offers us eternal rewards (v 11b)

## VI) Cutting Right to Our Core

- The powerful yet painful way that God's Word brings life and transformational change to our souls is by revealing our filthy sins before cleansing us in God's righteousness. As quoted earlier, Hebrews 4:12 says we will be "pierced" by the sword of God's Word in the depths of our very souls when we read or hear the preaching of Holy Scripture. Describing a moment in the early church when the Apostle Peter was preaching the gospel, we see an example of this type of piercing in Acts 2:37-38, which says, *"Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Peter was a common fisherman from Galilee, but his words "cut to the heart" because they were God's words working in the power of God's Spirit to bring salvation to God's people. Renowned pastor and author Kent Hughes perfectly illustrates the Bible's ability to cut right to our core when he states, "God cuts us deeply that we might die. God cuts us again with His Word that we might live."*

## VII) Reading a Book That Reads Us

- The concluding statement of Hebrews 4:13 mentioned earlier also reveals that Scripture not only cuts us deep, but it lays us bare before our Creator. This verse reveals that because of the convicting power of God's Word, we will be *"naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."* That means that the Bible is not only a book that we read, but it's a book that reads us. Author Timothy Ward offers us a helpful approach to reading Scripture with this understanding of our exposure to God through His Word. Ward states, *"The most appropriate question to ask ourselves when we open Scripture to read it is: What is God wanting to do to me, and in me, through the words I am reading? When we read the Bible we must be ready, in the first instance, for God to act on us and in us. For, as we encounter his words, and as we encounter the actions he performs by means of them, we are encountering God himself."*

## VIII) Our Active Response to God's Active Word

- So, our concluding question to this divine truth that God's Word is living and active is, *"How should we respond?"* Author Kevin DeYoung takes us right back to Psalm 119 and gives us scriptural support on how we can actively participate with God's active Word. DeYoung claims we should *sing* the word (v 172), *speak* the word (vv. 13, 46, 79), *study* the word (vv. 15, 48, 97, 148), *store up* the word (vv. 11, 93, 141), *obey* the word (vv. 8, 44, 57, 129, 145, 146, 167, 168), *praise God* for the word (vv. 7, 62, 164, 171), and *pray* that God would act according to his word (vv. 58, 121-123, 147, 149-152, 153-160). Therefore, as we respond to Scripture in these ways, we will confirm in our hearts that the words of the Bible, unlike any other book, are living and active words of our living and active God.