

“Living Transforming Scripture”

Hebrews 4:12-16

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October 28, 2018

Barbara Brown Taylor says that, "My relationship with the Bible is not a romance but a marriage, and one I am willing to work on in all the usual ways: by living with the text day in and day out, by listening to it and talking back to it, by making sure I know what is behind the words scripture speaks to me and being certain I have heard scripture properly, by refusing to distance myself from the parts of scripture I do not like or understand, by letting my love for scripture show up in the everyday acts of my life."

The Bible is the story of God's creative love affair with humanity. Marriage is a wonderful, thrilling adventure full of ups and downs, twists and turns, that enhances love. Marriage is mysterious. There is always more to learn about your spouse and yourself. Opening yourself up, being vulnerable and sharing, expands love. There are challenging times when you intentionally choose to love. Mistakes happen so forgiveness and embracing grace are essential. There are times of misunderstanding and muddled communication which are opportunities to really listen seeking understanding. There are plenty of failures, opportunities to try again and again, forming a harmonious life. A healthy marriage makes each person a more joyful, loving, creative person. A healthy marriage enables each person to understand their gifts, talents, and personality, so they can nurture and share their goodness with the world.

Hebrews 4:12-16 NLT “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. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before God’s eyes, and God is the one to whom we are accountable. So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for Jesus faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive God’s mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.”

Like a love letter scripture opens our heart, so we can love; and scripture penetrates through our self-defenses enabling us to understand our true self, so we can share. Scripture is a human journal that exposes the destructiveness of human sin that is being overcome by the wonder of God's grace in a story that doesn't end with the last chapter for the story continues in our lives.

The word of God, capital W, is Jesus. The Word became flesh and lived among us. The word of God, lower case w, is many things such as the Bible. Old Testament stories were passed along in oral stories for thousands of years, then hand chiseled into rock, written on papyrus, and painstakingly copied onto scrolls in Hebrew. The New Testament was passed along verbally for decades before being written in Greek. The books of the Bible were chosen in the fourth century. The Bible was hand-copied for a thousand years. The multitude of translations today reveals the wide range of meanings of the Greek and Hebrew. Most Presbyterians believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the thousands of people who make it possible for us to read the Bible today. However, since God is love and love honors free will, it is likely that some human distortion of God's word has happened. We will explore how to clarify this distortion in a minute. Most Presbyterians believe that the word of God is anytime someone speaks or writes with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This means there are many books that contain God's word. When you are inspired by the Holy Spirit, you speak God's word. The word of God is also expressed in Holy Spirit inspired art, music, and service. The word of God is also received when one perceives the wonder of creation as they savor the embrace of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture proclaims, **“For the word of God is alive,”** also translated living, active. God's word is Holy Spirit infused. In recent years some people have come to view scripture as inerrant. However, most people believe that one needs the Holy Spirit to understand the Bible that is why we always have a prayer for understanding before we read scripture. God's word is alive, growing, evolving, adapting to our world and to your life. Often one will read the same scripture and emerge with fresh insights. Since God made each of us unique and God celebrates our uniqueness by letting each of us make our own decisions, then perhaps God has a unique message for each person. If God's word was dead, rigid, and static, then we could dissect it perhaps determining one shared understanding. Clearer understanding happens when we strive to empty ourselves of our baggage, biases, and manipulations. Two old friends met one day after many years. One was rich. The other poor. The poor one said, “How has everything been going with you?” “Well, one day I opened the Bible at random, and dropped my finger on a word and it was oil. So, I

invested in oil, and the oil wells gushed. Then another day I dropped my finger on another word and it was gold. So, I invested in gold and those mines really produced. Now, I'm wealthy." The poor friend was so impressed that he rushed to his hotel, grabbed a Gideon Bible, flipped it open, and dropped his finger on a page. He opened his eyes and his finger rested on the words, "Chapter Eleven." God's word is alive, active, living able to change with the world context and our lives stimulating our growth. Seeking to understand God's word is work that expands our love and joy. If reading scripture ever causes you to want to tell someone else how to live their life, to judge, exclude, fear or hate anyone or group then stop, pray for the Holy Spirit to inspire you, and keep reading scripture. Judgement, fear, and hate is never from God. God's word is alive, inviting us to live a more abundant life, a grandeur way of love, a more encompassing peace, a more robust joy. God's word is alive taking you on a journey of enlightenment. The perceptions of God's word that I am sharing today will be different for me tomorrow and are different from yours right now. Our sharing of perspectives propels us into fresh ways of living, loving, and rejoicing.

Scripture proclaims, **"For the word of God is alive and powerful,"** also translated energetic. God is the source of all life, creativity, love, joy, peace, and every goodness. God's word is a power source of God's blessings. God's word is transformative. God's word is illuminating every darkness, wiping away every tear, healing every disease, mending every relationship, making whole every brokenness. A teenager was frustrated in her attempts to understand Scriptures. Tearfully, she told her grandfather, "I get so upset, because no matter how much I read, I often don't understand and after a few days I forget what I read." The grandfather gently replied, "You're still doing a valuable thing. Remember, when you pour water over a sieve, no matter how much you pour, you don't collect much, but at least you end up with a clean sieve." God's word is energetic, powerful, transforming, redeeming, and resurrecting.

Scripture proclaims, **"For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper."** God's word cuts through our defenses, rationalize and justification enabling us to know our true self. Homiletics states, "God's word is so sharp, it gets to the heart of the matter to cut to the chase, cut through the crap, cut out the nonsense. The word of God is nuanced. It's sharp. It's able to cut to the issues that concern us with laser like precision no matter how infected, scabbed, or hardened."

Scripture proclaims, **"For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword."** Often God's word unites two seemingly opposed views. The suffering lament of Job and the mustard seed of faith that moves mountains. God blessing all people and Jesus calling us to travel a narrow way. We are blessed when we struggle, and we enjoy abundant life. We have more, the more we give. We are to be gracious and point out faults in love. We are plagued with binary thinking today, that there is a right and wrong way, that issues are black and white. Too often we say "no, but..." God's word is two edged, it unites, it inspires "both and" thinking, "yes and" conversations. Instead of easy superficial one perspective answers. God's two-edged word invites us to live in holy tension, to wrestle with a multitude of perspectives, to know ourselves, to understand others, to delight in the creative harmony of shared insights. God's word is full of stories, parables, and metaphors that reveal multifaceted insights. A little weak god would be finite, limited to one answer, desiring one way, seeking one style of worship. Our almighty, infinite omnipotent God is spacious, gathering all, uniting all, bringing together all. The Holy One said, open for me a door as big as a needle's eye and I will open for you a door through which may enter tents and camels. The word of God has texture, depth, multidimensions like art, a harmony, a feeling. The word of God invites us to savor and explore the magnitude, to discover ever greater meaning. God is beyond time, beyond space, beyond our ability to perceive. God's word continually expands our thoughts and feelings.

God knows we do not understand God's word. We cannot perceive more than the tiniest snippet of God's peace, love, joy, and grace, so God sent Jesus and sends the Holy Spirit to help us on our journey.

God is love. Love never forces. God gives us freedom to choose. God will always love every person. God will always welcome every person home. God's word beckons us to choose to accept God's grace. **Hebrews 4:16 "So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive God's mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most."** Amen

