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LIFE VERSE
God's Grace
Hebrews 4:12-16

INTRODUCTION

I've always enjoyed hearing what other Christians identify as their life verse. That one verse or set of verses that's had a significant impact on their lives.

- If we had the time, I'd love taking a mic around this room and hear what you'd say is your life verse and why...

For some of you, it might be a verse or set of verses that made it possible for you to understand God's grace through Christ.

Or, it might be a verse that gave you the wisdom you needed at a defining point in your life. And still today, it's like a lighthouse guiding you in life's most important decisions.

It might be a verse that gave you strength to do what you knew you should do when faced with a major moral decision.

I'm confident that if we took the time to hear what you'd say is your life verse, we'd discover that there's a whole lot of different reasons for the verses we've chosen. And every one of those reasons pointing to God's love and kindness toward each one of us.

I've got to tell you... It doesn't get much better for preaching than being able to preach your life verse. Easy to be motivated. Easy to speak from the heart. Easy to speak with conviction and passion.

If you've been at Brookside for a few years, you might think my life verse comes out of Romans 8. You've heard me say many times that it's my favorite chapter in the Bible.

But, the verses I identify as my life verses go back even further than Romans 8. Actually all the way back to the late 70's...early 80's. Which for some of you is only a period in time you've only read about in history books. 😊

It's a set of five verses from the 4th chapter of the NT book of Hebrews. **Hebrews chapter 4, verses 12-16...** (read)

I memorized these five verses 30 plus years ago. They meant a lot to me then and they still do today. **For two reasons...**

- ✚ First, because of the confidence they give me of the relationship that's mine with God.
- ✚ Second, because of how helpful they've been for me in sharing my faith in Christ with others.

What's been a lot fun about this is that every time I use these verses to explain the gospel to another person – I'm speaking from my own experience of what they've meant for me. The peace and joy they've given me for a whole lot of years.

So, here's what we're going to do... I made a promise to you three weeks ago when we were in the 4th chapter of John's gospel and listening to the conversation Jesus had with a woman by a well. A conversation when he gave her the best news any person could hear.

- ✚ How it's possible to have a relationship with God where you experience God's grace during your years on earth and for all of eternity.

My challenge that Sunday was for us to have that same conversation with others... What I promised was to take the time today to show you 'one of the ways' you can share your faith in Christ with another person. I'm going to do that through these five verses in Hebrews.

Now I know that some of you are eagerly waiting for today's sermon. I know you are because you've told me. It's motivated me to prepare this sermon as well as I can.

But I also know it's possible for some of you not to be sharing this enthusiasm. You tried once...maybe more than once...and it didn't go so well. And you've decided – *"I'm not doing that again!"* Or it may be that you've never done it. You don't want to blow it...upset the other person...lose a friendship.

I want you to know that I'm totally with you in the challenge that sometimes comes with sharing your faith. It can be an intimidating thing to do. Just anticipating the questions you might be asked is enough to stop you.

I got to tell you... Your concerns are equally motivating to do my best this morning.

But I'd also like to add this thought...I want to encourage you... It's impossible for anyone to lose when you share your faith in Christ with another person. The only way to lose is to go into with the wrong motivation.

- You do it to tell the other person off or to make yourself look good and make them look bad.

I'm convinced it's only a total win all the way around... You're honoring God by doing. You're obeying God. And you're giving another person the opportunity to hear the truth of God's love and grace through Jesus Christ.

So, wherever you're at with what I'm about to do – I've got the same request. Think of this time as an opportunity to prepare yourself for the next opportunity God gives you to have this conversation.

Whether you're excited for it or reluctant to get it. Because I can guarantee you – God will give you that opportunity!

On the other hand... It's possible you're here today and you're not a follower of Christ. You're interested. You're asking questions. But, you're not there yet. It's still a journey for you. You came this morning because you want to understand what Christianity is all about.

Thanks for coming...for taking the time. I hope what I'm about to say is helpful for you. What you might do as you listen to me – is think of this time as a conversation between the two of us.

As I'm talking you might write down what you'd ask at any point in our conversation. Love to have you email your questions to me. [address]

There's three questions I'd like to answer this morning... # 1 Where do you start the conversation? # 2 What do you say once it's started. # 3 How do you end it.

So, first of all...

WHERE DO YOU START THE CONVERSATION?

I can go all the way back to my senior year in high school when I first began sharing my faith in Christ – and I'm finding that what was true then is still true today.

✚ People do think about their relationship with God...not only during their lifetime, but also what it will be when they die...when they step into eternity.

So, whenever I have a conversation with another person about my faith this is where I begin. **I begin with our relationship with God...**

I talk about how it only makes sense...it's logical...that the God who created us would want a relationship with us. And this being true, that God would not leave us wondering who he is and what he's like. That instead he'd communicate with us...make himself known to us. And show us how we can have a relationship with him.

I can't think of a time I've said this that the person I'm talking with didn't agree.

And once I know we're on the same page with this – it's then that I lead our conversation into these five verses in Hebrews. They're the answer to what to say once the conversation's started.

WHAT DO YOU SAY ONCE THE CONVERSATION'S STARTED?

I begin by saying that as a Christian I believe God's revealed himself to us in three ways... He's done this through creation, through the Bible and through Jesus Christ.

Begin with creation... I've talked about how fascinated I am with the universe...the pictures that have come back from the Hubble telescope. Every one of those pictures giving us a better understanding of God.

God's brilliance. God's power. God's creative ability. The size of the universe alone pointing to the infinite greatness of God. Light years of distance between galaxies and planets. Galaxies and planets that make our own galaxy and its planets...including earth...tiny in comparison.

So no question, we learn a lot about God through creation itself. And it's good to talk this through with the person you're talking with. It's a fun thing to do and helps them think about the greatness of God.

But, it's important to take it to the next level of how God communicates with us... To help them see that as much as we learn about God through creation...we learn even more through the Bible.

✚ Not only do we learn everything that's true about God. We learn everything that's true about ourselves.

Let your enthusiasm for the Bible show!

You might be thinking right now... *"I'm going to be asked."* **or you might be asking the question yourself...**

"Why the Bible? Why not some other religious book? Why do you believe God speaks to us through the Bible and not through the Koran or the Veda or the religious teachings of Buddhism?"

My best short answer... The way in which the Bible was written. By many different authors over an extended period of time. And every one with the same message. It's content. Incredible wisdom for life! Most important – it's message of God's love and grace. The gods described in other religions are either impersonal or hateful.

✚ I'll take the time to talk about this, but I keep it short because it's important to stay on track. **Bring conversation back...**

We read the Bible and we learn even more about God – including the truth that God's holy and just and loving. Invaluable truth to know!

I've said so many times in these conversations... *"I'm so thankful that the God who created this universe is holy and loving. I can't imagine what it would be like if God wasn't this way."* **Almost always say...** *"You're right..."*

So, we learn what's true about God through the Bible. We also learn what's true about ourselves. **These are the things I emphasize...**

First... The reason we've been able to do what we've accomplished to this point in human history. **There's no denying it...** We've done some amazing things. The human mind is truly phenomenal.

- The Bible shows us we are what we are because we've been created in the image of God.
- There's the stuff of God in us big time.

Second, I emphasize... The Bible shows us that God created us with something we put a lot of value in – and that’s the freedom to choose what we do and don’t do. This is one of the key truths we learn about ourselves from the Bible. And honestly, we wouldn’t want it any other way.

But, with this freedom comes the potential for us to choose evil over good...for us to choose wrong over right. And we start exercising that freedom at a very young age. **Have fun with this in your conversation...** *Remember the first time your son or daughter said ‘No!’ to you?*

I’ll say... *Read the Bible and you’ll see how God spells all of this out for us. God tells us about our potential to do some very amazing things. And with this potential, we have a huge capacity for so much that’s good.*

But, God also shows us that we have an equal capacity for evil. We can go as far south with sin as we choose to go. And the Bible is very clear in saying that we’ve gone terribly far in the wrong direction.

- *Some of us further than others. But all of us far enough. We’ve all sinned more than a few times.*

Here’s where I write out the first of these five verses... To show the valuable part the Bible plays in our life by helping us see ourselves for who we really are. And not simply what we do, but what’s in our heart...what’s inside us that no one else can see.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

Tim mentioned last Sunday how much God’s Word means to him. I’m with him 100%. I’m so thankful for this book! And one of the key reasons I’m thankful – is this very thing the writer of Hebrews claims for it.

- It’s ability to penetrate to the core of who I am.
- It doesn’t let me get by with thinking I’m something I’m not. The very opposite! It faces me with what’s true about myself.

When I’m having a conversation with someone about my faith – I want them to know my gratitude for what the Bible’s done in my life. And I point to this as one of the reasons I’m so thankful that God’s given it to us.

- It helps me see myself for who I really am.

I talk through all of this through... What’s good about us and what’s gone wrong. And in all of these years I’ve never had anyone push back. In fact, I’ve only had one person claim they’ve never sinned. It was an interesting conversation. Other than that one time, I can’t remember when I’ve gotten push back on this part of the conversation.

But, here’s where the conversation becomes very real, and sometimes a bit challenging and other times very challenging... It’s talking through our

accountability to God for every sin in our lives...including the sin that only God can see. Our sinful thoughts and our sinful intentions.

✚ Which is why the next verse...verse 13...is so important to the conversation – for it to be truly helpful to the person you’re talking with.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:13

This is a powerful statement. It’s one thing to recognize that we’re sinners. In a way, that’s an easy thing to do. Who wouldn’t? Right!

But, to face the truth that everything we do is seen by God. Not only what we do, but our most secret sins. The sin that’s buried deep in our heart. Hidden in our thoughts.

To face the truth that God not only knows this sin, but will hold us accountable for each and every one. This is when it becomes real.

And it’s to this point that we’ve got to bring the conversation... Because it’s only in facing this truth and believing it, that the person you’re talking with will be ready to receive the help they need.

And you’ve got to spell out for them what this accountability means. It’s not a simple slap on the wrist. It’s God’s judgment to an eternal hell. It’s to spend eternity separated from God himself and everything that’s good and right. It’s the total absence of God and everything that’s good.

So I talk about this... And I do it with a sincere concern for the person hearing this. I know it’s a lot for them to take in...to absorb. This is a tough thing to hear. And I always acknowledge this. I ask them to hear me out.

And very often I’ll compare this to us wanting justice for the person who’s done wrong. Example of the four people who were murdered in Omaha. We want justice for the person who did this. We want him held accountable for what he did.

I’ll say... *This is hard stuff to hear. I know it is. But I also know that it couldn’t be any other way. And personally it would leave me feeling hopeless if it weren’t for what God did for me.*

Which brings the conversation to Jesus Christ...the only one who can help us. I got to tell you – every time I have this conversation I can hardly wait until I can write out the third and fourth verses.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Hebrews 4:14

I talk about the role of priests in the OT... How the people brought their sacrifices to the priests and they were the ones who offered those sacrifices to God. This is the way it had to be done. They couldn't do it themselves.

Added to this, there was one priest who was chosen to be Israel's high priest. More than every other priest, he represented the people to God. He alone could enter the Holy of Holies... **(explain this...)**

Every one of the priests...but especially the high priest...pointed to Jesus Christ who would become our ultimate and final high priest.

It's here I talk about the miracle of Jesus' birth... How the eternal Son of God became one with us in our humanity. I almost always say that this was a greater miracle than creation itself. For the Creator to become a part of his creation.

I talk through what this meant for him. **For example...** Living within the constraint of time and space. Experiencing the same challenges we face living on earth.

Then I show what distinguished Jesus from every other priest...

Instead of us bringing him sacrifices – he offered himself as a sacrifice for us on the cross. He could do this because unlike every other priest and unlike each one of us – he lived a sinless life. He lived a life of perfect obedience to God.

I'll describe the lambs in the OT that were offered as sacrifices. Each lamb carefully chosen so that the lambs they brought were free of any imperfection.

- ✚ Each lamb pointing to the sinless perfection of Jesus.

- ✚ John the Baptist – *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”*

I love talking through every part of verse 14... Including how it shows us that that instead of simply entering the Holy of Holies in a temple in Jerusalem...Jesus rose from the dead and entered into the presence of God in heaven.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Hebrews 4:14

Ultimately making it possible for us to be in God's presence.

So, I love everything about verse 14 and sharing it with others. **And then there's verse 15...** It's like the icing on the cake!

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:15

There's so much joy in being able to share this with another person! To help them see that Jesus Christ completely understands what it's like to be human.

- ✚ He's faced every challenge we face.

- ✚ Most important of all – he's been tempted to sin in the same way we're tempted.

And the good news! The really good news that takes it way beyond Jesus understanding temptation – is that he never sinned. And because this is true – he could offer himself to God as a sacrifice for our sin.

Every time I've talked about this I've used myself as an example of why no other person could do what Jesus did. **I've said...**

I understand what it's like to be tempted. I can sympathize with your struggle with sin. But, that's all I can do. I can't do what Jesus did. I can't take your sin on myself and die for you. Because I'm as much a sinner as anyone.

Which brings us to the last of our three questions...

WHAT DO YOU SAY AT THE END OF THE CONVERSATION?

Have this conversation with another person and you've shared with them the most wonderful truth any person could hear. You really have! And they might be totally amazed by what you've said.

About a month ago – God gave me the opportunity to have this conversation with someone who's doing some work for Bec and me on some investments we have. I know this person well enough to know that things aren't settled for him spiritually.

So, I've been praying for the opportunity to have this conversation. And God answered my prayer. What was planned to be a one hour meeting turned into a two hour conversation – where most of those two hours were spent talking about what I talked through with you this morning.

Up to this point that is... Because this was one of those times I didn't end the conversation. We literally ran out of time! Give him more time to think about what I just said. **(Explain in sermon that you never have to rush the conversation. There are times when it's best to give the person you're talking with more time to process what you've said.)**

He called me this week and one of the things he mentioned is going home that evening and telling his wife about our conversation. How good it was! He even used the word 'inspired' to describe its effect on him.

And I was really glad to hear him say this. **But, here's the deal...** If I don't end the conversation the way it needs to be ended – it's not going to do him any good. Because right now – it's simply good news he's heard. He still doesn't know what he needs to do with what he's heard. What he needs to do in response.

So, guess what? I'm praying for the opportunity to end the conversation. And how I'll end it? I'd end it with verse 16 – the last of these five verses in Hebrews four.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:16

Approaching the throne of grace – is coming to God in prayer. Something we can do with confidence because of what Christ did for us.

And the reason to do it, is... *“to receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

I'll explain that there's no greater need in our lives than to have God's forgiveness for our sin. Forgiveness that's only possible through Christ's death for us on the cross.

But, it's something we need to receive! We need to confess to God that we are sinners and we need God's forgiveness. We need to ask God for it.

Ask 'the big question' – Is this something you'd like to do? **If he says...** **“Yes.”** Then I'll lead him in a simple prayer.

God, I thank you for loving me and sending your Son to die for me. I confess that I've sinned against you and I ask your forgiveness. I put my trust in what Jesus did for me when he died on the cross.