

HEBREWS 3:7-4:16

A word to those who've started out on the road to God's rest...

HEBREWS 3:7-19

WARNING: THERE'S NO REST FOR THE WICKED

So watch out lest our sin-hardened hearts keep us out of God's rest

HEBREWS 4:1-11

PROMISE: THE REST IS YET TO COME FOR THOSE OF PERSEVERING FAITH

So, with fear, make every effort to enter into God's rest

HEBREWS 4:12-13

SO CHECK YOUR HEART

God's Word exposes the true state of our hearts

HEBREWS 4:14-16

& KEEP GOING TO JESUS

He's the one we're going to & the one who can get us there

HEBREWS 3:7-4:16—MANUSCRIPT

WARNING!—Strenuous Trail!

CAUTION!—Falling Branches!

DANGER!—Brown Snakes on the Track!

These are just a few of the warning signs you might find on some of the more risky bush walks around and hikers ought to watch out with fear—there are serious dangers out there for them to consider.

But for Christians on the often difficult journey through this wild world, home to heaven, there's another danger altogether to be considered and it's not out there—it's the very present danger in here (our hearts).

This morning's passage has everything to do with the relationship between our hearts, and our home.

Brothers and sisters (you know this), we Christians are pilgrims on a journey. In Jesus, God has set us free from slavery to sin and death, but his saving acts aren't all over and our salvation is not yet complete. Our home of complete rescue is still ahead of us and our salvation won't be fully realised until we reach that world to come of resting with God.

And so we must go on, by faith, to that appointed place of perfect rescue. There, our toils will all be over, our journeying on rocky tracks will be done, and our blistered feet will find comfort on the green grass of God's new creation. We will be home! at rest! with God!

...unless our wicked hearts kill us on the way.

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I remember as a kid sleeping in the back of the car on a late drive home at night with the family, and then pulling up at our house and waking up surprised and saying, “Oh, great! We’re here!”

Friends, is that (basically) how you’re journeying this road to rest? Are you dozing off, ignoring all the warnings and expecting to (just) coast all the way to eternal life and wake up at the end surprised you made it?

Spiritually speaking, are you asleep at the wheel of your own heart?

If that’s us, the pastor of Hebrews is screaming at us this morning to wake up because we must go on to God’s rest. That’s why he showed us that high, exalted view of Jesus in Hebrews 1. He’s saying, “Hey, look! here’s Jesus, the human priest-king and divine Son of God!” So, Hebrews 2, “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we’ve heard in the Gospel of God’s exalted Son so that we don’t drift away from the glorious message that is him!—his person and his work!” (We must go on).

And then he continues, Hebrews 2, “Behold Jesus! who was made (for a little while) lower than the angels but who’s now exalted in heaven, crowned with glory and honour!—there he is!—having conquered sin and death in the flesh so that we might go on to join him!” (We must go on).

So, Hebrews 3, “Holy brothers and sisters who share in that heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on him (on Jesus!) because we are the true household (the true people) of God... *if* we hold on to our confidence and hope.” (We must go on).

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So, here's a word to those who've started out and who are going along the road to God's rest. We begin in Hebrews 3:7-19 where there's a **WARNING** in the form of a simple history lesson and here it is: **THERE'S NO REST FOR THE WICKED.**

This history lesson is one we've been going over throughout the service. We heard, in Exodus 17, how God's people (redeemed out of slavery in Egypt) grumbled against him and tested him in the wilderness even though he'd cared for them so miraculously. And then we read together from Psalm 95 where (through the psalmist David) God's speaking about those hard-hearted, rebellious people. That psalm (Psalm 95) is the very passage the writer of Hebrews has picked as his own sermon text! (He quotes it seven times by my count).

So as pilgrims on our journey, let's learn from our forefathers who were pilgrims on there's, as the Holy Spirit speaks to their failures.

(Hebrews 3, verse 7)

⁷ So, as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion,
during the time of testing in the desert,
⁹ where your fathers tested and tried me
and for forty years saw what I did.

Don't repeat that deadly mistake (the Holy Spirit's saying)—God's people saw forty years of God's faithfulness to them (like water from a rock) and in response they hardened their hearts and rebelled against him. So, today, if you hear God's voice, don't you harden your hearts against his Word (verse 10) because...

¹⁰ That's why I was angry with that generation (the Holy Spirit says), and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, (they don't want to know—don't want to listen) and they've not known my ways.' (they've not know their God)

¹¹ So... I declared... on oath... in my anger... 'They shall *never* enter my rest.' "

THERE'S NO REST FOR THE WICKED.

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A bit of background from Numbers 14:26-30,

²⁶ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ²⁷ "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I've heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. ²⁸ So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: ²⁹ In this desert your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. ³⁰ Not one of you will enter the land (the place of rest) I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

THERE'S NO REST FOR THE WICKED.

That's the same point the pastor's making back in Hebrews 3 and, by the way, the wicked aren't just those who torture small fluffy animals—most definitively in Bible terms, the 'wicked' are those who reject God and rebel against him. So, I wonder what effect does God's Word have on you in verse 11 of Hebrews 3?

¹¹ "So I declared... on oath... in my anger...

'They shall never enter my rest.' "

I'd like to put it to you that, in maturity of faith, we really ought to instantly see how God's judgment of those who reject him is, ultimately, such good news. God is not some 'sook in the sky' with petty rejection issues. No—those who reject him reject the source of all that's good, right, beautiful, and just. To oppose him is to endorse chaos and evil and that's why it's so utterly wicked (not to mention the Israelites rejection of him after his amazing faithfulness).

And so the good news of God's judgment is that he is not about to abandon his creation, let us throw off his good authority, and leave us to destroy the whole lot of ourselves. He will intervene to uphold justice for his own glory and for our own good.

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THERE IS NO REST FOR THE WICKED and that's good and right, so (Hebrews 3, verse 12),

¹² See to it (or 'watch out') brothers and sisters, that none of you (not just 'you' but 'none of you') has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

Do you see what the writer's doing? He's taking Psalm 95 and now he's applying it today to his hearers. So what's he getting at?

Let's listen again. We're to,

¹² Watch out, that none of us has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it's called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

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Growing up on a farm we had geese. Geese are not nice animals (I can assure you) but there's a couple of things to be said for them: they're tight-knit (they've got each others' back) and they'll protect their own to the death (and I bore the wounds to prove it!)

Grange Baptist Church, we are a gaggle of geese. Our formation style is 'Stick in close' and our motto is 'No goose gets left behind.' On a basic level, this is (just) what it means to be a church member. You and I are actually supposed to be doing this—getting in close like the brothers and sisters we are and making sure not one of us is kept out of God's rest because of our sin-hardened hearts.

How are you going with that?

So, if one of us starts saying, "Y'know, God's judgment and wrath (like in Psalm 95) is a bit much (isn't it?) People really don't like or understand it. I think I'll start denying that aspect of God." Or if one of us starts saying, "I'm over living under God's Word. I'm bailing out"... We're to [watch out](#),

brothers and sisters, that none of us has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

So then, members of Grange Baptist Church, since we're a 'get me to heaven' co-operative, let's agree to do everything God is telling us in an attempt that not one of us turns away from the living God.

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So, what can we do Today to keep moving heaven-ward together? Have a look again at verse 13,

¹³ Encourage one another daily, as long as it's called Today (feel the urgency?—every day counts!) so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

When the Hoover Dam was being constructed in the US in the 1930's some of the workers were getting hit in the head from falling rocks. To protect themselves, they made helmets by taking their baseball caps and hardening them with tar.

Well, sin works like that too (not to protect us but to kill us). Sin is like black tar on our hearts hardening them to God's Word of life.

Sin's deceitful like that. Though it promises to satisfy us, it actually wants to end us and if we tolerate it long enough, it just might. And so John Owen wasn't messing around when he said, "Be killing sin... or it will be killing you."

This is why, in our Church Covenant, we promise to ‘uphold the exercising of biblical Church discipline.’ So, members, if you’re found to be living in blatant sin (sin that you repeatedly refuse to turn away from) since you’ve fallen asleep at the wheel of your heart and since you’re in danger of dying on the road and not making it to God’s rest we (your brothers and sisters) will use God-given measures to try and wake you up. In obedience to Jesus’ command of Church discipline, we will discount you from this body and we’ll do it in love since (at that point) we’ll be loving your heart more than *you* do.

Member of Grange Baptist Church, please notice this isn’t just the pastor’s deal—this is your business too.

This is also why, in our Church Covenant, we all promise to ‘Strive to live godly lives, resisting worldly passions, and to lovingly correct one another where necessary.’ So, members, it’s not necessarily nosy to take an interest in each other’s hearts, and it isn’t nit-picky to note those obvious sins in each other’s lives—it’s supremely caring and loving because (verse 14),

¹⁴ *We have come to share in Christ* (we’ve come to receive all the spiritual blessings of Jesus’ sinless life and sin-destroying death and resurrection) *if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.*

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We must go on if we are to enter God’s rest, and if there’s one sure way to sabotage our church on the way it’s to tolerate sin in our own and in one another’s lives. That only hardens our hearts and deafens us to the heavenly calling of Christ.

So, **WARNING: THERE'S NO REST FOR THE WICKED.** So, watch out lest our sin-hardened hearts keep us out of God's rest.

And if we're sitting here thinking, "Oh c'mon, tone it down; I said 'the prayer'; I'm in the people of God' I'm good"... take heed lest you fall, and read with me from verse 15,

¹⁵ As has just been said:

"Today, if you hear his voice,
don't harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion."

¹⁶ Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? (the set free people of God) ¹⁷ And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? ¹⁸ And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? ¹⁹ So we see that they (the set free, yet rebellious) were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

The history lesson is in and the results are conclusive: it is entirely possible to start out in the (understood) 'redeemed' people of God and to, later, prove your exclusion from them by your rebellion. (There is such thing as rocky soil hearts who sprout but die). It's not that we can be 'unborn' again—it's that the reborn always go the distance.

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It's a deeply humbling warning (isn't it?)

THERE'S NO REST FOR THE WICKED. So watch out lest our sin-hardened hearts keep us out of God's rest.

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Well, that's the warning, and now (in Hebrews 4:1-11) here comes the **PROMISE: THE REST IS YET TO COME FOR THOSE OF PERSEVERING FAITH.**

By 'topping and tailing' this next unit we see his main point. So, Hebrew 4, verse 1,

¹ Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let's be careful (literally 'let us fear') that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.

And then down to verse 11,

¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

So it works (quite simply) like this. To a people on the road to God's rest:

- Hebrews 3:7-19—"Make sure you're not kept out of it"...
- Hebrews 4:1-11—"Make sure you actually go into it."

We've had Psalm 95's hard-hitting history lesson, and now comes Psalm 95's promise and hope!

THE REST IS YET TO COME FOR THOSE OF PERSEVERING FAITH.

So, with fear, make every effort to enter into God's rest...

And we ‘get’ what that means—it means ‘keep going in true faith’; really, genuinely trust in it, not with a dead faith but with an alive and active one! Not doing that was what went horribly wrong with the ‘Psalm 95’ people of God that warning was all about.

That’s what he’s saying in Hebrews 4 (from verse 1 again),

¹ Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ² For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did (they heard the good news of God’s rest too); but the message they heard was of no value to them (not because there was something wrong with the message but) because those who heard didn’t combine it with faith (‘trust’).

It’s just like earlier in the service—we didn’t sing ‘Trust & Do Nothing’ by Edwin Deadfaith!... we sang ‘Trust & Obey’ because obedience is (just) what real trust looks like!

(Think about it)—obedience without trust is like obediently grabbing hold of a lifeline that’s tethered to nothing, and trust without obedience is like refusing to obediently grab hold of that lifeline while yelling out “I trust you!” The pastor of Hebrews wants us to know that hearing the good news of God’s rest is one thing, but truly trusting that promise to the end is another. (Plenty of people hear the Gospel and it does them no good).

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So, a few questions you might be having: What (exactly) is this rest he’s talking about? And where is the promise that this rest of God is still open for entry? Well, let’s follow his logic (here) and see what we find and I

think what we'll see is that it's (really) quite straightforward. Hebrews 4, verse 3,

³ Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

"So I declared on oath in my anger,
'They shall never enter my rest.' "

That might sound a bit contradictory, but he's just saying, 'Since it was *unbelief* that kept *them* out, it's *belief* that will get *us* in.' (Let's keep reading),

And yet his work (God's work) has been finished (rest) since the creation of the world. ⁴ For somewhere he's spoken about the seventh day in these words: (Genesis 2:2) "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work."⁵ And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest."

And that just means what it sounds like it means! The rest that's on offer in Psalm 95 is God's own 'Genesis 2' Rest of rests!—it's the rest God's been enjoying, in heaven, since his creation work was done! So this 'rest' thing is a massive deal! We're talking about entering eternal, heavenly rest, with God.

Verse 6,

⁶ It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them didn't go in, because of their disobedience.

We 'get' his point (there) from everything we've seen so far. So...

1. (Genesis 2)—big 'God-rest' to be entered into...
2. (Numbers 14)—God's disobedient people didn't even enter into the preview of his rest when they failed to enter the land of Canaan. And so...
3. (Hebrews 4:7),

⁷ Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, (Psalm 95) as was said before:

"Today, if you hear his voice,
don't harden your hearts."

So...

1. big 'God-rest' on offer in Genesis 2...
2. God's people failed to enter into it in Numbers 14...
3. but God has set another day called Today (Psalm 95) when his 'God-rest' can be entered into *for* (Hebrews 4:8),

⁸ if Joshua (the leader of God's people) had given them rest (back in Numbers 14), God wouldn't have spoken later about another day.

He's just saying:

1. "God's true rest has been open for entry since Genesis 2, verse 2,
2. and Joshua didn't lead us into it,
3. and the Holy Spirit's still offering it in Psalm 95,
4. through which he's still speaking to us *today* and so *that's* why (verse 9),

⁹ There remains, then a Sabbath-rest for the people of God (and here's why it's a Genesis 2 'on the seventh day, big, God-Sabbath rest') ¹⁰ for

anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

He's been talking 'rest, rest, rest, rest' and now he's talking '*Sabbath-rest!*—true, heavenly rest, with God!'... That's such a wonderful image (isn't it?)

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Brothers and sisters, you might be tired. Tired of the grind of life in a fallen world. Tired of the serious pains of a broken body and mind. Tired of the sin that rips families apart. Tired of fighting against sin that just won't die... But, one day, the race *will* be finished and the work *will* be done, and those of persevering faith *will* be *home!*... at *rest!*... *with God!*...

And so the old English hymn goes...

Sleep on, beloved, sleep, and take thy rest
Lay down thy head upon thy Saviour's breast
We love thee well, but Jesus loves thee best
Goodnight... goodnight... goodnight...

Calm is thy slumber as an infant's sleep
But thou shalt wake no more to toil and weep
Thine is a perfect rest, secure and deep
Goodnight... goodnight... goodnight...

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PROMISE: THE REST IS YET TO COME FOR THOSE OF PERSEVERING FAITH.

¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following *(past) their example of disobedience.

Christian, you know what to do in response to this. You must go on in perseverance of faith, to the end. But if you're with us this morning and you aren't a follower of Jesus (we're so glad you're with us) but, with all love, the reality is... you can't persevere in what you haven't even begun and this rest with God cannot be yours if you don't ever set foot on the road.

One of the past leaders of God's people, Joshua (we were reading about) couldn't even lead God's people into the *preview* of God's rest in Canaan! Their rejection of God and their disobedience against him invited his right judgment upon them and so they died in the desert.

But the new and true leader of God's people—another Joshua (Yeshua) we know as 'Jesus'—he can do it! He can lead us into this true, heavenly, God-rest because he is our leader who is God in the flesh! And, though every Christian in this room has rejected him, on the cross, while we all were still his enemies, our perfect leader, Jesus, died in our place, taking the judgement of God for our sins, and Jesus leads us (now) out of our sin and disobedience, safely through death, and into eternal rest! His resurrection from the dead and his ascension into heaven is ours *and yours* to share in...

...if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

Will you put your confidence in Jesus today?

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Hear the living Word of the living God: don't let your wicked, unbelieving hard heart kill you in the desert of disobedience and rejection of God. Turn from your life of sin and grab hold of Jesus. He's the only one who can lead you into this rest.

¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

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So then (so far as it depends on us) we want to know how we can guard our hearts so that, one day, we say along with the apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" and after which, by God's grace and to his glory, we hear Jesus himself saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

- **WARNING: THERE'S NO REST FOR THE WICKED.**
- **PROMISE: THE REST IS YET TO COME FOR THOSE OF PERSEVERING FAITH.**
- So (Hebrews 4:12-13) **CHECK YOUR HEART...**

...is it hardened by sin?... or is it believing?... But how could we really know? What could reveal such deep, inner mysteries? It strikes me today that so many people (Christians included) put such a huge amount of trust in their own hearts. "If you want to know the state of your heart, just ask your heart!" they say!

But everything we've considered this morning seems to be saying, "That is not a good idea!" and that rings true for me. My heart is so often not the true friend and reliable guide it promises to be! If we want to know the true state of our hearts, put them under the scalpel of God's Word and see what he reveals. Do you want to know if you stand to fall by following the example of disobedience? Have a look with me again from verse 11,

¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

¹² For... the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow (it divides what man cannot divide nor tell where one thing ends and another begins—that's how sharp and exposing it is) it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything's uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

And I think the pastor of Hebrews has been demonstrating the immediate cutting power of God's Word in this very passage! Through Psalm 95, the Holy Spirit, today, is saying "Today!" (this really is a living and active Word!) and it's one that demands a response, just like we saw right back at the start in Hebrews 3, verse 7,

⁷ So, as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you hear his voice

⁸ (response) do not harden your hearts.

Friends, we don't expose the true state of our hearts—God's Word exposes the true state of our hearts. So how are you responding to God's Word?

How are you responding to this warning? By ignoring it in prideful self-confidence and tolerating sin in your life? Or by being humbled by it and watching out for ourselves and this body of Christ as God commands us to?

How are you responding to this promise? By passively letting this sermon fly over you and not (really) planning to make any changes in your life as a result? Or by fearing you fall short of God's rest and making every effort to enter into it as God lovingly calls you to? Our entire lives are a conversation with God. We will not fool him on judgment day—the lives we're living now will speak for our hearts.

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Brothers and sisters, **CHECK YOUR HEART**, and when you find it's nowhere near worthy of the rest you're on the road to don't turn back in shame—(Hebrews 4:14-16)—**KEEP GOING TO JESUS**.

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens (think: 'rest'), Jesus the Son of God, let's hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we don't have a high priest who's unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but we have one who's been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. ¹⁶ 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.

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I'm going to put some thoughts out there (and you don't have to nod or anything) but I wonder how many of us have had these same concerns before...

"Following Jesus... living by the promises of God... it's hard... I'm pathetic at this. I can't keep going to Jesus—not like this..."

"It seems most other Christians I know are flying along the super-highway to heaven and I'm broken down on the side of the road half the time. I must be doing this all wrong. I can't keep going to Jesus—not like this."

"I *have* fallen asleep at the wheel of my own heart. My love of Christ is so often cold and dull. My lack of personal evangelism makes me feel disqualified. My performance as a husband or a wife is littered with selfishness. My performance as a parent is plagued with impatience. My caring about my fellow church members' souls has been non-existent, so I'm done for. I can't keep going to Jesus—not like this."

All of those thoughts are so common, but that conclusion is so wrong. No—this is what we're to preach to ourselves in those moments:

Since we have a great high priest

(OK) what do they do?—they represent you before God and atone for your sin!—they get rid of it! And where is this great high priest?

who's gone through the heavens

So he's there, in the same heavenly rest we're headed for! And who is he?

Jesus the Son of God!

So, since Jesus, the Son of God is our sin-squashing high priest who is already there in the rest at the end of our road... don't lose heart! Don't turn back! Together, let's hold firmly to the faith we profess!

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It's so often true that the reason we refuse to go to others for help is because we think, "They're above this. They won't 'get' it." But we must not think such things of Jesus. Because,

¹⁵ we don't have a high priest who's unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who's been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin...

There's a marvellous reality in this for every Christian who knows their need: Jesus is *weak* in all the ways you *want* a high priest to be (he 'gets' it), and yet he's *strong* in all the ways we *need* him to be (he's without sin!)

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If you've been hardening your heart to God's Word; if you've been tolerating sin in your life, Jesus the Son of God is saying to you from the place of pure rest, "Here, repentant child, *run* to me, boldly, confidently, and without hesitation. I 'get' your weakness; I 'get' that it's hard... now let me wash you clean by my grace."

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Grange Baptist Church, a word to those on the road to God's rest:

There are dangers aplenty out there, but don't underestimate the very present danger in here:

- Watch out lest our sin-hardened hearts keep us out of God's rest.
- With fear, make every effort to enter into God's rest.
- So, let God's Word expose the true state of your heart and respond accordingly.
- And keep going to Jesus—he's the one we're going to and he's the one who can get us there!

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¹⁶ 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.