

## How To Listen To A Sermon

*“Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.*

*And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:*

*For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

*But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.*

*For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*

*Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.”* (Read Matthew 13:13-17)

How much effort do you put into listening to a message? Listening to the Word of God is important, and failure to do so can be spiritually devastating. The above passage of Scripture is quoted by the Lord from Isaiah 6. Isaiah had been appointed a prophet to the nation of Israel. When God called him, He warned Isaiah that the people were going to reject his message and refuse to listen to the Word of the Lord and that’s just what they did. Even in the Lord’s day, there were those who refused to listen to the message of God, and true to form, the consequences were serious.

The Bible places much emphasis on hearing. Various verses of Scripture in Matthew (11:15, 13:9, 15:10) as well as in Luke (Luke 5:15, 8:18), speak to the importance of hearing the Word of God. Mark 4:23-25 is another passage of Scripture that merits our attention. The Lord is speaking here in reference to our hearing and heeding the Word of God. That person who is willing to diligently listen to the preaching and teaching of the Word will be rewarded by gaining a greater degree of knowledge concerning the Scriptures. But they who lend only half an ear to the sermon, will never increase in their knowledge, and will eventually lose what knowledge they have. Needless to say, how we listen to a sermon will determine what we receive from it. So how do we listen to a sermon?

## ARRIVE EXPECTANTLY

“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.” (Ecclesiastes 5:1)

If we are going to arrive expectantly, we must first of all arrive **HUNGRY**. Acts 10 records the story of the conversion of Cornelius. Upon Peter’s arrival at his home, Cornelius shared with Peter the details of his vision, and in verse 33 Cornelius said, “. . .now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.” In this statement you can sense an attitude of expectancy.

Cornelius and those with were hungry for what Peter had to share concerning the things of the Lord.

The Bereans of Acts 17 are another example of being hungry for the Word of God. Of the Bereans it is said, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). The word “readiness” means eagerness or willingness. When the Bereans went to church, they went with an eagerness and willingness to hear the Word. They were hungry.

The following story humorously illustrates the lack of hunger on the part of God’s people. A year ago my wife’s work schedule shifted, and preparing dinner became my responsibility. My range of meals was limited: a bowl of Wheat Chex and a lunchmeat sandwich. I quickly developed an expanded array of dinners for my boys to choose from: spaghetti with Prego three-cheese sauce, spaghetti with Ragu traditional sauce, spaghetti with Kraft Parmesan cheese.

The first time or two their palates bathed in my spaghetti creations, my sons cleaned their plates. But soon the proud chef began to get a different response to his triumphant announcement, “Spaghetti’s ready!” “Aw, Dad, don’t we have anything else?” I was incredulous. “You don’t want my spaghetti?” “No, dad, we’ve had that for days.” I learned something about my boys: They want a menu that looks like the classified ads of the Chicago Tribune; they want more choices. When they’re really hungry, anything will do, even spaghetti. But otherwise, they get picky.

Christians come to church either starving or stuffed. They either devour every word because they are hungry for God or they pick at their meal because they think they’ve heard it all before. To some, the finest sermon is just another plate of spaghetti. The preacher’s responsibility is to work hard at providing a good meal. It is the church member’s responsibility to be hungry when they arrive.

The reason most Christians aren’t hungry when they get to church is because they’ve been eating the wrong things all week long. The average church member

spends more time feasting on the things of the world through television, videos, magazines, and newspapers, than they do partaking of the things of the Lord through His Word on a daily basis. By the time they get to church, they're stuffed with worldly junk food, having eaten very little, if anything, nutritious from the Word of God. Consequently, when they arrive, they're not hungry for God. They're not hungry for anything nutritious, they want more junk. They want a lively song service, they want the preacher to run around and entertain them, they want a show, because that's what they've been watching all week.

The average pastor generally has 3 or 4 hours on Sunday and a couple of hours on Wednesday to feed His people. That is not enough time for him to give them what they need in order to grow spiritually as they should. Like the Bereans, they need to "search the Scriptures daily." They need to learn to supplement the meals they receive at church with a daily helping of the Scriptures.

To arrive expectantly also means to arrive **READY**. Listening to a sermon does not begin after the last song is sung and the preacher takes his place in the pulpit. It begins **BEFORE** a person ever arrives at church. There are several things a church member needs to do in order to arrive ready.

### **1. Pray for the preacher.**

Pray that he might have understanding of the Scriptures. Pray that he might have insight into how the truth of a given passage can apply to his people.

Pray that he might have discernment as far as what to preach. (Salvation Doctrine Rebuke Encouragement)

Pray that he might have stamina. Thinking studying and writing wear down the body and the mind.

Pray that he might be disciplined. Sometimes the temptation is there to do anything but sit at a desk open the Bible study the text and begin the process of interpretation.

### **2. Get a good night's rest.**

Preparing a sermon is hard on the preacher. Listening to one is hard on the member.

Church members need to get a good night's rest so they will have the mental energy they need to listen. If they stay up too late it's going to be difficult for them to come with any sense of expectation and eagerness. If church members can't come to church on Sunday morning feeling rested and alert, then they've got a fundamental problem with

life's priorities. It may be time for them to say "NO!" to their employer or "NO!" to their customers or "NO!" to their friends, so they can fulfill their responsibility

to come to church rested and prepared, eager to hear what God has to say to them.

### **3. Listen to some good music.**

James 5:13 says, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms."

Psalm 100:4 says, "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name." Music does wonders in preparing the heart.

### **4. Determine to keep an open mind.**

Our tendency when we hear something we don't like or something we don't agree with is to put it out of our mind. So many don't hear from God when they come to church because they don't want to hear from God. That was the problem with the folks Isaiah was called to preach to, they couldn't see or hear because they didn't want to see or hear.

### **5. Carry a pen or pencil and some paper so you can take notes.**

There's something magical about having a pencil or a pen in hand. Just the mere act of holding it in preparation for writing sharpens the mind, clarifies our thoughts, and prepares our heart. When we hear something that we need to remember, we need to write it down. We are more apt to act upon it if we make the effort to write it down.

## **LISTEN ATTENTIVELY**

We saw earlier in Ecclesiastes 5:1 where Solomon said, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God. . ." That means to "give thy mind to what thou art going to do."

"And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him, And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him." This passage of Scripture, taken from Luke 19:47-48 is a classic example of listening attentively. The Greek word for "attentive" means "an anxious desire, a fixed attention, a cleaving to Him, and an unwillingness to leave Him." The phrase, "were very attentive to hear Him" literally means that they hung to Jesus and would not leave for fear of missing something. **WOULD TO GOD WE HAD THOSE KINDS OF LISTENERS TODAY!** Because the preaching consists of words and not pictures or diagrams, people have to work hard at listening. And because listening is hard work, it

sure doesn't need to be made any harder by talking, walking, gawking, or mocking.

If we are going to listen attentively, we are going to have to listen **PURPOSEFULLY**. In Proverbs 1:5, Solomon said, "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels." Our purpose for listening is to learn, and if we're wise, we will learn when we listen. Other words of wisdom from Solomon can be found in Proverbs 18:15 where we read, "The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge."

Listening **ACTIVELY** is another aspect of listening attentively. One pastor said this at the end of his sermon, "That you are sitting before me in this church is a fact. That I am standing, speaking from this pulpit, is fact. But it is only faith that makes me believe anyone is listening." Modern media has made it easy for our minds to be lazy. It doesn't take a lot of intelligence to sit around and watch most of the infantile garbage on TV. Television is one of two things, it is either an insult to the intelligence of the average human being, or it is a reflection of the intelligence of the average human being. An active listener will become emotionally involved in the sermon. It's sad when we become more emotionally involved in some story on television than we do in what is being presented from the Scriptures. It's equally as sad when we become more actively involved in some televised sporting event than we do in a good sermon. We'll scream, and yell, and shout when our team does something exceptional, but the preacher will not even receive as much as a "holy grunt" from his congregation during an entire sermon. Part of being an active listener is saying "AMEN". Saying "Amen" encourages the preacher, it lets him know that we are in support of what is being said. It also lets him know that we are listening to what is being said.

## COMPLY DILIGENTLY

Luke 11:28 -- "But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and KEEP IT."

Luke 6:47-48 -- "Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and DOETH THEM, I will show you to whom he is like:

He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock."

Luke 8:21 -- "And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and DO IT."

Compliance pleases the Lord. As we listen to a sermon, we ought to ask ourselves a series of questions. "How does this apply to me? How can this change my life? What can I do with this message to make me a better servant for God?"

Compliance not only pleases the Lord, but it also changes lives. Jesus said in Matthew 13:15, "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." Notice the connection here between hearing and being changed? **We HEAR, we UNDERSTAND, we ACT, and we're CHANGED.**

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." As we look into the Scriptures, or when we hear the Scriptures preached, we are made to see the glory of the Lord and we are to be changed into the same image that we see. As a child of God, we ought to be able to look back at our life over the last year and see some specific ways that we have grown spiritually, ways in which we have become more like our Saviour. We ought to be able to see some new habits, new attitudes, and new abilities due to the fact that we have been changed by the Spirit of God and the Word of God. If we can't do this, then perhaps we need to begin practicing the art of listening to sermons. Many who name the name of Christ and profess to belong to Him through the miracle of the new birth find it difficult listening and getting anything out of God's Word when it's preached. Perhaps they should consider the words of Jesus found in John 8:47, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." For some, no doubt, developing good listening skills will go a long way in their ability to effectively listen to a sermon. For others however, their inability to listen effectively goes beyond the development of good listening skills. Their problem lies in the fact that the Bible is a spiritual book and therefore must be spiritually discerned.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:11-12, 14, "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

For many, it is a lack of salvation that is the cause for poor listening. They have never really been born again, therefore they do not have the "Spirit of truth" to guide them into "all truth" (John 16:13).