

How to Listen In Church

Ever get sleepy during the sermon? (Not mine, of course.) Truth is, any one of us may find our attention wandering now and then. Long attention spans are difficult under the best of circumstances. The preacher bears a heavy responsibility here, for subject matter, style of presentation, relevance, and many other factors which contribute to a "live" wide-awake audience. But the speaker cannot do it all. Nor is it enough to prove by the Scriptures that we should be vitally interested. We know that -- and yet we may need motivation. Perhaps we could even learn how to become better listeners.

Jesus said, "Take heed . . . how ye hear" (Lk. 8:18). Not with dulled hearing and closed eyes, shunning the truth (Matt. 13:15-16); nor with preconceived notions that pre-vent our receiving truth (Matt. 16:21-23). The people I now have in mind do not belong in these categories. But there are "good" people whose minds wander, or are easily distracted; and this article is bold to make some suggestions for getting more out of the sermon and of worship as a whole.

Sit toward the front of the auditorium; close enough to feel the speaker is talking to you. Do this not just to better hear the speaker, but to improve the "oneness" of feeling essential to good communication. It puts fewer distractions between you and the speaker, allows you to better "read" his expressions, gestures, etc. It also makes for better singing and a "closer" feeling for the Lord's supper and other worship. Yes, there are mothers with babies who need to sit closer to the nursery; sick and elderly who need easier access to the rest rooms; and always a certain number who "couldn't care less" about the worship, but come (now and then) for unknown reasons. Leave the back seats for them.

Become a participant, not an observer. In Christianity all saints are priests in a holy, royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,9). Each is a worshiper; praying and singing with the leader, remembering Christ in the communion, giving freely with the Lord's work in mind, and learning -- repeating in your own mind -- that which is being taught. Being a true learner is not a passive process, but requires distinct participation with the teacher.

Take notes, learn to outline the message. Some are content to jot down the Scriptures used -- and that is good. But this can be done without much thinking with the speaker. If we would make an effort to jot down his main points (in our own brief wording) and note their relation to one another and to the subject, we would find ourselves much more of a participant -- and certainly a much better listener.

Question what you hear. Is that a valid point, proven by the Scripture used? You will not be able to think the matter through during the sermon, but a question mark beside the point will remind you to "check it out" when you are home. This word of caution: one can be a "noble Berean" (Acts 17:11) without becoming an habitual critic of the work of others. Learn constructive criticism, and apply it to your own work.

Listen with the intention of making this your message, when you have time to think it through. How would you tell this to others? How could you improve on it, to fit some-one you need to teach? This point of view can have an amazing effect on your attention span.

Make self-application of the lesson. How can this improve my life for Christ? How does it fit my personal needs? Listen with a tender conscience, ready to learn and adjust your life accordingly.

You can have the blessings of Jesus Christ if you will learn to be a good listener. The Savior said, "Blessed are . . . your ears, for they hear." He also said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 13:16; 5:6). With a little practice on the above, and this kind of incentive, you may not notice the preacher ran overtime.

- by Robert F. Turner

Preach to Me!

Up and down in the land, day in and day out, by young and by old the banal little protest, "Don't preach to me!" is heard. I cannot use it. My understanding, my conscience, and the needs of my soul won't allow me. The Son of God came preaching. He died that the gospel of heaven might be proclaimed to lost and dying humanity. It has pleased God by the preaching that the

world labels "foolishness" to save those who will believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). So, I say, "Preach to me!"

But when you do so, make certain that it is heaven's will and wisdom, and not man's philosophy and psychology. Hold up God's mirror that I might see myself as I am (James 1:2-25). Use the Spirit's sword to discern the very thoughts and intents of my heart (Hebrews 4:12). Tell me what God wants me to know, and believe, and do, and become. Seek not to please me, but to persuade me; not to soothe me but to save me; not to entertain me, but to enlighten me.

Preach that which I need to hear and not that which you think I want to hear. Tell me of my blessings that I might be grateful, my responsibilities that I might be faithful, and my opportunities that I might be diligent; but shun not to tell me of my sins, my transgressions, my neglect, my imperfections. At the risk of offending me and even of making an enemy of me, preach to me the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) -- for in telling me the truth you are not my enemy, but my friend and God's servant. With fear of God, reverence for the truth, love for souls, and concern for duty PREACH TO ME!

- by Bill Crews

Does Your Service to God Cost Anything?

When King David sinned by taking an unauthorized census of the people, the prophet Gad brought word from God that a punishment was imminent. Three days of horrible pestilence came upon the nation. To stop the plague David was instructed to make an altar and to offer a sacrifice at the threshingfloor of a man named Araunah.

As David approached the site, Araunah met him and asked why he came. When David explained the purpose of his visit, Araunah offered to give him everything needed to accomplish the sacrifice. David's famous response was: *"Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing"* (2 Samuel 24:24).

This incident raises a serious question for us all: Does our service to God cost anything? As an example, consider the use of our time. Our schedules are usually quite full with the things we need to do and with other things we want to do. When our work and chores are finished, there's an array of recreational activities to pursue. Often it's hard to squeeze everything into a 7 day week with short, 24 hour days. Something has to 'give'. For too many, and too often, it is our time for God. If camping, or golf, or sporting events, etc., conflict with scheduled worship times, many folks will compromise. Oh, yes, they are at worship if nothing else happens to clash in their schedules. But if something else comes up, they yield. In effect, they are saying 'we will worship God, but not if we have to give up something to do it.' Do you see it? Their worship really costs them nothing.

Applications of this principle can be multiplied, but you should be easily able to see the point King David was making. He knew real sacrifice to God required an associated 'cost' of service. Does your service to God cost anything? Think!

- by Greg Gwin