

## How to Listen to a Sermon

While faithful Gospel preachers do their part to plumb the depths of God's Word and deliver its treasures to us, there are actions that we ourselves can take to get the most out of the lessons ourselves. Depending on the reactions (or lack of action) on the part of his audience, the preacher sometimes feels like he's trying to empty a five gallon bucket into a thimble. As listeners, we should prepare ourselves to get the most out of these life-challenging and faith-building sermons. Here are some suggestions:

1. Be well rested when you come to worship God. While acknowledging that being ill, on a medication that produces drowsiness or other unavoidable circumstances can make it difficult for one to be alert during a sermon, I have never understood why Christians not affected by these will sleep while God's Word is being proclaimed. It's ironic that the same 20-30 minutes spent listening to a sermon could be invested in watching a television show and one's eyelids would barely blink for fear that something would be missed. How much greater is the breaking of the bread of life than a TV program! Remember, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:21). Our snoozing due to anything other than circumstances beyond our control during a sermon is more a reflection on our lack of interest in spiritual matters than anything else.
2. Sit toward the front of the building. Understanding that there are legitimate reasons for sitting near the back, the effort should be made by those without such reasons to move on up. Toward the front you hear better, are more likely to get involved in the lesson and you encounter fewer distractions. It will be easier for you to see visual aids and, even with a great sound system, it's easier to hear near the front.
3. Take notes. Not only does this activity help you stay focused, good notes can make for a great resource as the years go by. "But we have outlines given to us every week," someone objects. Keep in mind that not every word of a sermon is in an outline. An outline is nothing more than a guide. The preacher nearly always adds helpful and informative material to that which is printed in the outline. Even if you have an outline in your hands, pull out a pen or pencil and make some notes on it.
4. Follow along in your Bible. Nothing thrills a preacher's heart like the sound of pages turning. It means that not only are people interested in the subject, they are also checking to make sure that what is being said is the truth (Acts 17:11). Every faithful Gospel preacher delights in having his audience follow along to make sure that he is preaching as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11).
5. Listen to the entire lesson. I was taught back in my college days to stay on top of a lesson by trying to anticipate the next point that the preacher is going to make. Again referencing television, after just a few minutes into a murder mystery we begin to anticipate who committed the crime and we stay with the program until the end. Contemplating the next point in a sermon keeps our ears open and our hearts receptive all the way through.

Even though preachers and their sermons have been the brunt of many a joke over the years, the proclaiming of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is no laughing matter. The faithful Gospel preacher is aware of the tremendous responsibility he bears when he stands before an audience to deliver his message (James 3:1). As listeners, our attentiveness not only benefits our souls upon the hearing of God's Word (Isaiah 55:11), it sets a great example before others and greatly encourages the man who is speaking.

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