

# HOW TO GET MORE FROM A SERMON

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A couple started to miss the services of the church. The preacher visited to find out why they were absent. He had thought since they were empty nesters maybe they had been on an extended trip. Hopefully that hadn't been sick or been dealing with some other problems the church family didn't know about. They were missed.

In the course of the conversation, when asked why they had been missing services; the husband replied, *"To be honest preacher... it's your sermons. We weren't getting anything out of them. I know it may not be a good reason but it's the truth."*

The claim of not getting anything out of a sermon is heard frequently from church members. It is one of the major complaints Satan instigates in the Body of Christ. In some cases the complaints have been leveled by "prominent" members of a congregation with enough clout to get preachers fired.

I confess that through the years I have heard some sermons I had to struggle to get something to take away. Even in those cases I was able to jot down Scripture references and ask questions; getting something out of the sermon.

## The Dynamics of the Preaching Event

The preaching event is an amazing dynamic. It involves many factors. It involves the preacher, the listener, the Word, other attendees, the environment, and includes the presence of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. And oh yes, Satan is present so he can *"steal the word out of hearts so they can't believe"* (Luke 8:12). Keep this picture in your mind.

In a communication class I jotted down these filters that impact the listening skills affecting the members in an audience:

- |                    |                 |                              |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Culture         | 6. Values       | 11. Interest                 |
| 2. Education level | 7. Attitude     | 12. Knowledge                |
| 3. Language        | 8. Expectations | 13. Reasoning skills         |
| 4. Vocabulary      | 9. Intentions   | 14. Perceived needs          |
| 5. Beliefs         | 10. Commitment  | 15. Physical state of health |

Awareness of the dynamics of the preaching event help us to see why, at best, communication is an ongoing challenging; especially for listeners. The preaching event is more than a two-way exercise—the preacher and the listener—it involves numerous factors, such as above, that determines what we get out of a sermon.

### **Biblical Emphasis on Listening**

God gave each of us two ears and one mouth; evidently He wants us to listen twice as much as we talk. We spend 60 percent of our waken minutes listening; remembering about 25 percent of what we hear (If we pay close attention).

Jesus had this to say about listening:

1. Matthew 11:15: *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”*
2. Matthew 10:27: *“Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak it in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.”*
3. Matthew 13:13: *“Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”*
4. Matthew 13:16: *“But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.”*
5. Luke 8:18: *“Therefore take heed HOW you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken away.”*
6. Mark 4:24: *Then He said to them, ‘Take heed WHAT you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given.’*
7. Matthew 13:15: *“For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, let they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.”*

On the Day of Pentecost, while Peter was preaching, we read this about the audience: *“Now when they HEARD this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37)*. Obeying the Gospel relates to how a person listens.

The opposite reaction occurred during Stephens’ sermon to the Jews: *“When they HEARD these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth” (Acts 7:54)*.

When God's word is proclaimed it never fails to accomplish something: *"So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me VOID, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the things for which I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:11).

### **Suggestions for Getting More from a Sermon**

As we have noted the preaching event is a very involved and dynamic event. It is more than just coming, taking a seat, and looking at the preacher. Likewise it involved more than preparing a sermon, standing in a pulpit, and speaking words.

Since this lesson is about how to get more from a sermon, the emphasis is on the listener. Going to the preaching event is like going to the bank. If you don't put something in you won't get anything out. Here are some suggestions for getting more from a sermon by putting something into the event:

1. Prepare to attend the preaching event with a rested and alert physical body.
2. Plan to arrive on time; don't rush or pressure yourself. Prevents anxiousness.
3. Prayerfully attend with the attitude of expecting to contribute and receive.
4. Set your attitude with "I will listen and learn" self-talk.
5. Prepare for the event by bringing paper and pen to take notes. Get involved.
6. Find a comfortable place to sit where you can see and hear.
7. Look at the preacher and concentrate on what he is saying.
8. Ask yourself these questions as you listen, jotting down your answers:
  - a. *What is the preacher saying? What is the text?*
  - b. *What is he saying about it? Is it biblical?*
  - c. *Do I believe it? Why?*
  - d. *What difference does it make?*
  - e. *How can I intentionally use this sermon in my life?*
9. Work hard to free your mind from prejudice and preconceived ideas about the subject.
10. Relate the message to other truths and subjects you know something about.
11. A great way to get more out of a sermon is to share it with others—personally and in a group.

12. Another reasons to listen and take notes is to use the lesson as a family devotion and source for discussion and application at home (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

13. The Psalmist gives us a major reason for learning the word (i.e. by listening to sermons):

*“Thy word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against Thee” (Psalm 119:11).*

Years ago as a young preacher I read a book by Bill Bennett entitled, *30 Minutes to Raise the Dead: How You Can Preach Your Best Sermon Yet—This Sunday*. This metaphor about the state of those who assemble to hear a sermon is true today but the title now should be, *15 Minutes to Raise the Dead* because the art and skill of listening is in a steady decline. Years ago information was presented in speeches and the printed page. Today we are losing listening skills and emphasis on being an attentive listener. This is true today because of media, recordings, sound-bites, social media, visual art, reality games, head phones, print, etc. Add to this the bombardment of information being dispersed today. We are becoming “dull of hearing.”

How are you listening? Can you list the major points that were made in the last three sermons you heard?  Yes  No. Did you make an intentional application of those sermons?  Yes  No.

We need to have the attitude of Samuel: *“Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel answered, ‘Speak, for your servant hears” (1 Samuel 3:10).*

***PREACH PREACHER! I AM LISTENING.***