



How to LISTEN To a Sermon

bathroom, or take a quick nap! How long do we give the preacher before we look at the clock?

This is easier said than done, but we should take precautions to lessen distractions or to not be a distraction to others. Use the bathroom before services. Don't get up during the sermon and examine the tracts, go to the foyer, or check the lights. Do not look at your phone during worship, silence it during the announcements. Do not talk to your neighbor or whisper to your friend. This helps you and others stay focused on the task at hand. To stay focused, one can take notes or perhaps even close one's eyes to alleviate their eyes from rolling.

Many things can cause us to be distracted during the sermon; however, we should work on being more focused on what is being said in the sermon so that we may understand the power of the message. Some people don't understand because they don't want to (John 8:43, 47).

Think of Ways to Apply What You Hear (Nehemiah 8:13-17).

A sermon is only as good as one makes it to be. As the people heard the words of Ezra the preacher, they came across a commandment they had been neglecting to observe. According to the Law of Moses, three yearly feasts were to be observed (Deuteronomy 16:16) and the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) was one of them (Leviticus 23:34-44). Evidently, they had been forsaking such a command for centuries—since the day of Joshua! Humbly, they decided to restore Law of Moses keeping and build the booths commanded by God. Here are three lessons about applying the sermons we hear:

Don't be a critic. [7] Some people listen with critical ears and watch with accusing eyes (Luke 11:54); there is no time or place for this in a sermon. While we should be sure the truth is being taught, being critical over things that do not matter should be avoided. Do not criticize the preacher's gestures, voice pattern, or sermon points. Do not try to find the fault in the preacher's words, verses used, and quotes made just to find faults. Refuse to be the person that has

“constructive criticism” for every sermon or try say, “well I liked the sermon but...” While constructive criticism can be good, we should be careful when and how we give it. Picking our battles in this area is wise. We are there to learn, study, and be encouraged, not to discourage the preacher.

Examine. During the sermon examine (2 Corinthians 13:5) yourself with these questions:

- How can I be better in this area?
- What steps should I take to improve here?
- What sins am I committing that would keep me out of heaven?
- Am I giving my all for the Lord?
- What does this sermon have to do with me?

Making the sermon personal will make applying it easier. When we receive the sermon as the Word of God, we will make the necessary steps to make it work in our lives (James 1:22-25).

Take the Sermon as a Beginning Point for Your Weekly Study (Nehemiah 8:18).

Lecture hours are not enough for students to gain the information needed to pass tests. Studying outside of class is essential. Continually, Ezra preached and the people listened and did. The sermons heard every week should be foundations for weekly study. Some sermon topics cannot be deeply developed in 40 minutes, so one should take the synopsis and proverbially turn it into an essay through deep study. A Christian will be malnourished if Sunday is the only day for spiritual enrichment and education.

Do not be the person that was asked about the sermon topic and responded with “go ask the preacher.” Listen well and you will be rewarded beyond measure.

Endnotes

- [1]<https://blog.tms.edu/the-art-of-enjoying-an-expository-sermon>
[2]Bible Marking quote from B.J. Clarke.
[3]Noah Olson's Bible Margin.
[4]Bob Winton, gbntv.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Textual/10-Winton-Ezra_Nehemiah.pdf
[5]Some sub points come from:
<https://corechristianity.com/resources/articles/how-to-hear-a-sermon>
[6] <https://www.reformation21.org/articles/how-to-listen-to-a-sermon.php>
[7]<https://corechristianity.com/resources/articles/how-to-hear-a-sermon>

Church members listen to about 104 sermons every year. Sermons are in important part of Christian's lives. Sermons spark interest, educate, and are sometimes the initial spark to a sinner's conversion. We should be as Eli told Samuel: "Speak, Lord; for they servant heareth" (1 Samuel 3:9).

Someone asked what makes a great sermon?[1] Some would say how short it lasted. Another says how many illustrations it had. Perhaps one would say it depends on the ability of the speaker. The answer to the question lies within the words of the preacher. Does he preach the truth? If we do not listen, then how can we determine if the sermon is good or not (Acts 17:11)? There is a difference between hearing and listening. Many hear, but they are not careful with how they hear (Luke 8:18a). Every Christian has two ears, therefore, he ought to "hear" (Matthew 11:15).

The book of Nehemiah is couched in the Persian empire in the 5th century B.C. Nehemiah, a cupbearer (Nehemiah 1:11), was the leader of the last return (444 B.C.) back to Jerusalem, and his job was to build the wall of the city. After just fifty-two days (Nehemiah 6:15), the people finished the project. It is with this background that we come to chapter 8 when the people in Jerusalem come together to hear the Law of Moses in the street (Nehemiah 8:1). This chapter teaches people how to listen to a sermon. So how can one listen to a sermon?

Get Excited to Hear the Sermon (Nehemiah 8:1). Since the Word of God brings joy, we should be filled with anticipation as we approach the Sunday worship service. One preacher jokingly made the point that he wished people would tailgate for worship like people tailgate for ball games. While this is an extreme thought, it makes an interesting point. The people in Nehemiah's day were not enticed by the preacher; they "gathered themselves." They wanted Ezra to bring the Law of God to them! Being excited BEFORE the sermon, will center our focus and engage our ears DURING the sermon. To some, the word of God is a reproach and undelightful (Jeremiah 6:10), but to others is food for the soul (1

Peter 2:1-2). We should come to services with enthusiastic hearts and open ears, having our Bibles handy, notebooks ready, and minds geared to what we are being told. Listening to a sermon effectively demands that we be excited about what is said. One preacher asked "Do you want the book...or not?"[2]

Come Prepared for the Sermon (Nehemiah 8:4).

Jerry Kerns said, "The whole person, with all his senses, with both mind and body, needs to be involved in genuine worship." We cannot give our all, if we have not adequately taken the necessary steps to prepare for the sermon. The people prepared to hear the Word of the Lord by making the speakers a "pulpit of wood" (a platform[3]). Our work before the Sunday sermon will determine how much we are ready to receive it when it comes. Abraham Lincoln said, "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe." How hard will we sharpen our ears to listen better? Six areas of focus are:

Emotionally (Deuteronomy 32:46). Before Ezra was going to preach the Word, he prepared his heart (Ezra 7:10). One said that "his efforts were not the result of happenstance or impulse, but were determinedly fixed." [4] The heart is the motor for Christian preparation in worship. We should ask

- "Why am I going?"
- "What is my purpose?"
- "Am I focused enough to listen?"

If the heart is not right, neither will anything else be (cf. Proverbs 23:7; Matthew 15:18-19). Also, our hearts must be right with our brethren (Matthew 5:21-26), else listening will be impacted too.

Habitually. [5] Philip Ryken said, "Most churchgoers assume that the sermon starts when the pastor (preacher-NO) opens his mouth on Sunday. However, listening to a sermon actually starts the week before." [6] Ponder this schedule:

- Monday we pray for the preacher.
- Tuesday we pray for the preacher again.
- Wednesday we ask the preacher for his sermon topic.
- Thursday we study all we can about the Sunday's sermon topic.
- Friday we keep on studying for Sunday morning.

- Saturday we gather our materials we will need for the sermon on Sunday.

A little preparation for the Sunday sermon every day of the week before, will make the Sunday sermon even more delightful, enjoyable, and beneficial.

Restfully. We do not want to be included in the preacher's jokes about the people who fall asleep. Our sleep will affect our listening of the sermon. We need to get good rest the night before. Saturday nights are not for partying but are for preparation for Sunday.

Modestly. The way we dress can influence how serious we are in situations. We want to give God our best in our dress, showing Him that we take it seriously. No person would have a meal with the president with a t-shirt and shorts on, nor would we present an essay before a board with our pajamas. We will listen better when we dress appropriately for worship.

Physically. The rumbling of the stomach, the salivating of the mouth, and the cry of the child, "mom I'm hungry," are common in the assembly, but they don't have to be. Physical desires are strong, so they should be curbed as much as possible. Eat breakfast before Bible class or eat a snack in-between class and worship. You cannot help the call for hunger, but you can lengthen when it comes.

Morally. One said that sin affects how we listen. We don't want to come to God with unclean hands (1 Timothy 2:8). If we are practicing sin, determine to stop and confess beforehand (1 John 1:9).

Cain; Nadab and Abihu; and Israel did not prepare their hearts for worship. In order to perfect our listening, we must be people that precisely prepare.

Focus, Focus, Focus (Nehemiah 8:3, 5-7).

The human mind only holds attention for so long. Some say that after 10-20 minutes the mind loses attention; therefore, we should work hard to lengthen our attention as long as possible. The people in Nehemiah's day listened for hours! Their standing up showed their respect. It is interesting how much we may stress closing the eyes and folding the hands for prayer, but when God's Word is preached we look at the phone, go to the