

How to Listen to Sermons¹

1. Introduction: why is a topic like this important?
 - a. **Luke 8:11-18**
 - b. **Mark 8:18**
 - c. **Mark 4:12**
2. How to listen to a sermon
 - a. Expect God to _____.
 - i. When the Word is preached accurately, God himself is speaking through the preacher. The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.²
 1. When Peter tells Christians that they have been born again **“through the living and enduring word of God,”** he explains that: **“this is the word that was preached to you” (1 Pet 1:23-25).**
 2. Paul thanked God that when the first Christians in Thessalonica heard the good news of Jesus (Acts 17:1-4), they **“accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13).**
 3. Peter says: **“If anyone speaks”** [and the context here is Bible teaching in church] **“they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God” (1 Pet 4:11).**
 - ii. Practical tips:
 1. Look up next Sunday’s Bible passage and read it at home during the week.
 2. Pray for next Sunday’s preacher during the week.
 3. Pray often for yourself that God would speak to you from His word as it is preached.

¹ This lecture is adapted from: Christopher Ash, *Listen Up! A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons* (Purcellville, PA: The Good Book Company, 2009).

² Second Helvetic Confession (1566), 1.4.

4. Come to the sermon rested and ready to pay attention.
5. Come expectantly: *“Lord, this is when you speak to me. I am ready to listen.”*

b. Admit God _____ better than you.

i. Come humbly to the preaching. Be willing to change. Bend your heart to conformity to the preached Word.

1. We don’t want to be those Paul tells Timothy about. Those who **“will not put up with sound (i.e., health-giving) doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Tim 4:3).**
2. Rather, we must recognize that the Bible penetrates to the heart (**Heb 4:12-13**). And the Scriptures will call us to **“get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted”** in me (**Jam 1:21**).

ii. Practical tips:

1. Pray.
2. Pray.
3. Pray . . . for the work of God’s spirit to enable you to submit to what the Bible clearly says, and to help you change.

c. Do what the Bible says _____.

i. The purpose of the sermon is to change us into the image of Christ.

1. This happens when we **“prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (Jam 1:22).**
2. Be doers of the Word today. **Heb 3:7-8: “Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness.’”**

ii. Practical tips:

1. Write down as definitely and precisely as you can some action you need to take to obey this Bible passage. It may be a change of attitude, or an alteration in the way you speak, or some action you need to stop doing, or start doing. Whatever it is, write it down. In a week's time, and then a month's time, look at what you've written and ask yourself whether that Bible passage made any difference to you.
 2. Enjoy preaching, not as entertainment but as God's regular gracious invitation to walk with Him, rejoicing in a clear conscience.
- d. Check that the _____ says what the _____ says.
- i. Listen actively to the sermon not passively. Do what it takes to pay attention. Follow along in the Scriptures. Be like those who **“received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11)**.
 - ii. Practical tips:
 1. Read the passage or listen carefully when it is read.
 2. Questions:
 - a. What do you think is the main point of the passage? This may be signaled by repetition of something important, or by being in the punchline (for example, of a parable), or by being the theme that runs through the passage. Is the main thrust of the sermon the same as the main point of the passage?
 - b. Are there any surprises in the passage, i.e., things the Bible says that we wouldn't expect it to say, or that it says in ways we wouldn't expect it to say them?
 - c. Who was the passage originally written or spoken to? Are we in the same situation as them? In particular, if the people were before Christ, we need to be careful what parallels we draw; we can't simply apply it straight to ourselves. After all, it wasn't written to us. It was written for us (for our benefit) but not directly to us.

- d. Why do you think the Bible writer wrote this passage?
What is the passage intended to achieve in its hearers?

3. Pray as Martin Luther used to pray: *“Lord, teach me, teach me, teach me.”*

- e. Hear the sermon in _____ .
 - i. God’s plan is not only to shape individuals but a collection of people in a local assembly. When we hear a sermon, we are accountable to one another. In a real sense, then, preaching involves a real person and real people.
 - ii. Listening to a sermon in church not only shapes a group of people but it allows those people to discuss the sermon together.
 - iii. Practical tips (see same tips as next point).
- f. Hear the sermon _____ by _____.
 - i. Some passages will be more relevant than others to our specific needs. The Bible, however, is not designed to give me “instant fixes.” It is designed to shape and mold my life. And this is a process over a lifetime.
 - ii. Practical tips:
 - 1. Keep count for six months or a year of how many weeks you are in your own local church to hear the sermon. Make a note of the different reasons why you’re not here.
 - 2. If you find you’re away more than you realized, and more than you ought to be, take some practical diary of action to make sure you’re there more regularly. Example: come back from vacation on a Saturday.