

Sitting through the Sermon — Some Encouragements.

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When God speaks amazing things happen. Mountains quake. Winds blow. Rain falls. Souls receive eternal life. Armies are put to flight. The voice of God thunders with unstoppable force and supernatural power. When the man of God takes the Bible and speaks God's Word faithfully it is truly a remarkable event when God addresses His people through the mouthpiece of a man. In every sermon there are two preachers: the human mouth and the divine voice.

This essay provides some helpful encouragements for the people of God as they gather and sit through sermons every week.

1. Take Your Bible.

As a sailor would never leave without the map, so the Christian should not journey to church without his Bible. As the soldier would carry and utilize his weapons, so the Christian must carry and utilize his Bible. The cook needs his utensils, the accountant needs his computer, so the Christian needs his Bible. When going to church, take your Bible with you so you can open it, follow along, read the text, mark it up, and then go home and return to it at a later point for further reflection, study, and meditation. A preacher's delight is to see his congregation with their Bibles open.

2. Open Your Bible.

Furthermore, don't just take your Bible to church but open it and follow along. If you don't need to open your Bible because the man does not preach from the Bible, then it would be time to leave and find a Bible-teaching church. But as the man teaches from God's Word, open your Bible and follow along with the man as he journeys thru the text.

3. Follow in Your Bible.

In preaching through the selected paragraph, follow along carefully in your own Bible. When he turns to other Scriptures make it a point to try to turn with him to those cross-references so you can learn how to interpret Scripture with Scripture and how you can see how God's Word wondrously unifies together.

4. Think Deeply About What's Said.

Engage! Listen! The minister spends much effort preparing and exerts much focus in preaching the Word with clarity. And just as he does this, so also the hearers must engage and spend much effort in hearing and focus deeply in the listening to the preached Word. Engage with what is said. Amen what is spoken truthfully in your own heart (or, verbally if so you choose). Think about God's character. Commune with Christ. Let the words of Scripture sink deep into your ears. Fight hard to not hear a message and say it was good but resolve to engage thoughtfully and deliberately with God's truth that went forth.

5. Apply Specifically what You Hear.

Hearing -- even, hearing well -- is not enough. James exhorts believers to be hearers *and doers* of the Word. The one who hears but does not obey the Word of God has deluded himself and is deceived about his faith. The one who builds his house on the rock is the one who hears *and obeys* God's Word. So, then, specifically apply what you hear. Listen well and apply well. Hear well and implement specifically. Find 1 or 2 specific items and plan to practice them.

6. Take Notes & Plan to Review Them Thru the Upcoming Week

As the minister proclaims God's truth to you, it may benefit you to jot down some gleanings from the text to mark in your Bible, put in a file on your computer, or write it on a card and place it where you'll see it with some frequency. Review your notes throughout the upcoming week. That's one way to take the meal and chew the cud. Eating is one thing. Digesting is another thing. Don't just receive the Word. Work it through the mouth, down the

throat, into your stomach and let it sustain you for a long period of time. I know of no better way to do it than to rehearse the sermon -- or truths from the sermon -- in prayer and devotional time to grow in holiness by it.

7. Fight! Fight! Fight! for Focus & Resisting Distractions!

You may have to move to the front row. Many churches, buildings, venues have plenty of distractions. Maybe it is focusing your mind to resist the upcoming week's work-travels. Or perhaps it may be resisting the distraction to allow the mind to wander to a relationship, an upcoming trial, or a sporting event. Fight to focus your heart on God and on His Word. The Devil would love nothing more than for you to sit in church and to have your mind millions of miles away. He would bombard you with fiery-temptations of distractions and would love for you to externally look good at church but inwardly to be focused on self or on the world. That would not be worship. And for that, Satan would rejoice. Maybe it's an attractive person sitting near you. And you need to initiate a move elsewhere in the worship gathering. Maybe you need to move to the front row so that nothing is in front of you as you hear the Word heralded. But fight, not only physically, but intellectually and mentally, to meet with God for He is worthy of worship!