

**How to Listen to...**



**A Boring Sermon**

*A sermon series by  
Pastor Michael Jackson*

## HOW TO LISTEN TO A BORING SERMON

No doubt some of you have seen the book entitled *Fun Things to do During Boring Sermons*. I used to have a copy. Someone gave it to me as a gift. Hey, some of the suggestions are pretty good. For instance:

1. Slap your neighbor. See if they turn the other cheek. If not, raise your hand and tell the preacher.
2. Devise ways of climbing into the balcony without using the stairs.
3. Listen for your preacher to use a word beginning with 'A' then 'B' and so on through the alphabet.
4. Using church bulletins or visitor cards for raw materials, design, test and modify a collection of paper airplanes.
5. Start from the back of the church and try to crawl all the way to the front, under the pews, without being noticed.
6. Raise your hand and ask for permission to go to the rest room.
7. Wiggle your ears so that the people behind you will notice.

Have you ever been bored during a sermon? I have. I would dare say that we all have at one time or another. While I am not so sure that I have a cure for the problem, at least I think what I have to offer this morning is a better solution than one's crawling under the pews or wiggling his or her ears.

Leaving that, every Sunday morning, all across America and in cities, towns, and villages in many parts of the world, a strange phenomenon takes place. Millions and millions of people leave their places of residence, take time away from their jobs and recreation, to go to a place of worship. There people sit quietly and listen while one person stands before them and delivers a sermon. In fact, it may surprise you to know that more people attend weekly church services in America than attend all professional sporting events combined.

Why? Why do they go? What is the draw?

A mother and her young son moved into a pew one Sunday morning. The boy was attentive through the song service, and, for that matter, through most of the rest of the service, that is until the pastor started his message. At that point, the lad began to invent reasons to leave his seat.

- He wanted to go to the restroom.
- He wanted to get a drink of water.
- He wanted to go to the dentist.

Finally, his mother snapped, "You're going to stay here through the service. Now make up your mind to sit still and listen." Slowly the boy raised his head and whined, "But, why?" In frustration the young mother said, "Because it's good for you!"

I realize that all too many of us view going to church, and especially setting through a sermon, in much the same way. It's something to be endured because it's good for us. It's God's castor oil to make us better people. Yes it's boring, but it is supposed to be boring, for goodness sake!

Obviously this isn't the attitude God wants us to have. I submit to you this morning that we must change the way we listen; change the way that we approach the sermon. This morning's message as well as my next one will focus in on "How To Listen To A Boring Sermon."

I believe that if you apply the points that I am about to give you, you will find that sermons will go from boring to exciting almost overnight.

### 1. UNDERSTAND THE PLACE OF PREACHING

Hear me, please. I am firmly convinced that in the church building, the sanctuary is the main thing, and to follow that up, the main thing that takes place in the sanctuary is the preaching or the proclamation of God's Word.

- The time spent in praise and worship is certainly important, but it can not take the place of the Word.

- The time spent in praying for one another is important, but again it must not take the place of the sharing of the Gospel.
- The offering is important,
- The announcements likewise have their place,
- As does the special music and the times at the altar;

However, each of these must bow before the primacy of the spoken Word.

The classic preacher, the late Dr. Carl Patton, noted: "I pay tribute to all those activities by which the minister makes himself useful and beloved--but then I say that they are all secondary. These can never make a minister. The church lived 1,700 years without a Sunday School. It lived 150 years longer without a troop of Boy Scouts. No record has come down as to what filing system Christendom used or what Savonarola did with his reports. The leaders of the church who have made lasting names for themselves, who have deeply affected the thought of their time and made the church a real power in human life, have never done it by any secondary or accessory means; they have done it by their preaching."

Dr. Gerald Kennedy, a former Methodist Bishop, has observed: "If I am to serve the Master and make some small contribution to the religious life of my day, it will be through my primary function of preaching the Gospel in the church to a congregation. The most critical and potentially the most influential event of the week is the sermon. The minister ought to be a good administrator, an efficient organizer, a first rate advertiser, an adequate counselor, a faithful pastor, and an effective preacher--all of these things; but the greatest of them all is to preach. . . ."

An old adage notes that "one picture is worth a thousand words." Don't you believe it!

- What picture could compare to the wisdom and teaching found in the Ten Commandments which contains but 297 words?
- Likewise, the Twenty-third Psalm and
- the Lord's Prayer both have fewer than 300 words.
- Lincoln's Gettysburg Address only has a paltry 266 words,
- While the Bill of Rights contains some 463 words.

Words are important and effective. Note the Apostle Paul's observation in I Corinthians 1:21 (*King James Version*), **"For after that in the wisdom of God... it pleased God BY THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING to save them that believe."**

God speaks to the world, to the church, and to individuals through WORDS, THROUGH PREACHING. That is His formula for success.

- Therefore, when Josiah exalted the Word, Israel enjoyed a great revival.
- When Jonah proclaimed the Word of the Lord, an entire city turned to the God and divine judgment was averted.
- When Peter preached the Word on the Day of Pentecost, three thousand souls were born-again.
- When Philip preached in Samaria, again, people were saved and marveled at the wonderful miracles which accompanied his preaching.

In addition to these individuals:

- Enoch was a preacher hundreds of years before the great flood.
- Noah was a preacher of righteousness.
- Samuel was a preacher.
- Nehemiah was a preacher as well as a builder of broken down walls.
- The prophets Isaiah, Amos, Haggai and Zechariah were preachers.
- John the Baptist was a preacher.
- Then finally, Luke 4:18 quotes Jesus saying, **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed...."**

The Prophet Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 20:9, **“But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.”**

People, I encourage you to set up and take notice:

- This is not a sale’s pitch put on by General Motors,
- This is not a talk on the merits of Capitalism,
- This is not a lecture on the DNA of some Egyptian mummy,
- Nor is this a speech on the plight of the Palestinians.

No, friends...

- I am standing where Peter, James and John have stood,
- I am here to declare to you the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ,
- The Bible is my text,
- The fire of God is in my heart,
- Demons have put their fingers in their ears
- Jesus Christ is being exalted,
- Lives are being changed,
- The convicting power of the Holy Spirit is at work
- Eternal souls are about to be saved,
- Faith is welling up,
- The Father is looking on ready to confirm His Holy Word,
- Angels have stilled their wings,
- If E. F. Hutton were here, even he would be paying attention...

For a preacher of the Gospel is preaching the Gospel.

It is impossible to overemphasize preaching. It is even impossible to fully grasp the importance of preaching. Therefore, one reason a sermon should not be boring, is due to the fact that it is a sermon!

## 2. THE PLACE OF THE WORD OF GOD

Understand this; when the Word of God is preached, the Word of God is preached! Every so often someone tells me that they would love to have God speak to them. Shhhhhh! He is speaking right now through the preaching of His Word. Just listen.

Notice how this is borne out in Paul’s words to the believers in Thessalonica, for **“when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God...”** (I Thessalonians 2:13).

What a phenomenal statement! Paul unmistakably declared that the Word he proclaimed was:

- Not the words of men,
- Not the thoughts of men,
- Not the dreams of men,

but the very Word of God Himself.

Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, **“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.”**

Again... **“Preach the Word.”**

- God and Christ both have their eyes on the minister — to see if he/she is preaching the Word.
- The minister shall be judged by the Lord Jesus Christ as to whether or not he preached the Word.
- The minister shall face Christ when Christ returns in glory as the conquering Lord — face Him and give an account before Him as to whether or not he preached the Word.
- The minister’s place and position in the Lord’s kingdom will be determined by how faithful he was in preaching the Word.

Therefore, the charge is to **“preach the Word”**.

Why the Word?

**FIRST**, the Word is to be preached because **“all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God”** (2 Timothy 3:16). By this I mean, the Holy Bible is the very Word of God itself. It is “the whole body of revealed truth”

- The *Contemporary English Version* notes, **“Everything in the Scriptures is God’s Word....”**
- The German translation puts it: **“...given in by God.”**
- The Swedish have it: **“...given out by God.”**
- The Danes put it: **“...in-blown by God.”**
- Or simply, the bottom line is, God breathed into man what man breathed out.

2 Peter 1:21 adds, **“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke FROM GOD....”**

*The Scofield Bible* states, "If God Himself had done the writing, the written Word would be no more accurate and authoritative than it is." Simply put, the Bible is true, inspired and without error.

I hate to be negative. However, I see the reason that many people find preaching boring and why they are not faithful to the things of God is due to a lack of faith in the Scriptures; a lack of faith in preaching itself.

- If we do not believe in the accuracy of Scripture,
- If we do not hold to the promises of God,
- If we do not trust the man of God to hear from God,

Then the obvious result will be people who do not open their Bibles and people who do not put a high priority on hearing a preacher preach.

To turn this into a positive, If we really believed that God was going to speak, and that the Word was going to come to pass, wild horses then couldn't keep us away.

Before I move on, I want to be so bold as to declare that preaching is second only to the Bible itself as the vehicle that God uses to speak to people today.

**SECONDLY**, we preach the Word because it and it alone contains the way to salvation.

Martin Luther once remarked, "if a thousand Christs had been crucified and no one said anything about it what use would that have been?"

Romans 10:14 therefore notes, **“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”** The Word is preached because the Word has power to save.

John Wesley was holding a meeting in a small town, and an ungodly man who was fond of music decided to attend. He wanted to hear the "good singing," but he planned to stop listening when Wesley began to preach He sat quietly until the song service ended. Then he covered his ears. Suddenly a fly landed on his nose. He tried to shake it off, but to no avail The tickling effect was so irritating that he finally had to use one hand to shoo away the insect. At that precise moment Wesley was quoting Jesus' words, **“He who has ears to hear. let him hear!”** Startled, the unbeliever kept listening, and through the gospel message he was converted. God had used a fly to reach a rebellious sinner!

Charles H. Spurgeon, the great British preacher, told about his own conversion experience. He said a man who was almost illiterate was preaching from the simple text in Isaiah 45:22, **“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.”** Spurgeon said the preacher began by saying, "This is a very simple text indeed. It says, 'Look.' Now that don't take a great deal of effort. It ain't lifting your foot or your finger; it is just 'look.' "

The preacher went on: "A man need not go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look.

"It says, Look unto me. I am sweating great drops of blood. I am hanging on the cross. Look, I am dead and buried. Look unto me, I rise again. I ascend."

Spurgeon said, "He looked at me sitting under the gallery and said, 'Young man, you look very miserable, and you will always be miserable in life and death if you don't obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.'

Then, said Spurgeon, he shouted as only a Primitive Methodist could shout, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ!"

Spurgeon heard the simple message and was immediately saved and he went on to become one of the greatest preachers to ever live.

Church, I'm convinced that many of us today take the conversion of a lost soul for granted. We pass over someone being born-again while we look elsewhere for a miracle. I want to say right here and right now; as much power is needed to make a convert as to raise the dead or heal the blind, or restore hearing to the deaf.

After all, that is what conversion does:

- It raises to life those who are dead in trespasses and sin,
- It restores sight to those who are spiritually blind, and
- It opens the ears of those whose ears have been closed to the truth claims of the Gospel.

Conversion is a miracle that accompanies the preaching of the Word of God for we know that the Gospel is the **"power of God unto salvation of everyone who believes."**

**NEXT**, we preach the Word, for the Word is powerful.

Hebrews 4:12 (*King James Version*), **"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...."** The word "powerful" here in this verse is the same word from which we get our word "energy." The Word simply has life-giving energy or power in it!

Think of a seed. It might look common. Certainly, nothing out of the ordinary. But then you plant that seed in the warm, moist sod, and something happens. The seed spouts. It breaks its way through the ground. It produces a plant and in time it produces fruit.

In the same way, the Word of God has life-giving energy in it.

- Last week a man came up after one of the services and thanked me for the message. As he was talking he broke down as he told me what the sermon meant to him, and what the message had done for him.
- Three weeks ago another person came up to confess an area of need in her life. The message had opened her eyes to the area and she resolved then and there to make a life change. She did.
- Only recently, others have told me that they were going to start tithing,
- join the church, or
- be more faithful to the church.

Since I have been in the ministry, I have seen marriages restored, people healed, prodigals determine to make things right with mom and dad, extra-marital affairs end, and much much more through the medium of preaching.

Now I dare say none of those things took place because I am a great speaker. I am not. I believe that those events and many more like them took place due to the power that accompanies and confirms the preached Word of God!

Literally, anything is possible when the preached Word, the life-giving Word, the power-filled Word of God goes forth.

Wouldn't our appreciation for sermons dramatically increase,

- Wouldn't church attendance move to a higher level of priority,
- Wouldn't our attentiveness to the message be different ,
- Wouldn't the whole nature of listening to a message change if we truly thought::
  - that God was going to powerfully move,
  - that God was going to speak to us personally and cooperatively, through the preaching of His Word?

And yet, that is exactly what happens week after week in churches around the world – including New Life Assembly of God!

There is power, wonder working power, in the preaching of God's Word!

Someone has pointed out, God works through preachers; God speaks through preachers. Its true.

### **3. MY THIRD AND FINAL WAY TO DEAL WITH A BORING SERMON IS TO CONCENTRATE ON WHAT IS BEING SAID**

I find it humorous that people who focus in at work for eight hours, who almost glue themselves to a football game for three hours, or who hardly move during a two hour movie, find it nearly impossible to sit through a 30 to 40 minute sermon.

Let me give you some practical things that can help you in this area:

- First and foremost, set closer to the front. Pretend you are at a football game. Try to get as close to the action as possible. I truly love setting up front for most of the things that I find distracting are behind me. I can focus better on hearing from God.
- I know that many of you are not comfortable moving toward the front. Nonetheless, find a place where you are comfortable. Some spots in the sanctuary are louder than others; some spots are warmer or cooler than others. Move around from service to service until you find the place that is right for you.
- Take notes. I will cover this in greater depth in my next message in this series.
- Bring something to suck on – breath mints, or hard candy. Pop one in your mouth if you find yourself getting drowsy.
- Discipline yourself. If you gaze around constantly, read the bulletin, or leaf through the hymn book, you will miss what is being said from the pulpit. 2 Corinthians 10:5 tells us to **“take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”**

The enemy of our souls would much rather have us thinking about turning the roast, painting the house, or playing golf, than listening to a sermon.

- Finally, go to the rest room or get a drink of water before the message. Again, I know that some people have physical conditions that require them to go to the ladies or men's room quite often. I understand and I have no problem with that. However, if that isn't the case with you, go before the preaching begins. Try to stay where you can catch every word.

Concentration demands that we seek God's help so as to not short-circuit any opportunities the Lord has to use a message for our good.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor who was put to death by the Nazis during World War Two. Bonhoeffer once stated, “A concert audience does not come to watch a conductor but to hear the music; a church congregation should not come to watch or hear the preacher, but to listen to the Word of God.”

That is some pretty sound advice on how to deal with a boring sermon, and it certainly beats making paper airplanes.

# HOW TO LISTEN TO A BORING SERMON

## Part 2

In a poll that was taken a while back, a number of Americans were asked how they managed to escape "boredom" in their lives.

- Forty percent responded that they stayed away from church.
- One out of five adults admitted to daydreaming in church to alleviate boredom.
- Almost the same number (16.8 percent) simply *forced* themselves to pay attention, and
- 16 percent more checked out of the sermon by fixing their mind on solving problems at work and home or some other strategy!

Today I want to continue my two-part series of messages on "How To Listen To A Boring Sermon." Though the years, I have both preached and have heard a number of what some people might call boring sermons. From that backlog of experience I have come up with a number of ways to combat boredom.

### **HOWEVER, BEFORE I GO THERE, I WANT TO BRIEFLY EXPLORE WHY IT IS THAT SOME PEOPLE FIND SERMONS BORING**

#### **1. FRANKLY, I WANT TO BE THE FIRST TO ADMIT THAT SOME PREACHERS ARE BORING.**

I once heard a sermon entitled, "People I have known, Places I have seen, Things I have done." The title said it all. The messenger was the message.

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church -- one of America's largest churches -- has said "It's amazing how some pastors are able to take the most exciting book in the world and bore people to tears with it! Miraculously, they're able to turn bread into stones! The tragedy of being a boring speaker is that it causes people to think God is boring!" God is not boring.

#### **2. SOME SERMONS DON'T CONNECT. THEY SIMPLY ARE NOT RELEVANT.**

Sadly, the social gospel has given birth to sermons that are nothing more than book or movie reviews. Oftentimes, the message ends up answering questions that hardly anyone is asking. Here are the titles of some actual sermons that I have found on the Internet:

- Is Socialism More Ethical Than Capitalism?
- An Excremental Theology
- A Celebration of Ambiguity
- The Zen Of Responding To A Threat
- Your Tears and Your Suffering: Wisdom of the Hasidic Masters
- The Theology of Herman Melville

Can you remember the title of an especially boring message?

I hate to be critical, however I do think that some of those messages would probably put anyone to sleep.

#### **3. SOME PEOPLE QUITE HONESTLY FEEL AS IF THEY HAVE HEARD AND SEEN IT ALL.**

While they would not want to be classified as being proud, they do feel as if the preacher can not tell them anything that they do not already know. They have handled the holy so much that their hands have become calloused. The old, old story has truly become old to them. As a result they have lost sight of the majesty of the Word, the wonder of a sermon. How tragic.

#### **4. CHURCHES ARE MORE DIVERSE TODAY.**

James Joyce gave a famous definition of the church: "Here comes everybody!" Its true. Today's church is often made of up a cross section of society as a whole. The rich and the poor, the young and the old, the educated and the uneducated, even people of different races worship side by side. One of the things that I find most challenging is the denominational diversity that is now common within our churches.

I would imagine that between twenty percent or more of this congregation used to be Roman Catholics. Others come from the Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses and even the United Pentecostal Church. This would have been unheard of a generation ago. As a result, some come into the church having been used to a 20-minute Lutheran homily while others were raised on one hour hell fire and brimstone Baptist fundamentalism sermons. Diversity within the congregation leaves room for a sermon to speak to one group while missing another group.

Let me give you another example. I realize that any time that I speak on marriage, many of the widows and even some of the singles will feel as if such a message is irrelevant to them. Occasionally, I like to preach a message that is specifically geared to the young people in the congregation. At other times, I may chose to talk to those who are facing retirement. See the difficulty? What one person considers boring might turn out to be one of the greatest sermons another person has ever heard.

I recently told the Wednesday night Bible study about a time that I spoke on reincarnation. A lady was visiting that morning who was really into New Age stuff including, would you believe, reincarnation. In fact, she had been trying to communicate by way of spiritualism with her recently deceased husband. Shirley listened to the message that morning and accepted Christ as her Savior. She is still in the church today serving the Lord.

## 5. WE CAN BE CRITICAL.

A critical spirit can cause a person to find a sermon boring.

- The person doesn't like the way things are done in the church.
- They don't like the music.
- They don't like the way the preacher wears his hair, or the kind of car he drives.
- They don't agree with some decision that the board has made, and so they stew in the pew. As a result, they miss the message. They hear it, but they do not listen to it.

## 6. WE HAVE CERTAIN PREFERENCES WHEN IT COMES TO PREACHING.

Some have a view, for instance, that in order for a sermon to be anointed, the preacher has to do what Benny Hinn does, or preach the way that Rod Parsley preaches. In the southern part of the United States, a preacher's anointing is often gauged by how fast and how loud he preaches.

Then too, there is the segment that thinks the preacher is to be a soft spoken self-help guru who is to help get them in touch with their inner-person. They want a preacher who preaches they way they think he should preach.

Along this line, some preachers build their sermons around stories. Others take a biblical text and roll with that. Chuck Swindoll is an expositor. He may take a book of the Bible and plow through that book verse by verse. That is basically what I like to do here on Wednesday nights. Finally, some preachers enjoy taking a topic and developing a sermon around that topic. Billy Graham is a topical preacher.

As a pastor, I like to encourage people to judge a message by it's content, not just delivery or style. Has the preacher heard from God? Is He/she preaching the Word?

In 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19, we find the Prophet Elijah on the run from the wicked Jezebel. She had promised to have him killed. As a result, the prophet was more than a little scared. It is in this context that the brother calls out to God. Listen to the Lord's response in verses 11-13: **"The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face...."**

The wind didn't cause the prophet to cover his face in reverence, nor did the earthquake, or even the fire. Why? The Lord was in none of those manifestations. Where did Elijah find the Lord? In a "**gentle whisper**", in "**the still small voice.**"

The point is, we must be very careful for it is possible for us to allow our preferences and even prejudices to cause us to miss a true Word from God.

## 7. LIFESTYLES CAN AFFECT HOW WE RECEIVE A SERMON

If a person acts like a pagan Monday through Saturday, then he or she shouldn't come to church on Sunday expecting to get much out of the message.

Those who are just "going through the motions" or who are "playing church" rarely appreciate good preaching. The reason for this is simple, good preaching doesn't satisfy the flesh. If it does, it isn't good preaching!

Someone has noted that true Spirit-anointed preaching will do one of two things, either it will comfort the afflicted, or it will afflict the comforted.

## HAVING SAID THAT, HOW DOES ONE GO ABOUT LISTENING TO A BORING SERMON?

In the first message in this series, I shared three main points:

### 1. UNDERSTAND THE PLACE OF PREACHING

I am firmly convinced that preaching is the most important thing that takes place in church. It is the main event, it is prime time, it is the real deal!

### 2. THE PLACE OF THE WORD OF GOD

When the Word of God is preached, the **WORD** of God is preached! Listen.

### 3. CONCENTRATE ON WHAT IS BEING SAID

I find it humorous that people who focus in at work for eight hours, who almost glue themselves to a football game for three hours, or who hardly move during a two hour movie, find it nearly impossible to sit through a 30 to 40 minute sermon.

## NOW TO TODAY'S POINTS.

### 1. GET A GOOD NIGHT'S REST SATURDAY NIGHT

Sleeping in church is such a common dilemma that someone actually drew up a cartoon about it.



**PASTOR MIKE HAD ENDURED SNORING DURING HIS SERMONS IN THE PAST, BUT NEVER FROM HIS WIFE.**

I understand that this is not some profound spiritual truth, however weariness is probably the number one thing that keeps people from getting something out of a message. Dr. Louis Sperry Chafer used to open his course on "Spiritual Life" at Dallas Theological Seminary by saying, "The first prerequisite to a victorious Christian life is eight hours of sleep."

There is a powerful link between the physical and the spiritual. The time Satan felt that he had his best chance to tempt our Lord into sin was when Jesus had been in the wilderness fasting for forty days. The devil knew the Lord's body would be in a weakened condition due to His going without food.

We also remember how the disciples failed while in the Garden of Gethsemane. Listen to some selected verses from Matthew 26, **"Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?' he asked Peter. 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.' When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.'**"

Satan may try to distract and disturb a service; however, we can be our own worst enemy and hamper the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives by our physical condition. While not everyone requires eight hours of sleep, others demand more. Each must decide how much or how little sleep is necessary for his or her own mental alertness.

A good and simple test is, if you have trouble staying awake during a sermon, you may need to go to bed earlier on Saturday night.

## **2. COME TO THE MESSAGE WITH A SENSE OF EXPECTANCY**

While president of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Chicago, Dr. Charles W. Koller would remind the students, "The day you miss chapel may be the day something will be said that will completely change your life." I believe the same holds true for each and every church service; each and every sermon.

David Livingstone once slipped into a church service where the great missionary Robert Moffat was speaking. He heard Moffat say, "I have sometimes seen, in the morning sun, the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary has ever been." These twenty words spoken by Moffat were used of God to challenge David Livingstone to go to Africa as a missionary.

While such dramatic results cannot always be expected, they certainly do happen. I well remember a Sunday morning service when I preached on faith. I was pastoring in Willmar, Minnesota at the time. A young man named Bob Hinkleman was in the congregation. Bob was suffering from Multiple Sclerosis.

He had been in and out of the hospital ten times over the previous twelve months. He was by and large confined to an electric scooter. As the message continued on that morning, Hinkleman received faith that he was going to be healed that very day. That evening, during the altar time, Bob's faith was rewarded as the Lord instantly and completely healed him of the disease. You may remember Bob, as he shared his testimony here some two years ago. Today Bob pastors a thriving church, is the father of four, and is free of the illness that once plagued his body.

Such an occurrence shouldn't surprise us. Romans 10:17 (*New King James Version*) promises, **"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."** *The New Living Translation* put it this way, **"Yet faith comes from listening to this message of good news—the Good News about Christ."**

The Bible records numerous sermons in both the Old and the New Testaments. It is thrilling to me to see the divine manifestations that accompanied many of those messages. For instance:

- Following Peter's sermon in Acts 2, three thousand people received salvation.
- In Acts 14, a crippled man was healed while Paul was preaching.
- A young man was raised from the dead, in Acts 20, during another one of Paul's sermons.
- Once, when King Solomon was preaching, the glory of God fell to such an extent that no one was able to stand in the Lord's presence.

Sermons encourage faith which creates an atmosphere where anything is possible!

I want you to think with me here. When men speak, things begin to happen. Great skyscrapers are constructed, ships are put out to sea, and men walk on the moon. Nations are established, wars are fought, and destinies are shaped. Everything that is, or ever has been, or ever shall be, threads its way into existence on the wings of a word.

If that is true of human words, dare to think of the potential that is present whenever God's Word is presented. As I noted in the first message of this series, one of the primary ways that the Lord addresses His people today is through the vehicle of preaching.

Let me share with you a quote. I do not know it's source:

- By means of words preached and taught, eternity breaks into time, heaven comes to earth, souls dead in trespasses and sins are awakened to new life.
- Words are the spiritual midwives that usher newborns into the presence of God.
- Words are flaming torches which indelibly impress the signature of God's will upon the spirit.
- Words are the hammer and chisel by which saints are sculptured into the image of God's Son.
- Words are a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path which will unerringly take us all the way home.

**“For God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached -- mere words -- to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified....”** 1 Corinthians 1:21-23.

One of the things that I pray for is that signs and wonders take place within this congregation. I know of the needs. I know that some of you need a miracle. I am praying for that.

With that in mind, do you remember the 40-year-old lame man that was healed in Acts 3? Peter said, **“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”** Moving on now to verse 10, **“they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.”** This was a grand miracle.

Luke 9 carries the account of when Jesus healed a boy who had been afflicted by an evil spirit. Let me read to you verse 43, **“And they were all amazed at the greatness of God....”** Wow! When I talk about signs and wonders, when I pray about signs and wonders, these are the kinds of things that I have in mind.

Now I want to point something else out to you. The story in Acts 3 says that the people were filled with **“wonder and amazement.”** Luke 9 likewise tells us that **“they were all amazed....”** In both of these instances, the same Greek word is used to express amazement. The word literally means, “To be amazed; to be overwhelmed; to be in awe.”

Move with me now to Matthew 7:28. Jesus had just wrapped up His Sermon on the Mount. It is here that the Bible points out, **“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching....”**

Matthew 13:54 adds, **“Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. ‘Where did this man get this wisdom....’”**

People, the same Greek word was used to express amazement here as was used to express amazement earlier. These passages tell us that Jesus could amaze people by his word – His teaching -- as easily as He could with signs and wonders!

One more verse, Matthew 22:33, **“When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.”** The people were once again “amazed, over-whelmed, in awe”, not because of some great miracle, but because of His Words.

If Jesus could amaze and astonish either by His word or by miracles two thousand years ago, then I have to believe that He can still amaze and astonish people by words and miracles yet today.

I am convinced that one of the reasons that we do not see signs and wonders accompany the Word any more than we do, one reason why we are no longer amazed at His Word, is due to the fact that we have lost faith in the power of the Word. We no longer listen to preaching with some great sense of expectancy!

### 3. GET INVOLVED WITH THE MESSAGE

I was talking to someone recently about NASCAR. NASCAR, as most of you know, is very popular across the United States. Both men and women are really into what used to be nothing more than stock car racing. It is now a multi-million dollar industry.

An avid race fan really gets into this stuff. (PowerPoint NASCAR staff)

- If you are really going to be a fan, you will need a jacket. I happen to like this Jeff Gordon model myself.
- Then, too, a real die hard fan also needs to have a scanner radio so he or she can hear what is being said between the driver and the pits, and finally,
- he or she would want to know the standings of each driver.

Pretty intensive, wouldn't you say?

What if we approached a sermon with that same kind of intensity? No, I am not suggesting that you buy a Billy Graham preaching jacket, or a Joyce Myers T-shirt. And to be honest, pastor Kurt and I do not communicate by radio when one or the other is preaching.

I can just imagine the dialogue, though, if we did have such means of communication:

- Hey, Kurt, you have a crying baby back toward the end of the last row, left side. Speak up.
- Larry Taylor is dozing off. Walk toward him.
- Race is starting to drag. Pick up the pace a bit.
- You are on the last lap – pour it on!

What do you think? Does it have possibilities?

Seriously, the sermon deserves our very best involvement. Let me make some recommendations here. As you listen to a sermon:

1. Take notes on the main ideas. I will usually have three or four with each message. Researchers tell us that we can double what we retain by taking a few selected notes to jog our memory later.
2. Write in something new that you may have learned from the sermon. I try to share something in every message that the average saint has never heard before. Almost every message will have such a nugget. Listen for it.
3. Jot down any interesting facts.
4. Write out an idea that you might like to research later.
5. Ask yourself, did God specially speak a certain truth to your heart?
6. Ask, how can you change for the better as a result of the sermon?
7. Finally, share your thoughts with a friend. This can help both of you to better grow and know the Word of God.

You'll find that as you listen with a purpose in mind, you'll be more attentive and actually begin to enjoy and look forward to the sermons.

Notice this commendation found in Acts 17:11, **“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”** Paul was happy that these saints took the message home and studied it out.

On more than one occasion, I have preached someone's funeral using the notes and the passages that they had written or underlined in their Bible as my text or outline. One of these was a thirty-four year old lady that died of Rocky-Mountain-Spotted-Fever. Mary had only been saved for six months when she died, yet her notes showed a tremendous depth of maturity. Better than twenty people accepted Christ at her funeral.

Get involved with the message.

#### **4. THE FORTH WAY TO LISTEN TO A BORING SERMON IS TO ASK "HOW CAN I APPLY THESE TRUTHS TO MY DAILY LIFE?"**

Have you ever had to ask one of your children to clean his or her bedroom? Dumb question, right? No matter how emphatically the child claims to have done the job, there is always a corner, closet, or drawer, that seems to have been neglected.

The Holy Spirit can find our lives in much the same condition. We have a hazy idea of what God expects from us, but during a message God begins to show things that still needs to be cleaned up. Applying the Word of God to our lives means allowing the Word to expose those shady corners.

#### **5. MY LAST SUGGESTION IS PRAY. BEFORE THE SERVICE**

Ask God to use the preacher to speak to your own spiritual needs. Give Him free rein to challenge you in every area of your life. Be open to **“teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”**

Go into the message with faith that your prayers are going to be answered.

Pastor, author R. T. Kendall once wrote, “It is the task of every generation is to discern in which direction the Sovereign Redeemer is moving, then to move in that direction.” Oftentimes that direction comes by way of believing prayer coupled with the proclamation of the Word of God. Pray.

**IN CONCLUSION**, it takes two to make a sermon interesting. The preacher certainly has an obligation to prepare and to hear from God and to communicate His holy Word. Anything else than the preacher's best, is somewhat akin to putting the Hope Diamond on a cigar band.

Those in the congregation, though, also have certain responsibilities. When both preacher and congregation do their jobs, then the potential is present for great things to happen.

Ezra 6:14 is a great verse in this regard, it says, **“So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet....”** I want no less for you. I desire for you to build and to prosper under my ministry – my preaching. I certainly do not want you to have to endure boring sermons.