

How Do You Prepare to Hear the Word of God on Sunday?

I have ten exhortations, most of them very short, but worthy of much more reflection than I can give them here. You can take them and go over them. I hope you jot them down and talk about them as a family or perhaps in your small groups tonight. The question I am trying to answer is, How do you prepare to hear the Word of God in worship on Sunday morning? Specifically, I mean what can you do Saturday evening and Sunday morning and on the way to church and when you come into this room? That is the time frame I have in mind.

1. Pray that God would give you the good and honest heart described in verse 15

There are many things we can do with our wills - and must do. But our wills are governed by our hearts and what our hearts love. So we must have a new heart if we are to do what we ought to do, and do it with joy the way God commands us to ([Psalm 100:2](#)). And the Bible teaches that this new heart is a work of God. [Ezekiel 36:26](#), "I will give you a new heart." [Jeremiah 24:7](#), "I will give them a heart to know Me." So we should ask God for it. "O Lord, give me a heart for you. Give me a good and honest heart. Give me a soft and receptive heart. Give me a humble and meek heart. Give me a fruitful heart. Give me a heart for you."

Set aside some time before you go to bed Saturday night, and then again when you get up Sunday morning to pray like this.

2. Meditate on the Word of God. Read portions of your Bible with a view to stirring up hunger for God

How many of you have heard of the word "appetizer"? Most everybody. But how about the word "appetize"? No? Because it's not in the dictionary. Well I hereby create the word! An appetizer is that which appetizes. To appetize is to awaken appetite. And that is what an appetizer is for. So if the sermon is the meal, the appetizer is the portion of the Word that you meditate on Saturday night and Sunday morning. This is crucial. You need to cultivate spiritual taste before you come if you want to enjoy and benefit most from the meal of the Spirit. If your palate is worldly, you will have no taste for spiritual things, and will not hear as you ought. So "appetize" your heart by meditating on the Word of God Saturday night and Sunday morning. Plan it in. This is the way you "Take heed how you hear!"

3. Purify your mind by turning away from worldly entertainment

[James 1:21](#): "Put aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." How do you receive the implanted word? By putting aside all filthiness and wickedness. This is what makes the word "unreceivable." It astonishes me how many Christians watch the same banal, empty, silly, trivial, titillating, suggestive, immodest TV shows that most unbelievers watch - and then wonder why their spiritual lives are weak and their worship experience is shallow with no intensity. If you really want to hear the Word of God the way he means to be heard in truth and joy and power, turn off the television on Saturday night and read something true and great and beautiful and pure and honorable and excellent and worthy of praise (see [Philippians 4:8](#)). Then watch your heart unshriveled and begin to hunger for the word of God.

4. Trust in the truth that you already have

In our text, the second soil failed to hear the way it should because it had no root. What is the root that we need in hearing the word of God? [Jeremiah 17:7-8](#) says, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream." The root that nourishes fruitful hearing is the root of faith. Hearing begets faith and faith begets better hearing. Trusting in the truth you already have is the best way to prepare yourself to receive more.

So when you pray and meditate and turn off the TV, consciously fix your heart on the promises of God and trust him Saturday night and Sunday morning.

5. Get a good night's rest on Saturday night

I am aware that some of you work all night on Saturday, get off at 7 AM and shower and grab a bite to eat and come straight to church. Bless you. God has special graces for you and you must seek his special help. Trust him. He will help you. But I am talking to the rest of us who make our own choices about when to go to bed. My counsel is: decide when you must get up to have time to eat, get dressed, pray and meditate on the Word, prepare the family, and travel to church; and then compute backward eight hours (or whatever you know you need) and be sure that you are in bed 15 minutes before that. Read your Bible in bed and fall asleep with the Word of God on your lips and in your mind.

It takes more discipline to go to bed on time than to get up on time. There are not as many pressures to go to bed. And sleep is so boring compared to playing or going out or watching TV. I especially exhort parents to teach teenagers that Saturday is not the night to think of staying out late with friends. If there is a special late night, make it Friday, not Saturday. It is a terrible thing to teach children that worship is so optional that it doesn't matter if you are exhausted when you come. What happens here is more important than a college entrance SAT, and we do work hard to get our kids to sleep well before an important test.

Without sufficient sleep, we are not alert; our minds are dull, our emotions are flat and unenergetic, our proneness to depression is higher, and our fuses are short. "Take heed how you hear" means get a good night's rest before you hear the Word of God.

6. Forebear one another without grumbling and criticism

[Psalm 106:25](#) says, "They grumbled in their tents; they did not listen to the voice of the LORD." Saturday night's and Sunday morning's grumbling and controversy and quarreling can ruin a worship service for a family. My suggestion is this: When there is something you are angry about or some conflict that you genuinely think needs to be talked about, forbear, and put it off till later on Sunday after worship. Don't dive in Saturday night or Sunday morning.

And when you come to worship, don't come as hypocrites pretending there are no problems. We've all got problems. Come saying: Lord, show me the log in my eye. Humble me and cleanse me and show me so much of yourself that I know how to deal with this in a more Christlike way than I feel now. You may be surprised how many of your crises get changed in the light of God's Word and worship.

7. Come in a spirit of meek teachability

Not gullibility. You have your Bible and you have your head. But James says "In meekness receive the implanted word" (1:21). If we come with a chip on our shoulder that there is nothing we can learn or no benefit we can get, we will prove ourselves infallible on both counts. But if we humble ourselves before the Word of God, we will hear and grow and bear fruit.

8. Be still as you enter the room and focus your mind's attention and heart's affection on God

I would like to recommend that as we enter the room here we "come on the lookout for God and leave on the lookout for people." That is, come quietly and go hard after God in prayer and meditation. Then leave with a view to taking risks as you extend your welcome and love to other people. We will not be an unfriendly church if we are aggressive in our pursuit of God during the prelude and aggressive in our pursuit of visitors during the postlude.

Are you with me in this? This is different than the way many churches conceive of the pre-service atmosphere. For many, the louder the better, because it connotes life and friendliness. That is legitimate in

some contexts, but something huge is lost, a sense of the greatness and holiness and wonder of God. There are almost no times in our lives when we together get blood-earnest about God and our meeting him in his greatness. Let Sunday morning be one of those times. "Be still, and know that I am God" ([Psalm 46:10](#)). Where do we do that? Let's do it just before the service in this room. Let the Commons be abuzz with greetings. But let this room reverberate with the electric power of silent passion for God's glory. There is a world of difference between the silence of apathy and the silence of passion! Pray, meditate on the text to be preached, ponder the words to the songs. Go hard after God.

9. When the worship service begins, think earnestly about what is sung and prayed and preached

Paul says to the Corinthians, "Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature" ([1 Corinthians 14:20](#)). And he says to Timothy, "Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything" ([2 Timothy 2:7](#)). Anything worth hearing is worth thinking about. If a message does not require the engagement of your mind, it is probably not going to take you anywhere beyond where you are now. But that would probably not be biblical preaching. If you would take heed how you hear, think about what you hear.

10. Desire the truth of God's Word more than you desire riches or food

As you sit quietly and pray and meditate on the text and the songs, remind yourself of what [Psalm 19:10-11](#) says about the words of God: "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." So because the Word of God is greater than all riches and sweeter than all honey, take heed how you hear. Desire it more than you desire all these things.

As [Proverbs 2:3-5](#) says, "If you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God."

May God make us a people who hear the Word of God and bear fruit a hundredfold so that the lamp of our lives will be on a lampstand giving light to all who enter the kingdom of God. Take heed how you hear! Amen.

By John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org