

How to Help Your Children Become Better Sermon Listeners

I was recently asked, "How would you explain to children in grade school what a sermon is and what they should be doing during the sermon?" I thought it might be a good question to answer in an article since I have frequently had similar questions over the years.

What is a sermon?

A sermon is when a man of God delivers the message of God directly from the Word of God (the Bible) to the people of God in the church and to unbelievers who are also listening. A sermon is not merely an intellectual lecture, form of entertainment, or self-help pep-talk; instead, a sermon actually transforms people by the power of God and his gospel. The preacher's goal is to influence the whole person—mind, will, and emotions—with the truth of the gospel.

What should children be doing during the sermon?

1. Respecting others

Like any other important setting where groups of people are attempting to listen and learn from someone speaking, the child should think about how his or her behavior affects others. This understanding should have both positive and negative aspects. Negatively, the child should avoid actions that distract others, but positively, the child should be engaged by listening which can help others listen more effectively as well.

2. Actively listening

While this may seem obvious, it is important to point out that good listening is a learned skill; it is an active pursuit and not a passive one. Jesus said, "Take care then how you hear" ([Luke 8:18](#)), and every parent ought to be training their child to obey that command. Jesus also warns about those who hear but do not understand ([Mark 4:12](#)).

You can say to your children on Saturday night or Sunday morning:

- "I wonder what God will teach us in the sermon on Sunday?"
- "Let's pray that we will understand the sermon and pray for our pastor."
- "Let's thank God that we have His Word to guide us."

3. Keeping a tally of important stuff

If your children are really young you may want to write down important words like God, Father, Jesus, Christ, Holy Spirit, church, gospel, and so on, and have them circle or make a tally mark by each one every time the pastor mentions that word. If they are too young to recognize the words, then you could do symbols for each one. This will allow you to point out that these key categories show up in the pastor's sermons no matter what part of the Bible he preaches from (if the preaching is good Christ-centered preaching). Also, if you know what text your pastor is going to be in that week, you could draw out keywords from that particular text.

4. Drawing pictures

Many children will naturally take the bulletin and draw pictures on it during the service. That can be a good thing if you encourage them to draw pictures related to the worship service and particularly for them to draw what they are hearing in the sermon. This is both fun and fascinating. Parents can learn a lot about how their children are processing the sermon by talking to them about the pictures afterward. Focus on your children understanding the main point of the sermon while not being critical of anything they draw regarding the sermon.

5. Recognizing the windows

I like to think about illustrations in sermons as windows. You see through them in order to see something else. Illustrations are not like paintings, which are an end in themselves. Children will naturally listen to the practical illustrations in the sermon. If we call them windows and train children to listen to the sermon illustrations thinking about what they are supposed to really see as they look through them, then we will help them become better sermon listeners for life.

6. Listening for one thing

I think it is important to train them to listen to sermons without a me-centered attitude. I think in every sermon we should think first and foremost about God, second about others, and then how we can serve God and others. Here are a couple of things you can train your children to be listening for and to tell you after the sermon.

- What is one thing you heard about the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- What is one thing you learned about God?
- What is one thing you can do differently to serve God and others?

Your interaction with them about these things should be lighthearted and enjoyable. The only wrong response is to not be listening. These listening strategies are merely points of contact for parents to utilize and guide the discussions in whatever direction they see fit. Some weeks will end in uproarious laughter over a drawing or comment, and others may lead to very serious and important discussions over biblical truth. Both are needed. These thoughts are certainly not exhaustive and you may have other creative ways that come to mind, but the key is to not act like getting them in the building is the end of your parental responsibility.

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