

How Do You Get Ready for Church?

Pastor Kelly Sensenig

One young Christian mother said, "My father knows how to give a hint. Once, when visiting me and my family, he brought me a pie cookbook as a gift. On the inside front page, he signed it, "With love and anticipation, Daddy."

With love and anticipation! This is exactly the way that Christians should prepare themselves to come to church on Sunday or the Lord's Day. Christians should come to church with love and anticipation ready to receive something from God and His Word. Before coming to church, believers should personally sign these words upon the dotted line of their own heart, "With love and anticipation."

Psalm 119:34-35

"Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight."

The Psalmist was ready to receive God's Word with all of his heart. If we would come to church with this attitude ("Give me understanding") then we would probably leave understanding God's Word instead of missing out on what God wanted us to learn and obey. Many times we can get into a rut where we come to church and never really prepare our hearts to receive from God and His Word. In addition, we can also come to church and never really give to God in a true spirit of worship. This little message is designed to help all of us become better prepared for church. We are not talking about what kind of tie or shirt we wear. We are talking about heart preparation. We simply need to come to church prepared to receive from God's Word and ready to give back to God in a time of worship. We must come to church prepared to have heaven opened to us and open up our heart to heaven.

Isaiah 64:1 says:

“Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence.”

When we come to church ready to hear from heaven and expect God to speak to our heart, He will! After all, outlook usually helps to determine outcome. How many times have you and I gone to God’s House unprepared to hear the Word of God? We may have got little or nothing out of the message and returned home in worse spiritual condition than when we came. How many times have we experienced distractions and detours that have led us away from being able to effectively listen to the Word of God and keep our hearts in tune with the message? Is this not a work of the devil? I say that it is. If the devil can steal the Word of God away from the soil of our heart, then he has done his job effectively (Matt. 13:19).

Let me say that as parents we must express to our children how important it is to prepare our hearts for church. If we as parents are careless about our preparation for the Lord’s Day, then we are sending the message to our children that church is not important and that preaching and hearing the Word of God does not matter to us. So we must learn to prepare ourselves for church and teach our children the importance of mind and heart preparation.

Ezra 7:10

“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”

Are you ready and prepared to go to church? Church is a primarily a prepared place for prepared people. It is a place for saints who are ready to receive eternal truth. It is a place where the saints should come with clean and receptive hearts. Like Ezra, they should come with their hearts cleansed, opened and ready to receive from the Word of God.

Sadly, for many Christians church has become an entertainment center. It has become a place where believers come to sit down on plush padded pews and wait for the preacher to say something or do something to make them smile and feed their Hollywood mentality of what church is to be like.

Someone has said:

“In recent years I have become increasingly aware of the dangerous possibility of making the Word of God sensational. Just as people can watch spellbound a circus artist tumbling through the air in a phosphorized costume, so they can listen to a preacher who uses the Word of God to draw attention to himself. But a sensational preacher stimulates the senses and leaves the spirit untouched. Instead of being the way to God, his ‘being different’ gets in the way.”

This is the most honest and discerning statement that I have read in a long time. It is so very true. Preachers with their performance centered preaching want to draw attention to themselves instead of to the real message of the Word of God. Preaching has become man-centered instead of God-centered. Preachers are really using the Word of God to draw attention to themselves instead of to the real text and to Christ. The modern church has many sensational type preachers today who are trying to only entertain people by jokes, jerky motions, jungle music and jargon that is from the world.

Many people are going to church like they would go to a baseball game. They want to be entertained with homeruns and diving plays at the plate. They want some kind of disorderly display of acrobatic preaching and ecstatic experience of tongue speaking or they want to see some kind of miracle so that they can create a euphoric feeling about themselves and feel refreshed.

1 Corinthians 14:33 reminds us:

“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”

I want to say with much dogmatism today that the church is off target! My friend, you do not come to church in order to be entertained or seek some kind of selfish experience when you worship God! We have these Charismatic ministries today that are nothing more than a circus atmosphere of entertaining preachers and people who come to church for sheer fun and excitement. They come to watch a man fly on a trapeze, do summersaults in the air and entertain them for 30 minutes. People merely come to church in order to be pumped full of emotional rocket fuel for the Monday morning rush hour.

Today many people come to church to feed their emotions and have some kind of emotional frenzy so that they “feel” like they have been with God. Someone has got to blow the whistle on what is going on today within the church. The church has turned into a place for spectators, emotional seekers and selfish worshippers who are trying to shop for what makes them feel good, feel right and meet their felt needs. They come expecting some experience from God without wanting to give anything to God in true worship. They attend church expecting to find something that will grab hold of them and give them some emotional high which will in return send them on their way emotionally recharged.

On the other end of the spectrum, some Christians attend church and never look for something to grab hold of their hearts. They have developed the mentality which says, “Hit me Lord if you can.” They walk in the church doors with the attitude that says, “Let’s see what God can do for me today. Let’s see if God or the preacher can meet my need today.” They come with an unbelieving heart and wonder if God can speak to them and really give them something for their lives. They come with the mindset that it’s a 50/50 chance that they will go away empty simply because God has decided not to hand out His Christian candy bars for the day and speak to their hearts.

Then there is the Christian who comes to church in order to see what blunders the preacher might make. They come to analyze his outline and delivery. They also come to analyze the preacher and see if he has anything in his bag of tricks that might spark some interest in their life. Their philosophy or way of thinking is this: “Maybe the preacher will do okay today or maybe he will be dry as toast. Perhaps he will have a good message today for a change.” Dear friend, this kind of thinking will never prepare your heart to receive God’s Word on Sunday.

Then there are those Christians who come to church with a shopping list. We have mentioned this already. Instead of coming to worship God and give Him their hearts devotion, they come to see if God can possibly give them something that they might have on their shopping list. They want God to divvy up and hand over the goods without themselves giving anything to Him in their act of worship. They are

greedy worshippers to say the least. May I say today that God does not want your shopping list!

People who bring these kinds of attitudes into the church service do not understand what worship is and will never learn the Word of God or produce lasting spirituality in their lives. In fact, they will go away with an empty dish and empty heart. A person who comes to church for these selfish reasons and with these attitudes might as well go golfing or stay home and play Bible Bingo instead of coming to church! There is a desperate need today for Christians to come to church with their hearts prepared to receive from God's Word and ready to worship God. We need a whole new mindset on why we come to church and how we must prepare ourselves when coming to church.

It is my prayer that our eyes would be opened as a result of this study. Most of all, it's my prayer that as a result of this study we would attend church with a new expectancy from God like we never had before. We can come to church realizing that we have come to drink from the well that never shall run dry! The Word of God and God Himself supplies us with an inexhaustible amount of resources to feed our lives, inform our lives and direct our lives. There is no reason to come to church and go away with an empty bag.

One shrimp in the ocean exclaimed, "This house is too big for me." So it is with the Christian studying the Bible. The Bible is so big that when we study it we feel like a shrimp walking through the ocean. But we know that the vastness of the Bible can surely have something for our lives. If we miss getting something out of the ocean of God's Word, it's because we have come to church without the right attitude and expectancy from God. We need to learn how to reprogram our hearts and minds before coming to church. We need to mentally and spiritually get ready for church. But how do we get ready for church? This is what we are going to study about in our message today. May God help all of us to come to church with a new freshness, expectancy and outlook as a result of this study.

There are four helpful ways to prepare ourselves for church:

1. We must come to church with the desire to hear God speak.

Revelation 3:22

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

It's not that God does not want to speak to our hearts today. The Spirit is willing to teach us the eternal truth of God's Word. The problem is that we are not listening to the Spirit's voice. God is speaking but we are not listening! We are not listening to the Word of God, which the Holy Spirit wants to use to give us daily instruction. Do you have an ear to hear when you come to church? Are you willing and eager to hear and apply the timeless truth of God's Word to your present day living? Many Christians come to church and really are not prepared to hear God's Word. They are better prepared to watch Sunday afternoon football but they are not prepared for Sunday morning church. Let us remember that fruitful living depends on fruitful listening!

Hebrews 5:11

“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.”

Many times Christians can become dull of hearing. This obviously means that over a period of time we can become desensitized to really comprehending the Word of God and applying it to our lives. The word “dull” is from the Greek word “nothros” which means to be “slow or sluggish.” This word was used when speaking about the numbed limbs of a sick lion that could no longer attack its prey. Strangely enough, it was also used in the tales of stories to indicate the stupidity of a wolf that heard the nurse threaten to throw the child to the wolves. These Hebrews were slow, sluggish, numbed and stupid in their apprehension and understanding of the teaching of New Testament truth. This made it difficult to teach them. The difficulty was not in the writer or preacher but in them. These people chose to not hear deeper truth and grow stronger in their Christian faith. They only wanted the surface teaching. These people settled only for milk and cookies instead of steak and potatoes.

Hebrews 5:12-13 goes on to say:

“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.”

The “first principles of the oracles of God” literally reads “the elementary trues of the utterances of God” and speaks of how these believers never graduated from the milk and cookie stage of Bible study and Christian living. In one sense, Paul says that they were still learning their ABC’s and were not even sure about them. They were still talking like babies and were only interested in drinking milk. The truth or teaching of God’s Word, which is likened to “milk,” speaks of the less difficult teachings of the Word of God. The reference to “meat” points to the more difficult or challenging trues of the Word of God. And Paul reasons that if all you do is drink the milk of the Word of God then you will be unskillful in the Word of God, which teaches us how to live righteously and effectively in the world (vs. 13).

If we are not careful we can become like these Hebrew Christians. We can become dull of hearing or numb to truth. We can become bogged down and sluggish in the way that we listen and respond to truth as it is being presented. Some Christians have a hearing problem. I’m not suggesting that they need a hearing aid! What they need is to learn how to listen to the deeper trues of the Word of God so that they might grow up in their Christian life and mature in their understanding of the Word of God.

One man said to me that he could not attend this church because the teaching was too deep! What he really meant is that he did not want to listen and learn. He wanted a preacher who would stand up in the front and scream about politics and other irrelevant issues. I asked this particular fellow if he enjoyed eating steak. His response was positive. “Well,” I said, “Deeper teaching in the Word of God is like a spiritual steak dinner. And if you like steak then keep coming to the church. It will start to taste pretty good if you keep listening and learning.” Far too many people simply don’t want to listen to truth today. I’m talking about XYZ truth instead of the ABC stuff! They don’t

want to listen and learn. They are lazy listeners! And they are babies in Christ!

Hebrews 5:13 says:

“For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.”

When John A. Broadus was the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, he went to a country church to preach one Sunday. A man approached him after the service and said, "Brother, God kin git along without all your learnin'." Broadus replied, "Yes sir, God can. And he can also get along without your ignorance."

Grow up Paul says! You can't remain a spiritual infant all your life. Trade in your bottle and nook and start feasting on the Word of God. There is a steak dinner waiting for all of us if we will learn to listen! The mentality that is being promoted in the church today is that meaty type of preaching with doctrinal content and exegesis of Bible texts is no longer acceptable. We need to have "easy listening preaching" that strikes the emotions and charms the soul. And I might add that much of the TV land and Hollywood preaching that is going on today is nothing more than milk preaching which contains no depth and no doctrinal studies in the Word of God. Preaching has become nothing more than milk preaching and I might add that much of it is skim milk at best! I'm convinced that we can fall into the trap of becoming bad listeners. I say this because it is human to be a bad listener.

Someone has said:

“The reason why we have two ears and only one mouth is so we learn to listen all the more and talk less.”

James 1:19 reminds us:

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

In an argument, the one who is doing the listening is far less likely to lambaste someone. The point cannot be missed. We must be swift or ready and speedy to listen and not so quick to shut people off by clobbering them with argumentative language. The same principle

can be applied to our willingness to hear the Word of God when we come to church. When we come to church we should be swift to hear the truth or ready and speedy about finding out what God wants to say to us so that we can apply it to our lives. Many people fail to come to church ready to hear. They come to church prepared to hear what new funny thing the preacher will say or what kind of Christian rock music will be played in the church service. Their desire to hear the eternal Word of truth takes a back seat and as a result they end up wanting to hear only shallow preaching which is only 2% skim milk!

Today we want instant food without waiting for it. We want everything to be served on a silver platter. But God says that we must learn to listen in order to receive God's eternal truth with profit. We must come with an open heart and ready to listen to God speak to us through the Bible.

1 Samuel 3:9-10

"Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth."

Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth! This is the kind of submissive and attentive attitude that we need today when we come to church. With this heart attitude we are assured of receiving something from God's Word that is new, refreshing and helpful for our lives. A servant waiting for instruction from his master will receive every word and with eagerness and anticipation take note of what is being said. What an example Samuel is to us of waiting to hear from our Master, the Lord Jesus, as He speaks to us through the Word.

"Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth."

"Speak Lord, in the stillness,
While I wait on Thee;
Hushed my heart to listen
In expectancy.

Speak, O blessed Master,
In this quiet hour,
Let me see Thy face, Lord,
Feel Thy touch of power.

For the words Thou speakest,
They are life indeed;
Living Bread from heaven,
Now my spirit feed!

All to Thee is yielded,
I am not my own;
Blissful, glad surrender,
I am Thine alone.

Fill me with the knowledge
Of Thy glories will;
All Thine own good pleasure
In my life fulfill. Amen.”

We must also remember to approach God’s Word as that which is inspired or which comes from the very breath of God Himself. This is an awesome truth to ponder and reflect upon. As we attend church we are coming to hear God’s very own words that have originated from His own breath. What a difference this should make in our listening and attitude toward the Scriptures. We should not be coming to hear a preacher’s sermon but to listen to God as He speaks to us through the Bible! God is speaking through His Word every time truth is clearly and accurately presented.

2 Timothy 3:16 concludes:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

The word “inspiration” is the Greek word “theopneustos” which literally means, “God-breathed.” The words of the Bible are the very breath of God. The words of Scripture are inspired by God because they came from the very breath of God. We can believe this in our theology but many times we can forget about the inspiration of the Scriptures when we listen to the message of the preacher. But we

must remember that as the preacher shares the truth of Scripture we are hearing the very words of God being spoken to us. They are not the preacher's words but God's Word. They are not the preacher's thoughts but God's mind and will for our lives today. The preacher is not inspired but the words in the Bible are inspired and they are God's voice to us today. When we get a fresh perspective on this it's only then that we can come to church with a heart that is ready to listen to God's eternal and unchanging truth.

As we listen to the Bible being preached, we must ask ourselves these questions:

- Is there a command here for me to obey?
- Is there a sin here that I must forsake?
- Is there some new direction that I must take in my life?

When we read God's Word, we must constantly be asking ourselves, "It is talking to me, and about me?" Dear friend, we need to possess a new freshness when dealing with the Word of God today. As we come to the Scriptures we must be ready and eager to learn things new and old. Jesus used a good illustration in Matthew 13:52 to bring this point across: "Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."

Jesus, however, was performing the function of an owner of a house who could bring new and old treasures out of his storeroom. In these seven parables Jesus presented some truth to the disciples, which they already knew about, and other truth that was new to them. The disciples knew about a kingdom over which Messiah would rule and reign but they did not know it would be rejected at the time it was offered. Jesus pointed out some secret truths surrounding the establishment of the kingdom, which were not previously known by the disciples. He tells them that a period of time would elapse between His rejection and His Second Coming to earth to establish the kingdom. It would be a time that would be characterized by professing followers, both good and evil. It would be a time of seed sowing and harvest. It would be a time when truth would be mingled with error. These were all new concepts to the disciples. So the old

and new truths surrounding the establishment of the kingdom were expounded to them. Both were necessary.

The application is this. When we attend church to hear the Bible taught or expounded we must be ready to listen to the old things as well as the new things. We need the old as well as the new because we forget the importance of the old if it is not taken out of the treasure chest of God's Word and polished up once in a while. The Bible says that we should not forget the "old paths" (Jeremiah 6:16) and the "old landmark" (Prov. 23:10). God's children must be ready to listen to both the old and the new truths of God's Word. And if the saints start grumbling and complaining about the preaching they are probably getting tired of the Word of God!

Some believers get tired of the sameness of Scriptural study week in and week out and want to explore the church scene for something that might be more exciting and exhilarating. So what do they do? They go out and try to find the cheap substitutes such as church drama, church movies, church bowling allies, church dance bands and church aerobic clubs. These Christians are like the Athenians who were always searching for some "new thing" that would strike them as being different and entertaining to them (Acts 17:21). The sad thing that occurs in the lives of Christians today is that they have lost their love for the Bible like the children of Israel had lost their love for manna.

God's people said in Numbers 11:6:

"But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes."

The children of Israel were saying, "All we have is the same food and the same diet every day. God, I want something different. Give me something stylish and unconventional." This is what the children of Israel were saying and is what many believers are saying today when it comes to attending church and hearing the Word of God. They want something different or unusual when they come to church. Many saints have become somehow accustomed to the Word of God and can no longer be satisfied with the simplicity of God's Word. They are tired of the Scriptural studies that have sound biblical content and they have become bored while listening to those great texts of

Scripture that deal with theology. They want somebody to talk to them and not preach to them. Christians today want to change the word “preach” to mean, “talk” and they want to make preachers into talkers (2 Timothy 4:2). May God help the church! Nobody wants to listen any longer!

When the children of Israel moped around and grumbled about the sameness of the manna, God decided to give them the flesh of quails to eat (Numbers 11). However, they paid the price by receiving a plague, which was sent by God’s hand, while eating the quails. God is saying to the church today, “I’ll give you what you want but you might not like what you get in return!”

Psalm 106:15 records the sad history:

“And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.”

When believers wonder from the Word into “quail country” they will find leanness in their souls. The children of Israel who ate the quail suffered physical death as a result of the plague. Their soul or physical life was diseased and taken from them. The word “leanness” can have the idea of wasting away by disease. So it was for them. Today when Christians become enamored with worldly things in the church, instead of Bible truth, they find their souls lacking the spiritual nutrition that they really need. Their souls become lean and deficient of good health. Furthermore, they find themselves hungering for the junk food of other things instead of the filet mignon of the Bible truth. Leanness means scantiness and thinness and points to disease.

If you want to eat spiritual junkfood in the church then God will give it to you! You can go into these New Evangelical drive-in churches and get Big Macs, double cheeseburgers and large orders of french-fries and miss the scriptural nutrition that you need from the whole counsel of the Word of God (Acts 20:27). When this occurs your spiritual health will suffer. Your soul will become lean or diseased because it lacks good over-all nutrition. Thus, it is paramount to develop good listening habits as you hear the Word of God so that your soul does not become lean or diseased.

Acts 16:14 says:

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended (paid attention and applied herself) unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”

We must learn to be like this lady. We must develop good listening habits and pay attention to what God is saying to us and apply our minds to understanding and wisdom. If we have good listening habits we will develop a deeper understanding of God’s Word and be much wiser in our Christian living.

Proverbs 2:1-6

“My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”

We are not to come into church like a stiff board that will not bend. We must come to church expecting God to speak to us. We must come to church like an adventurous person who is seeking for silver and hidden treasure! And we must believe that God’s word contains precious gems that are waiting to be unearthed. When we have this kind of excitement and anticipation and drive to learn God’s Word, it’s only then that we will be given knowledge, understanding and wisdom from the truth of Scripture. But there is a flip side to this treasure hunt. If you continually ignore God’s word as you come to church, sooner or later you will not be able to identify God’s voice. What a tragedy! Your ears will become closed to what God has to say to you. God is speaking but you are not listening!

There is some truth to what John Ruskin said:

“The world is dying for want, not of good preaching, but of good hearing.”

Any pastor will tell you that they have been told by people within the flock how to preach, what to preach and when to preach it. The

problem with this scenario is that the sheep should be listeners and followers instead of trying to be the shepherd and preacher. The pastor is to be the leader of the flock that guides the people in the truth of the Scriptures. And it's the sheep that are to do the listening, as the Scriptures are unfolded to them. But the sheep can develop hearing problems. Many times the hearing problem of the sheep is a heart problem festering deep within their soul. And I might add that many times when people criticize the pastor continually, it's probably because he is touching a sore spot.

D. L. Moody used to say:

"When you throw a stone at a pack of dogs, it's always the one that gets hit that does the yelping."

2. We must come to church depending upon the Holy Spirit's illumination.

Psalm 119:18

"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

What a tremendous desire and request the Psalmist shared. His desire was to have his eyes opened or illuminated to the truth of Scripture so that he might see wondrous or marvelous things from the treasure house of God's Word. It's the ministry of the Holy Spirit to use the Word of God and illuminate our minds to truth. Illumination means to give us understanding and insight concerning the trues of Scripture.

Let us remind ourselves that when we fail to receive something from the sermon of a faithful pastor, who is proclaiming the truth of God's Word, then we must investigate our lives and see where the fault really lies. The fault may not be the pastor's and the fault surely is not with the Holy Spirit who is our real teacher. The fault lies within us many times and our lack or personal response to the teaching ministry of the Spirit of God. When we attend church we must remember to avail ourselves to the teaching ministry of the Spirit of God. After all, it is the Holy Spirit who teaches us God's eternal truth.

The book of Revelation repeatedly tells us to avail ourselves to the teaching ministry of the Spirit. Consider the following verses.

Revelation 2:7 says:

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ...”

Revelation 2:11

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ...”

Revelation 2:17

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ...”

Revelation 2:29

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Revelation 3:6

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Revelation 3:13

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Revelation 3:22

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Why all the fuss about listening to the Holy Spirit? It's because the Holy Spirit is our true teacher! We need to depend upon His illuminating and enlightening ministry when we come to church. The Spirit is our teacher who unfolds to our minds and hearts the glorious truth of the Word of God. And we must remember that God's message is not limited by the preacher's three-point outline! As you listen to the Word of God being preached it can be illuminated to your own heart in ways the preacher never expected. God can speak to your own heart far more than a preacher can with his lips. This is

because the Holy Spirit of God is our teacher who illuminates our minds and hearts to eternal truth and then applies the Word of God to our lives.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 says:

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”

A little five-year-old girl had been attending the church kindergarten. Each day before the children were dismissed, the teacher had them sing the Doxology, which the little five-year-old loved to sing, but in her own words. “Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures, here we go!” Sometimes this is our attitude about church. We want to get out of church as fast as we can because we have not been open to the illumination and teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

3. We must come to church with the desire to worship God.

Psalms 100:2-4

“Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.”

If we are going to serve the Lord with gladness, sing before His presence and enter his gates with thanksgiving, then we will need to prepare our hearts for our time of worship. Worship involves heart preparation the night before (Saturday) and preparation on Sunday morning. We must learn to not have Saturday night arguments with our wives or else we might not be prepared for the Sunday morning worship service. Church is a prepared place for prepared people.

When driving to church we must not get in the habit of fighting with the kids or having family feuds as we drive into the church parking lot. This creates a wrong mindset and attitude for worship. We must

prepare the whole family for worship on Sunday. We must teach them the need to be filled with the Spirit. Some families can fight while driving to church and pick up the fight while driving home from church! Then they wonder why the preacher did not preach a better sermon! This is the devil's way of distracting our attention from sincere worship before God. Also, we do not prepare ourselves for the church service when we are trying to solve the problems of the past week before the church service starts. If we bring the baggage of last week into the Sunday morning setting, we will find our mind being preoccupied with last week instead of Sunday morning.

God is looking for worshippers in the church. There are many pew sitters but fewer pew worshipers. Many saints come into church and sit down never opening up their heart before God and pouring out their soul in the act of deep worship. We are to worship God through the acts of singing, preaching, giving and praying. Every facet of the service is to be a time of worship directed to God.

Someone once remarked:

"We are not to be critics at a debate, spectators at an entertainment event, or passive pupils hearing a religious lecture. We are the people of God gathered to worship."

We must also remember that worship is not something that we greedily try and get out of a church service. Worship is actually what we give in a church service. Worship is not what we get but what we give to God!

Psalm 96:7-8 says:

"Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts."

1 Chronicles 16:29 says:

"Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness."

Worship involves giving our lives to God sacrificially and not greedily (Romans 12:1-2). Ladies and gentlemen, we come to church so that we can give to God. We don't come to church to hear a certain type

of rock sound so that we can get a chill running down our back and a fleshly thrill. This is not worship. It's called greed. In worship we are the givers and God is the receiver! Therefore, we do not need to have certain musical sounds to meet our so-called worship needs. Many people want to worship some sound when they come to church or some dynamic figurine walking around on the stage like a peacock instead of really worshiping God. But all sound and preaching that obscures God is not true worship or preaching.

Let us also remember that we do not need a grocery list of items that we want for worship. Actually, when we come to church with a grocery list of items that we need in order to worship God, then we are really telling Him what we want to receive instead of coming to church to simply pour out our hearts before Him. Much of what is called worship today is cheap entertainment that feeds the flesh and rings the dinner bell of those who are looking for their own selfish experience. Only when we come to church in a worshipful manner, ready to give to God without greed or pretense, will we find that our cup runneth over!

In addition, we must come to church prepared to worship only when we have done our daily spiritual housing cleaning. We must come spiritually clean and prepared to receive God's truth as a clean vessel fit for the Master's use!

2 Timothy 2:21

"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

God wants us prepared and ready to receive all that He wants to teach us. Sin blocks the Spirit's ministry in our hearts. It closes the door of our hearts to receiving the truth of God's Word. There needs to be a clean line between your heart and heaven. Therefore, we need to come to church as a vessel spiritually prepared to receive God's Word. Many Christians walk into church carrying the sins of the past week. No wonder they leave empty, unchallenged and devoid of true worship before God.

James 1:21 says:

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

You will notice that we must clean house before we can receive the Word of God or allow the Word of God to be “engrafted” or implanted within our souls. We must learn to pull out the weeds of sin in the soil of our heart so that we can allow the Word of God to become planted within our hearts. If we want to get the Word of God down into our soul, we must first get the sin out of our soul! A filthy life before God in our Christian walk will keep our ears from listening and our heart from worshipping God. Christians simply do not come to church prepared to receive God’s Word and the sad result is that they don’t get the word of God implanted into their soul.

The word “superfluity” has the idea of fullness, surplus or excess. This word was used by the Greeks to describe the excess wax in their ears. James is saying that you should not come to church and try to receive the Word of God with any surplus or excess of wickedness in your life that you might be carrying over from your prior conversion days. This will bog you down and keep you from learning divine truth and applying it to your life.

The word “naughtiness” means that which is evil or bad. When you come before the Word of God to study and listen to God’s voice you must get rid of the excess baggage of sin. You must get rid of those evil things that will hinder the Spirit’s ministry and your sincere worship before God. If you don’t get rid of these “naughty” or evil sins then you will not be able to receive the Word of God with an open heart, apply it to your life and worship God. There will be a blockage of sinful wax in your ears and heart that keeps you from receiving God’s eternal truth for your life. God cannot teach you and lead you by His Word if you are not walking with Him and clean before Him.

The same is true about worship. You cannot worship God “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24) or with sincerity when there is spiritual blockage in your heart arteries – the blockage of sin. Cleanliness precedes worship. Many times we come to church to worship God but find ourselves missing out on what we really came to church to do.

And this is because some sin or sins have been plaguing our lives and we have not repented of them.

My friend, Christians must repent of their sins (Rev. 3:19) before coming to church and confess them before God (1 John 1:9). First Chronicles 16:29 says that we are to “worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” But the sad fact is this. We cannot worship God in the beauty of holiness when we are not holy in our Christian life. We simply are not ready to come to church to hear God’s Word and worship Him when we are not spiritually prepared. I must say again for emphasis. Church is a prepared place for prepared people. The importance of heart preparation can be seen in this little poem that was written by a layperson. It tells the humorous story of how the heart can make a difference between a bad sermon and a good sermon.

“Sunday the sermon was sluggish,
’Twas hard attention to keep.
The theme was faultily chosen,
It almost put me to sleep.

Monday was blue with sheer boredom;
Tuesday was carnal by choice.
Wednesday my conscience was wakened
By pleas from a still, small voice.

Prayer meeting left me uplifted,
Loyalty lingering long.
Thursday my heart was responding;
Friday His nudging was strong.

I came to thorough repentance
The following Saturday;
I yielded in full surrender
As all on the altar I lay.

Sunday the sermon was perfect,
Superb and quite at its peak;
Amazing how greatly that pastor
Improved in the space of one week!”

4. We must come to church with a passionate love for the Bible and God's meetinghouse.

Luke 24:32 reminds us of that unforgettable Bible conference held long ago on the road to Damascus. The disciples heard Jesus Christ speaking. Do you remember what their response to the Word of God was? "And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"

Since I have mentioned about this scene being a Bible conference, allow me to inject something at this point. The true Bible conference movement of yesteryears is dying out for a lack of interest in God's Word. And many conferences are turning into meeting places, which are now centered upon shallow preaching and worldly entertainment. This is because Christians have lost a passion to hear the deeper trues of God's Word. They have become more interested in little "pep talks" and satisfied with "felt need" preaching instead of searching the ocean depths of God's Word.

Many years ago a brother told me how he used to attend a Bible Conference in the area where I now live. He said that he remembered sitting by a certain tall tree listening to Albert Hughes speak on the subject: "The Glory of the Godhead." My friend, there is a desperate need to return to the sound doctrinal teaching of the Word of God. In this Bible conference movement of Luke 24, we see how the disciples had a passionate desire to hear God's Word. The disciples had open hearts that were ready to meet God and prepared to respond to God's Word. We need to have a burning heart for the Word of God today! We need to come to church with a fire burning in our hearts and not allow anybody or anything to throw water on our fire and extinguish it.

Does your heart have a burning desire to hear God's Word? Where is the flame of your life? Do you have the right heart attitude about learning the Word of God when you attend church? How did you come to church today? This is a good question for all of us to ask ourselves? What was your heart attitude toward the Scriptures when you walked into church? The way that we prepare ourselves for

church is the way that we will come into church and probably will be the same way that we leave church!"

Some people think a 30-minute sermon is too long, so they substitute a 300-column Sunday paper. Their attitude toward a long sermon is skewed because they are not interested in the Bible and wanting to learn and hear God's voice. They have lost the passion for the Word of God. The old saying is true – "The mind can only absorb as much as the seat can endure." But today many churches have padded benches! The problem with most Christians is not the preacher but with their attitude toward the Word of God. Many Christians need to return to possessing a spiritual sensitivity toward the Bible. They have lost their first love for the Bible and God's House!

David said in Psalm 84:10:

"For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

David had a longing to worship God and be part of something that was right and good. He longed to worship the Lord in God's House. He was even willing to take on a small task in God's House just to be there and be part of something that was good and blessed by God. I wonder of this can be said of you? Do sports and TV programs in your life take the place of God's House? Oh my friend, how much do you long to be in God's House? Where is your heart?

Jesus said in Matthew 6:21

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

When our hearts are prepared to meet the Lord and we are ready to hear from heaven we will come to church with the same zeal of David who said in Psalm 122:1: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."

An old farmer once said to a preacher, "I see by your bulletin that at a recent convention you discussed the subject, "How to get people to attend church." This seems strange to me. I never heard a single address at a farmer's convention on how to get cattle to come to the rack! When we get together at the grange, we spend our time

discussing the best kinds of feed." The elderly farmer had accurately pinpointed a great truth. If the Word of God is faithfully presented and people are "exhorted with all longsuffering and doctrine," hungry souls will soon find their way to the Christian assembly. If there is hunger for the Word that is being preached, then people will come to church. The cows will come to the feeding trough. Friend, if you are not hungry you will not come to the stall to eat! Let's return to the Word of God today with a new hunger and passion to learn God's eternal truth.

One preacher noted:

"In any church service, the congregation preaches more than half the sermon. The congregation brings an atmosphere with it. The atmosphere is either a barrier through which the preacher's word cannot penetrate; or else it is such expectancy that even the poorest sermon becomes a living flame."

How did you come to church today? This is a good question for all of us to ask ourselves? I say again. The way that we prepare ourselves for church is the way that we will come into church and probably will be the same way that we leave church! But if we come to church like an Ezra, with a prepared heart to seek the Lord's will for our lives, it's then that we will leave church ready to practice His Word in our every day living. We must get the Bible into our shoe leather. Yes, we must leave church ready to do something about what we have heard!

James 1:22 says:

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

The test of a preacher is not that his congregation goes away saying, "My, what a lovely sermon that was," but that they go away saying, "I will do something!"

An old farmer once said to a preacher, "I see by your bulletin that at a recent convention you discussed the subject, "How to get people to attend church." This seems strange to me. I never heard a single address at a farmer's convention on how to get cattle to come to the rack! When we get together at the grange, we spend our time discussing the best kinds of feed." The elderly believer had

accurately pinpointed a great truth. If the Word is faithfully presented and people are "exhorted with all longsuffering and doctrine," hungry souls will soon find their way to the Christian assembly. And it's these same souls that will leave the church saying, "I will do something!"