PREACHERS PROJECT

Delivery

How to Listen to a Sermon

Because preaching is one of the ways God's Word comes to us, it's important to think about it as something that happens through speech. God's Word gets communicated from one set of lips to another set of ears.

How a sermon is delivered is crucial for both preachers and their hearers. Preachers need to be heard, and people want to actually hear. That means public speaking details like volume, pace, variety, and clarity are important. Your preacher wants to know if these things are working for you, because, if they're not, then God's Word isn't being communicated. Here are five questions you can ask about a sermon's delivery:

- **Does your preacher's pace work?**
  Sometimes the acoustics in a space can make words hard to make out, so a preacher needs to take it more slowly. Or a sermon can include lots of lively language or details that can get lost. That's because our ears absorb information more slowly than a preacher's lips can deliver it. Those situations require different pacing.

- **Is the sermon loud enough that you can hear it?**
  Often this isn't about the preacher but about external things. Does the sound system need tweaking? Are there crying babies or active children present? Did the preacher simply forget to turn on the microphone?

- **Does the preacher speak clearly enough that you catch all the words?**
  All sorts of things can get in the way of clarity. It might be a speech pattern where the ends of sentences drop in volume. Or a preacher might struggle with a stammer. Or it could be a lack of variety in speaking. A preacher might even preach to a deaf congregation with ineffective or garbled sign language. None of these things are character flaws, and preachers generally *want* to hone their communication skills. Help them know how to do that.

- **<u>Does the preacher's delivery seem authentic?</u>**
  We've all heard it: the "preacher voice." You know the one. It sounds put on, as if the preacher is trying to win a debate by coming across as big or important or authoritative. It's what happens when preachers show up in movies or on TV — the caricature of preaching. But here's the deal: the sermon is an actual person speaking to you on behalf of God. Authority is important, but so is being authentic.

- **<u>What is the preacher's place?</u>**
  A sermon can be preached in a variety of places. Some preachers deliver their sermons from a pulpit, use a manuscript, and wear clergy vestments. Others speak extemporaneously in front of the congregation without things like robes, albs and stoles. Both styles have their benefits.

  Preaching from a pulpit and wearing pastoral garb is often a symbol that says what you're about to hear isn't simply the preacher's opinion. They're functioning as God's mouthpiece now. It implies people should get ready, because they're about to encounter something important." On the other hand, preaching without notes in front of the pews can happen as a way to say your God is accessible, and your preacher is a sinner just like you and wants you to have the same good news they've heard.

  Either way, there are things to consider. Does preaching from a manuscript inhibit the preacher from making a connection? Does preaching outside the pulpit lessen the authority of God's Word? Does the preacher wander back and forth distractingly or without purpose? Most important, though, is whether the preacher *owns* whatever space the sermon is being delivered in. Can you tell that your preacher *belongs* right there bringing that *exact* Word to you?

When Jesus tells a parable in Matthew 13, he says, "Whoever has ears, let them hear." That's reason enough for preachers to develop their delivery skills.