

## **DIRECTIONS FOR PROFITABLY HEARING THE WORD OF GOD**

by John Angell James

Be early, always taking care to be present at the commencement of the service, that the body may recover from fatigue, the thoughts be collected, and the mind composed. We should avoid as much as possible all light and trifling conversation on the way to the house of God; and it would be well, where it can be done, to avoid errands, and what is usually denominated shopping, and to go from our own habitation direct to the place of worship. We should consider prayer as a very important part of the service, and not go merely to hear the sermon; and should also consider that the hymns belong to us, and join in them not only mentally, but where there is a capacity for singing, vocally also. We should most anxiously watch against a formal, careless, and undevout manner of joining in prayer, or rather of not joining in it at all, as nothing is more likely to prevent or destroy true spirituality of mind, than such a trifling with prayer as this; it is insulting to God by its hypocrisy and profaneness, and most injurious to us. There is scarcely anything about which a Christian should be more anxious than his frame of mind and outward manner in prayer. The frequency of our seasons of prayer is likely, without great watchfulness—to abate the sincerity, solemnity, and reverence with which it is performed. Our thoughts in social prayer should be kept fixed on the words of him who presents it on our behalf, that we may be prepared in spirit and in truth to say, "Amen."

Previous to our going to the house of God, we should retire for a few moments to seek a prepared heart, and implore the blessing of God both upon the minister and ourselves. It is presumed that no real Christian would neglect to preface his attendance on social worship with secret prayer.

We should establish in our minds the highest **reverence** and esteem of the glorious gospel, and recollect the tremendous importance and responsibility of hearing it preached, since

every sermon is giving a tinge to our character for eternity, and becomes "a savor of life unto life—or of death unto death."

We should hear the word with deep and **fixed attention**, for upon the degree in which we employ this faculty of the soul in reference to what we hear, we shall be likely to obtain benefit. If we give up our thoughts to vagrancy, and exercise no discipline over them, we shall derive no advantage from the most instructive or impressive sermons. While, on the other hand, if we cultivate a habit of attention, we shall by degrees experience no difficulty in following the track of the longest connected discourse. Our first business is to fix our mind on the text, then on the preacher's explanation of it, then on the announcement of his design and divisions of discourse, taking care when one head is finished to cast a glance back at that which has preceded it. The opposite of attention is sleeping, than which a greater insult can be scarcely offered to the minister of God. "If," says Mr. Hall, from whom many of these sentiments are borrowed, "the apostle indignantly enquires of the Corinthians whether they had not houses to eat and drink in? may we not with equal propriety ask those who indulge in this practice—whether they have not beds to sleep in, that they convert the house of God into a dormitory?"

The grand secret of hearing to advantage is to hear in **faith**; to realize that what we hear is the truth of God; to be more anxious about the matter than the manner of the sermon; to consider the minister as God's messenger, and the sermon as God's message to us; to be more concerned about what is preached than by whom: and to receive the discourse "not as the word of man, but as the word of God, which works effectually in those who believe." The word preached cannot profit, if it be not mixed with faith in those who hear it.

We should hear the word of God with **impartiality**; having no such predilections for some topics, or prejudices against others—as would lead us to be displeased if our favorite topics were not always brought forward, or those we dislike, notwithstanding they are true and important, were not always omitted. Some can hear only doctrine; others nothing but experience; others nothing but practice. We

should be pleased with all in turn, and in proportion.

**Self-application** is an important exercise. We should hear for ourselves, not for others; the sermon is intended for us as well as for them, and there is scarcely ever a sermon preached which does not contain in it something that suits us.

**Fairness** is necessary to profitable hearing. Critical hearers are rarely profitable ones: those who reject a whole sermon, generally good and excellent, because of some one word, or sentence, or paragraph, they think inelegant; or some sentiment they do not quite understand, or cannot altogether approve, act neither wisely for themselves, nor fairly towards the preacher. The man who spends all his time in analyzing his food, instead of eating it, is not likely to have good health. "Give me," says Fenelon, "the preacher who imbues me with such a love of the word of God, as makes me desirous of learning it from any mouth."

We should hear the word of God with a **sincere resolution of obeying it**. A sermon is not a something to be heard and admired like a fine strain of music—but a something to be heard and practiced, like the instructions of a physician, or the commands of a master. When the preacher's duty ends—that of the hearer is but beginning. We should be careful, after we have heard the word, to retain and perpetuate its impressions. We should go silently away, avoid as much as possible all conversation on the way home, retire to our closets, digest the subject in our thoughts, and turn the whole into prayer.

[HOME](#)

[QUOTES](#)

[SERMONS](#)

[BOOKS](#)