

Expository Listening

Ephesians

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Amen.

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Ephesians 4:11-16. We're continuing a series that we began this new year with that we've taken a step aside from our exposition of the book of James, which we intend to get back to in a few weeks, Lord willing, but we wanted to start the year by focusing on the doctrine of the church and really working out a practical ecclesiology. Ecclesiology means that simply the doctrine of the church. Ekklesia means the church and so the doctrine of the church. A practical ecclesiology, an understanding of the church and its place in our lives; how we ought to see the church. We tend to have much too low a view of the church. We don't value it as we ought as followers of Jesus. I confess that even myself as a pastor, I realize I don't value the church as I ought and it seems sort of counterintuitive that a pastor would have too low a view of the church. I mean, if I have too low a view of the church and don't bother coming, it's not that big a deal, you know, that doesn't make sense for me from a standpoint of just my life, right? But it's not about that. It doesn't matter, practically speaking, what our view of the church is except that God, we have God's view of the church. And as I've ministered the word and been in the word longer over the years, I see that the Lord has a much higher view of the church than I have tended to have, even in my life.

So we started out looking at this and how we should see the church and we began with a message Ted alluded to earlier, the most beautiful place on earth in God's eyes is the church. Jerusalem was the most beautiful place in the old covenant because it was the place where God met with his people and his temple was there. We are now the temple of God. 1 Timothy 3:16, you, plural, are the temple of the living God and that is, therefore you are the most beautiful place on earth. This, the gathering of the saints, everywhere they gather around the word, that's the most beautiful place on earth in the eyes of God and therefore it ought to be in our eyes too if we're seeing and thinking correctly.

Then we also said it's the best place to work. That was our second message and we began to look at Ephesians 2:19-22, and then also this passage here, 4:11-16, that we're building the temple, building the body, that's what we're all called to do and that's the best thing, the best place you can be working because this is the work that lasts forever.

Then last time, we talked about that in the angle that we see in Ephesians 4:11-16. We said it's also not just the most beautiful place on earth, it's not the best place to work, it's the most glorious opportunity. That was the title of last Sunday's message. And if you missed some of those, you can see them online. You can actually, if you download our app from the app store or Google Play, whatever, you can watch all of the messages on video on your phone. Isn't that amazing? And you can watch the Sunday school lessons. You can catch up on the hermeneutics lessons. You can watch the first three on your phone and you can watch other sermons. You know, it's really pretty cool.

Anyway, but if you missed them, I encourage you to look at them because we're building on this and we've basically seen and we wanted to see the church the way God sees it was the first objective in this series. Now this is all a part of actually preparing for our ministry update meeting where we talk about really the future, and including plans for building and expansion, things like that. We're trying to figure out God's will but what we want to do is keep the main thing the main thing, and the main thing is building the spiritual building. That's the people. Physical buildings, physical things are just means to that higher end and we must always keep it in perspective and that's something that often happens when a church enters a building program, it begins to, the tail wags the dog and we want, with God's help, not for that to ever be the case. We want to keep the main thing the main thing and so we wanted to really emphasize this as a part of our beginning of the new year 2019.

So we've been looking at elevating our view of the church, how we see the church in the first three lessons, messages, and today we're gonna begin for a few weeks looking at how we are to build. We've touched on it briefly in some application points, but we're gonna really dive into that more carefully and thoroughly in the weeks to come, Lord willing. We're going to start today by talking about how to build and we're gonna use Ephesians 4:11-16 and continue to mine what Paul is saying here as our starting point each week in our message.

The title of the message this morning is "Expository Listening." Expository listening. We hear a lot about expository preaching, but I want to talk to you today about expository listening. I borrow the title from Ken Ramey in his book by that title. He wrote a book called "Expository Listening" and I recommend it to you, and much of what I share, there's many things I'll be bringing from his book today, it's a very helpful concept and what he points out is that too often all the focus is on just the work that goes into expository preaching which needs to be there. I mean, there's a high calling for people who are preaching and teaching the word to labor in the word to be sure that what they're giving is faithful to the text, that they're doing what God has called them to do. It's a serious and sober thing. Isaiah 66:2, "to this one I will look, To he who is humble and contrite and who trembles at My word."

That's the way we ought to approach the preaching and teaching of the word and we should study to show ourselves approved, but too often not enough attention is paid to the responsibility of the listeners. Listen to what Ramey writes in his book. He says, "The

Bible says more about," listen to this, "The Bible says more about the listener's responsibility to hear and obey the word of God than it does about the preacher's responsibility to explain and apply the word of God." Did you get that? The Bible has more to say about the listener's responsibility to hear and obey the word of God than it does about the preacher's responsibility to explain and apply the word of God. "From cover to cover," Ramey writes, "the Bible is jam packed with verses and passages that talk about the vital necessity of hearing and obeying God's word. God is very concerned about how preachers preach but based on the sheer amount of biblical references to hearing and listening, it is unmistakable that God is just as, if not more, concerned about how listeners listen."

So I want to encourage us each to examine our hearts today and think about how we listen to the word of God and examine what a biblical mindset is and how we should approach the hearing of the word of God, not just in preaching but in Bible study, every time the word is taught, every time we approach the word ourselves even as we read it, how do we come to the word of God. It's of the highest order of importance and we're going to see this as we look at it and we begin to unpack what Paul is talking about in a key concept at the beginning of this passage, 4:11-16, when he talks about being equipped, the equipping of the saints for the work of service. So in a sense, if you're going to build, you and I are gonna build the temple, the spiritual temple, to build our lives to be more like Christ, to build one another to be more like Christ, to build the temple that God will dwell in, we have to get to work and the first part of getting to work is being equipped by the word, being thoroughly furnished and enabled by the word, hearing the word in such a way that it changes us and enables us and empowers us to get to work.

So we need to think about how we hear the word and so expository listening is the title and the question to consider is this: are you being equipped when you hear the word? When you hear a sermon, you hear a Bible study, you take part in reading the word, is it leading to change in your life or is it coming in, maybe even being sort of gladly received but there's no change happening? If that's the case, that's a very dangerous place to be, it's a very unhealthy place to be, and it's a very God-dishonoring place for us to be. God intends his word to change us every time we hear it. He doesn't just inform us for the sake of informing us. He doesn't inform us for the sake of entertaining us, for making us feel better. I mean, feeling better may be a function of having really dealt with the Lord, letting him work on you, at first though, you don't feel better when you're really hearing the word. The word cuts before it heals. But the purpose that God gives the word is not to make you feel better, the purpose is to make you like Christ. It's to change us. You and I need to change every time we come to the word and I think that it's very easy for us, I know it is for me, to approach the word of God in a way that forgets that key fundamental concept that I'm coming to the word to allow God to work in my heart to change me from the inside out, and that if that's not accomplished, then it's been a waste. So may the Lord help us to apply our hearts to understand this and really evaluate; are we being equipped, are we being enabled to minister to God's people by the word because we're coming expectantly and ready to be changed.

Ephesians 4:11-16. I want to read verse 7 just to set the context too because it helps us. In fact, I'll just read from verse 7 to 16. Ephesians 4:7,

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) 11 And He gave [so he gave gifts and now He's going to tell us the gifts He gave, some of the gifts] some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, as we come to Your word, we come, Lord, we want to be like the man You described in Isaiah 66, the one that You will dwell with; the one that You will draw near to is the one who is humble and contrite and who trembles at Your word. Lord we want to be humble and contrite and to tremble at Your word. We know that Your word is the word that created the universe. By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made and by the breath of His mouth, all of the hosts of heaven. That mighty word is available to us now and we just read it and we pray that as we continue to open Your word, that You would accomplish Your purpose in our lives that it would not return to You empty, and we pray this in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So we build, we build the temple by how we listen. We build by how we come to the word of God, how we respond to the word of God. We build by being equipped. This is something that is so important and as I quoted earlier Ramey, I want to read to you what Spurgeon said about this. Spurgeon says this, "We are told men ought not to preach without preparation, granted, but we add men ought not to hear without preparation. Whence do you think needs the most preparation, the sower or the ground? I would have the sower come with clean hands but I would have the ground well plowed and harrowed, well turned over and the clods broken before the seed comes in it. It seems to me that there is more preparation needed by the ground than by the sower, more by the hearer than by the preacher." C. H. Spurgeon.

Isn't that paradigm shifting? I don't know about you, that to me is just, I myself as someone who preaches the word, I'm also supposed to respond to the word myself, not just preach it, so I'm called to be changed by it and to prepare my heart the same way you are to hear the word and there really are so many passages that speak of it. James 1:22-25, don't be merely hearers of the word but be doers of the word. It's foolish to be merely a hearer. It's like somebody looks at a mirror, sees something wrong with them, walks away without fixing it. That's the image, remember, James uses in chapter 1. Don't be foolish. When you hear the word and you see yourself, change by God's grace and power.

So let's talk about being expository listeners and I want to say as a word just to help us think about this and prepare our hearts even for this concept, it's helpful to think how our world system and maybe just evangelicalism has conformed to it and our thinking is conformed to this in ways we don't realize, you know, we're the proverbial frog in a kettle or, you know, a fish doesn't know it's wet, that kind of thing, that the things that we swim in that affect us that we don't really know or think about. I think we tend, it's very easy to come to church as a spectator. You know, we sit there, we watch what's going on in the front, someone is leading worship, sometimes there's special music, there's a sermon, and we can come as a spectator watching in the way that we watch a show, and it's a subtle thing that we have to work against. We are not spectators, we are participants. We are here to go directly to God. If anything, the people in the front are not performing for us to watch, they are helping us to be focused up to God. God's the audience, you are not the audience, I'm not the audience. God is the audience.

So we need to be aware of the spectator mentality and then we also need to beware of another thing that's even maybe more prevalent today and that is a consumer. We're not consumers and we have to work against this. I'm not a consumer. I'm not a customer when I come to church. Many people treat it that way, even though they don't consciously say, "I'm a customer and I'm taking my business elsewhere." No one has ever told me when they left the church, "I'm taking my business elsewhere, pastor." I've not heard that yet. If you want to say that in the future, it'll at least be something I can then say, "I was told that one time." I hope that you don't leave and say that. But anyway, I've never been told that but in reality that's really a lot of times what's motivating. It's not always, there are a lot of times people leave for very good reasons and they have concerns or whatever, but often people leave churches because they're just not really happy with the services that they're receiving and they believe they can get their needs met somewhere else better. You see, it's just like the reason you change from, you know, one store to the other, you move from one department store to the other department store because you like the products better, you like the prices better, and so you like what's delivered. "You know, they have a better youth ministry there or they have a better children's ministry there. They're meeting my needs better." I'm not saying that there's not some consideration of those things. Yes, there should be but it's not from a consumer mindset. I don't have the freedom to leave as a consumer because if you belong to Jesus Christ, you are servants, literally slaves of Christ, the question is what does your Master want you to do? And a better question would be, am I being equipped where I am? Is the church I'm at equipping me to minister for the glory of Christ?

So you have responsibility that you test the teaching, yes, absolutely, but we need to put aside a spectator mindset, the consumer mindset, and we need to understand that we really are workers, have a worker mindset. Let's say that servant/worker mindset. Now think about the difference in how you hear if you're a consumer or you're a spectator or you're a worker. Think how it changes the way you approach what you're hearing. You know, if you're a spectator, maybe you enjoy it, maybe you don't. That's it. That's the issue. If you're a customer, are my needs getting met or are they not? If you're a worker, is am I being helped to go about and do my job?

I thought about this illustration. Do you ever think about those guys that work up on the skyscrapers? You know, you see, like I remember seeing a documentary about that one time and, you know, how they are like, they're on these, they're walking on beams, you know, 75 stories up in the air, 100 stories up in the air. Man, I have great respect for people that can do that. I just look at the building if I'm driving down the road, you know those cranes on top of buildings? If I see the crane it makes my knees weak driving. Like just to imagine being up there. Well, I'm telling you, if I was working on a skyscraper and I'd go to work the first day and there's a training time for me, I'm listening with great intentionality to everything I'm told because my life depends on it. I'm listening to what they say about, "Make sure that you lock in your safety harness everywhere you go so that if you fall, you're not falling more than about 6-8 feet." It changes. I'm not listening as a spectator. "Well, I really like listening to this guy. He's very entertaining. I like the way he tells jokes and stuff as he's training us." No, I'm listening as someone whose life depends on it.

Not only that, after I get used to it and I'm comfortable that I'm safe, now I'm meeting each week, maybe at the beginning of the week they have a meeting and they're, "Hey, we're gonna be doing this this week. You need this tool. You need to do this." And I'm listening to someone who's taking the information and putting it to work. I'm not listening to someone who's detached in any way. I'm gonna be engaged in doing what I'm being trained to do. That's something of how we ought to listen. That's something of the mindset we ought to bring to the word of God. That's what expository listening is.

Now in that book, Ramey uses a helpful illustration that I want to kind of guide the rest of our thoughts around and then I'll begin to give you an outline for this morning. He has his introductory chapter is called "Welcome the Word." Welcome the word, and he uses the metaphor that's helpful like if you're going to have guests in your house, guests that you really are looking forward to having, what do you do? I mean, you go to, you clean the sheets. You know, when we have people in our house, that means our kids have gotta move around and we've got a mattress on the floor for one of the kids or whatever, and we're making room for our guest. We had the Portugals at our house. They wished they weren't at our house because Dan broke his leg when he was at our house. If you heard that, Dan Portugal, our missionary to Spain. Anyway, I won't go into the details except to say we had them there and we were delighted to be able to have them, host them in our home. You know, we had the Portugals in John's room and Dan and Amy and the kids were in the other two rooms. Maggie was in our floor. Jonathan we shipped next door.

Anyway, sorry about that, John. But it took some work to get ready to welcome them into our home. You know, we made sure we had groceries in the house so that when it was morning time, there was breakfast. I mean, we try to do that anyway but, you know, it's a little different when you've got company, right? The same-old, same-old may not be adequate for tomorrow because we have somebody we want to welcome into our home. He says that's the way you should see the teaching and preaching of the word of God. Prepare your heart to welcome it.

Welcome the word. I want to encourage us to welcome the word by doing three things. Now this is really being equipped because it's all about being equipped and I'm gonna show you how this in the text works out in just a moment, but being equipped and welcoming the word, I think, are basically the same things. Be equipped by the word, welcome the word.

The first point this morning: welcome the word, number 1, by preparing your heart to hear. By preparing your heart to hear. We have to till the soil of our hearts. Spurgeon's allusion, he was alluding to the parable of the sower. Remember he said, "Does the sower need more preparation or the soil?" Remember that illustration that Jesus used in Matthew 13, Luke 8, where the sower goes out to sow, he sows the word of God and it falls on four different types of soil, remember? It falls on the wayside, that is the paths that run between the fields. That's hard soil, impenetrable. It lays on top of the soil. The birds eat it. Some falls among rocky soil. In Palestine, that means soil that's only a couple of inches deep and then limestone is underneath it so that the seed begins to germinate, goes down, hits the soil, hits the rock, can't go down any further, and then shoots up quicker. So it comes out of the ground quicker but it has no depth of earth. It dries up. Thirdly, thorny soil. Thorns choke it out. And so the first three, there's no fruit. The fourth kind of soil, the good soil which brings forth fruit. Well-tilled soil brings forth fruit 30, 60, 100-fold. And in Luke 8, Jesus after that then talks about, he uses another analogy and then he says, Luke 8:18, "Be careful how you hear." Right after the parable of the sower, he then talks about lighting a lamp and then he says, "Be careful how you hear." We have a responsibility in how we approach the word. We have a responsibility to do what Jeremiah and Hosea encouraged, God called the people of Israel to do, to break up the fallow ground of our hearts.

We have a responsibility to prepare our hearts to hear the word and part of that is just having an understanding and the expectation that we're to get to work. I want you to see this in the passage. I mean, you see that he basically describes this building process, it's now he's moved from the metaphor of the temple, remember in Ephesians 2, to the body in Ephesians 4, but we saw how both places are we're building, we're building the body in the same way we're building the temple. So how do we build? He essentially says it all is about the word of God. That's the flow of the passage. Jesus has given some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers. These four gifts, what they have in common is they are about giving the word of God to the people of God. I believe he's talking about, of course, apostles, they gave the New Testament. I think in this passage when he says prophets, he's speaking of the New Testament prophets who in the early church actually spoke in a sense of the word of God in a way

that's different than now. It was something that happened then. We're gonna talk about this actually on Wednesday night too, the gift of prophecy and the sufficiency of Scripture, but in the early church because they did not all have the New Testament documents right away, it wasn't like they got a download, boom, all 27 books sent to your email, "The New Testament has arrived." No, God gave the New Testament over time through different men interacting with different settings. Remember, Paul writes to Corinth and he writes the letter of 1 Corinthians, then he writes the letter of 2 Corinthians, he writes Galatians and Ephesians and Colossians. James writes his letter to the Jews that we've been talking about, first century Jewish believers, right? So all these books are being assembled over time and then as they received the word of God, they test it, they know it's the word of God, then they pass it on, and they recognize the authority of the word of God immediately. 2 Peter, actually chapter 3, I think it's around verse 14 or 15, Peter makes an interesting statement about Paul's writings. He says, just to sort of lay aside that whole nonsense that people think the church gives the word, that's the Roman Catholic view, that the church gives you the Bible. Completely wrong. The Bible gives you the church and the idea is that nobody knew what the books of the Bible were until the church definitively told them in the Church Council, particularly the Council of Nicea 393. This is Catholic view.

It's also very similar to what Dan Brown articulates in his book, "The Da Vinci Code," which I read to be a good shepherd and wish I could have washed my brain out after I read it, but it was actually an entertaining read. I would recommend it to no one. I mean, he's an interesting storyteller and he fabricates, you know, history and historians, unbelieving historians, you know, mock him because he's so bad in his history. But he has the same idea that the church kind of invented the canon.

That's not true at all. In fact, when you look at the way the Bible unfolded, God dealt with this initially in Deuteronomy 18. He told when he gave the first five books of the Bible, Genesis through Deuteronomy, through Moses, before Moses died, Moses gave the system of how you will test each successive prophet. Deuteronomy 18:15-18, and there's essentially three or four tests depending on how you cut it. I usually share three. It's the test of authority. Moses is saying, "If somebody comes along, they must first of all claim to speak for God. They must say, 'Thus says the Lord. This is the word of the Lord.'" Which the Old Testament says 4,000 times. Things like that, "God said." So test of authority. Secondly, this is actually a big parenthesis. I apologize. It's not in my outline so just hold onto this so you know the Bible is the word of God. The second test is accuracy. "If a prophet says something's going to happen and it doesn't happen, don't listen to him. I've not sent him." That's what the text says, Deuteronomy 18, I think it's verse 18. Third test is consistency. Is what he says consistent with what you've received before. If he claims to speak with authority, if he prophesies things are gonna happen and they happen, he has accuracy, and if he what he says is consistent, receive his writing as the word of God.

So they immediately received Joshua as the word of God because Joshua said things like, "Hey, guys, the Lord has told me we're to march around Jericho for seven days and on the seventh day we walk around seven times and He's gonna cause Jericho to be given in our

hands supernaturally." And do you know what happened? Exactly what Joshua said. So they said, "Here's a prophet from God. Receive his word and add it to our five books we had already, six books." And that's how the Old Testament grew. It grew book by book by accretion. Nobody was waiting for the Council of Jamnia in 90 AD, Jews were not waiting wondering, "Oh, all these other books, are they the word of God?" No, in the first century Jesus knew that the people he was speaking to knew the 39 books of the Old Testament were the 39 books of the Old Testament. Technically, the Jews had 24 books that are our same 39 books because they grouped the minor prophets, 12 as 1. So you may hear that but it's the same 39 books we have. Why? Because he knew they had, the faithful always knew what the word of God was. New Testament, the same thing is true.

So that's why Paul, I started out this whole thing, started with me telling you Peter in 2 Peter 3 says, "The writings of Paul, our brother Paul, which at some times are hard to understand, which the foolish twist and distort to their own destruction as they do the rest of the Scriptures." Peter was affirming Paul. He wasn't waiting for the Council of Hippo to tell him Paul's writings were God's word.

So we know the word of God. We have confidence in the word of God and so we're to attend to the word of God, and so we're given the word of God by the apostles, but when they didn't have all 27 books yet because they haven't been distributed, it's like Corinth has the 1 & 2 Corinthians, maybe they've gotten the Galatians' or they've gotten Thessalonians because Thessalonica is closer. So they have, maybe they've got Matthew, and so they're assimilating a canon. About 100 AD the whole church knows because they've shared, they've been traveling around, "Here's the canon." But until that time, until the canon was complete, God gives prophets to speak the word of God in church because they don't have the rest of the New Testament and they were supposed to listen to these prophets and receive it with more authority because they had not yet been given the whole Bible. 1 Corinthians 14 is all about testing the prophets, the guys that speak like this.

So what he's basically saying: God, Jesus Christ, his love gift to the church was to give them the word of God. He gives them, his gifts are the apostles. His gifts are the prophets. Those were at one point in time at the beginning of the church, and now he gives evangelists and he gives pastor-teachers. I think that last one is hyphenated when you look at the Greek. It's really it doesn't have a hyphen but it means to be hyphenated because of the structure. Pastors and teachers are the same person. Roles of the elders, for instance. He gives the evangelists, he gives the pastors and teachers to continue giving the word of God, but Jesus loves the church so much, he knows the church needs his word. The word is everything. The word is what gives us eternal life. The word is what causes us to be born again. The word is what sanctifies us, "Sanctify them in thy word. Thy word is truth."

So he gives the word and now the word is being ministered by the evangelists, the pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints. The word is given to equip. The word "equip" here means "to be furnished." It's from the word *artios*, *katartismos*. "Artios" means "to be fully furnished, equipped; to have everything that you need to perform a

task." And the preposition on the front of it intensifies that meaning. It means to be fully equipped, fully ready.

The word makes every believer fully ready to do the work of ministry and so when we come to receive the word, we're not coming to just learn new concepts, that's part of it, we're coming to be equipped to go to work and it starts this movement. He gives some as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service. In fact, there's five prepositions that are really important in verses 12 and 13 that are the same Greek preposition which picture movement. In the NASB, the New American Standard which I'm reading, the first one is translated, "for," f-o-r, and the last four are translated "to," t-o, and the word in Greek means "into or toward," and it pictures movement. So for the equipping of the saints for the work of service. The reason God is equipping the saints and furnishing them is to move them into work and as they move into the work of service, what they're moving toward, the reason they're working and serving is toward the building up of the body of Christ, to the building up of the body of Christ, and they are building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. It all starts with the word and it starts this cascade of movement, equipping and then this feverish working and this productive process starts with the word.

So we need to prepare our hearts to hear as people who are gonna be moved to action, to be careful to be doers of the word, not to be hearers only, and we need to prepare our hearts for that. It's not just foolish like James says in James 1:22-25, you know, like a person who looks at a mirror, sees something wrong with them and walks away without fixing it. You know, like, "Hey, look, my hair's really messed up. Wow, I look terrible." And just walk away and just go out in the world like that. "Hey, look at me. I look terrible. Isn't this great?" You know, it's ridiculous. Nobody does that unless you're crazy. James says that's what it's like to hear the word and not do it.

Jesus says it's not just foolish, it's dangerous. He ends the Sermon on the Mount with the illustration about two different types of builders, remember? There's one man who builds his house upon the sand and one man who builds his house upon the rock and the storms come, the storms of life come, and the man who's built his house upon the sand, his house collapses, destruction, total sudden destruction. The man who builds his house upon the rock, his house stands. What's the difference between the two men? They both heard the word of God. Jesus says the man who builds his house upon the sand is the man who hears the word and does not do it. The man who builds his house upon the rock is the one who hears the word and does it. So it's a matter of life and death. This is why we should hear the word as those whose lives depend on it.

So prepare our hearts to hear the word. Welcome the word, prepare like a guest is coming.

I want to share with you some things that Ramey mentions in his book for spiritual and physical preparation under this first point practical applications of preparing your heart to

hear. Listen to what he says; on Saturday or Sunday night, get your heart ready for worship. I mean on Saturday night or Sunday morning, get your heart ready for worship. Do that by reading a portion of God's word. So read God's word in expectation of hearing the word. Thirdly, confess your sins to God. Fourthly, plead with God to make your heart soft and receptive to his word when you go to worship, when you're in Bible study. Fifthly, pray for those who will be teaching and preaching God's word. Do this on Saturday night or Sunday morning. Do this, create new habits.

He has three physical, those were spiritual preparations. He has 12, I just gave you five of his 12. His others are helpful too. Three physical preparations. I think these are really good suggestions. He says make it a habit to be home on Saturday night. In parenthesis he writes, Sunday morning starts Saturday night. That's actually the Jewish way anyway, right? The day starts at sundown. Number 2: be careful of what you watch or read on Saturday night. I mean, you should all the time but especially on Saturday night. That the things that you fill your minds with will hinder your ability to hear.

Isn't it something, you listen to music and it'll stay with you. I'll sometimes, you know, I listen occasionally to secular music, most of the time I listen to spiritual uplifting music but from time to time we'll listen to secular music or whatever, you know. Patti and I, we were driving the other night out for a date and we listened to some old music from our day and thought how bad it was still. I mean, I still like it but it's like this is such goofy stuff. It was pretty good stuff compared to a lot of the other stuff. But anyway, still though, anyway, never mind. But I had it in my mind afterwards. Like the song, there it is the next morning. I'm like, "I gotta get that out, so I gotta listen to some good solid, pull up Norton Hall or the Gettys and listen to them online and get something good in my mind."

That's the kind of thing we're talking about. It makes a difference. We are creatures. Cultivate habits that prepare our hearts for the word and I think we should really think about media and how much media you're consuming because media actually impairs your ability to hear. They're learning more and more about this, the whole cellphone thing. I know we have to, there's a lotta goods things about the technology we have but it does change you. It changes the way we think and we need to cultivate habits of thinking so we can hear the word. I mean, you're here and we have long sermons and you're used to that but you have to keep cultivating that in your life, and this is what God intends. This is the wonderful thing about the world. They would think we're crazy. I mean, they're used to not even having a thought that can last more than five seconds, you know? The news is like little soundbites. Nobody ever really articulates any kind of coherent argument for anything. It's just little emotional appeals everywhere. But the people of God are learning to think God's thoughts after them and we're being changed by it. We're being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

So think about that, be careful about what you watch or read. Third thing, he says, get things ready on Saturday night for Sunday morning to alleviate the morning rush. He goes on, lay out clothes, set the table, write offering check, prepare diaper bag, load car, etc. That's just practical wisdom, isn't it? But if we're really anticipating, "I'm going to

work. I want to be able to attend to what I'm going to be learning so I can apply that. My life depends on it. My job is gonna be, the faithfulness to my job is gonna depend on how I hear." You make that a priority.

Prepare your heart to hear. Welcome it. Prepare like you're welcoming a guest. Secondly, not just we welcome the word not just by preparing our heart to hear but by placing your heart under what you hear. This is not before, this is during, during the teaching and preaching of the word. Place your heart under what you hear. I'm emphasizing the word "heart" in all three points because God wants to change our hearts. He doesn't want to just change our behavior in a surface way. He's not creating legalists. He's creating people who obey him from the heart. So place your heart by placing your heart under what you hear.

You know, he has a couple, let me just mention some of the helpful practical things he says in this and then I'm gonna talk more about the spiritual emphasis I want to add to what he says. He says, he gives four things and I'll add a fifth, so five things to place your heart under what you hear.

Follow along in your own Bible when the Scripture is read. I mean, actually attend to the word yourself. Look at the word on the page as it's being read. Don't be lazy. 2. Take notes during the sermon so you have something tangible to take home and reflect on. 3. Fight distractions. Don't be a distraction to others and fight distractions yourself. 4. Exercise discernment. Check and make sure what the pastor is saying or the Bible teacher is saying is true. Be a Berean, of course. Don't just take it lock, stock and barrel. Test everything. Hold to that which is good.

So those are the four things he gives, I would say number 5, focus on heart change. The Lord wants to address our hearts. We spent a lot of time talking about this last summer, that the heart biblically is the inner man. The Bible pictures, that's the favorite word God uses for the inner man is the heart. He uses a lot of words that are basically synonymous, they're basically the same thing roughly. The word "soul, spirit, heart, inner man," all the same thing and the heart is the word that's used almost 1,000 times in Scripture. It's God's favorite word and it's what we have that is like God. The heart consists of three components: it's our thinking, it's our desiring or wanting, that's number 2, and it's our choosing. Thinking, desiring, and choosing. God thinks, desires, chooses. He's made us in his image to think, desire and choose. The mission of the Christian life, this is sanctification in a sentence, the mission of the Christian life is to begin thinking like God thinks, desiring what God desires, choosing what God chooses. That is holiness. That's the issue. My problem is I don't think and believe what God thinks and believes about things. I don't desire or value in the appropriate level the things that God values or desires, you see? And I don't choose the things that he would choose or that he chooses and I need to repent.

So when I come to the word of God, what I need to expect, God is going to be addressing my thinking. God is going to be addressing my wanting. And God is going to be addressing my choosing. He's gonna say to me, "Ty, what you think is wrong. What you

believe is wrong. You need to repent of that belief and replace it with My belief. Ty, what you value," and sometimes it's a matter of degree, "you value this but you value it too lightly." Just like we've been talking about the church. I always had a value upon the church but I wasn't valuing it like God values it and what's the answer? Repent of that and change the way I value it to be what he values, and the same thing with our choices. I mean, our choices over time become habits. God wants us to create new habits. That's what that Saturday night preparation stuff, it's creating new habits that actually make a difference in our hearts. We're not trying to just become, you know, look how organized we are. It's not about that. It's not about outward righteousness, it's about inward heart change, but it's about cultivating your heart, tilling up the soil of your heart so that the word comes and it has fruit.

You see, this is what, this is the purpose of the word. 2 Timothy 3:16. This is a helpful category to have in your mind as you come to the word and this is 2 Timothy 3:16. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, that is, all Scripture is literally God-breathed, and is profitable for four things: for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness. Now think about these things and it relates to all three aspects of the heart but doctrine or teaching. When I come to a passage, what is this passage calling me to believe and think? What is it teaching me? What is it causing, what beliefs and intellectual propositions are being put before me and how do they differ from what I really think and believe? Because the second part, he's teaching something to reprove us. Reproof. Reproof is God pointing out and putting his finger on something that's wrong. He says that is not right in our hearts. This is a function of the word of God to do this regularly in our lives. This is how it profits us. This is its usefulness to us, it teaches us, it reproves us. So every time we come to it, we should expect to be reprov'd. "Lord, what is it You're trying, You're gonna deal with? What is wrong in me? What is wrong in the way I think? What is wrong in what I value? What is wrong in what I'm doing and choosing?"

But it doesn't only just do that. Isn't it wonderful, it goes beyond that, it corrects. Isn't it just, if people just go around pointing out what's wrong and don't help you fix it, that's not helpful, is it? "Wrong. Wrong." It's like a referee. Wouldn't you like to live with a referee? Sometimes we can be that to each other, can't we? We can actually be like referees. "Outta bounds. You know, you've fouled." That's not love. I mean, if you point out and then you come alongside and help correct, that's love.

Well, the word of God does that. It comes along and it corrects. It shows you the right way. It shows you how to fix what is wrong and it doesn't just do that, it trains in righteousness. Finds something wrong, corrects it, and now walks alongside you and trains you. This is the power of this word that we have, that we are hearing, that we are reading. So expect that to happen. Desire that to happen.

Now I mentioned a passage earlier, I want to mention this one too, Hebrews 4:12, and I mentioned it, alluded to it, but this is what it says. This is what the word of God does. "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierces to dividing joint and marrow, soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts

and intentions of the heart." The word of God is like a two-edged sword that cuts into the very depth of our being, the very depth of our hearts. What God wants to change, it lays it open, discerns the thoughts and intentions. It shows where we're wrong in what we believe, where we're wrong in what we value, where we're wrong in what we're doing. It lays it open. There it is. And it cuts all the way down to the bottom so that we can repent from the very heart level.

God's word doesn't stay on the surface. It cuts. Now it's painful so one of the things we should, if you're gonna welcome the word, you've gotta welcome the word and expect it to hurt. There's gotta be a sense in which we want it to hurt. That's kind of counterintuitive, isn't it? I don't like to hurt. I feel like my mission most the time is to not hurt. As I get older, that mission becomes more and more difficult, doesn't it? Things hurt more until we get to go home to glory. That's what we're supposed to do, is hope for heaven more, but if I'm thinking biblically and I want to be like Jesus and I want to build the temple, I have to hurt. And we come expecting, "God, search me and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. Cut into me and show me things I don't even see that are wrong with me."

So it's placing your heart under what you hear. "Lord, I come to You and I want my heart to be laid bare before You. This is what it means to tremble before Your word. I want Your word to accomplish its purpose." So prepare your heart to hear, that's the first thing. Secondly, place your heart under what you hear. And thirdly, this is after. Prepare your heart to hear before, place your heart under what you hear during, practice what you hear after. We welcome the word by practicing what you hear from your heart, practicing what you hear from your heart.

One of the most important things that we need to do is learn the art of meditation. Psalm 1:1-3, Psalm 119 talks about meditation over and over and over again. Meditation is simply Psalm 1:1-3, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree planted by rivers of water, yielding its fruit in its season, its leaves won't wither. Whatever he does prospers." He meditates. He doesn't just hear the word, he doesn't just gladly kinda think, "Hey, that was a great sermon or that was a great Bible study. I'm so glad I heard that." He takes that and meditates on it. He ruminates on it. He talks about it with himself.

The words for "meditate," one of the words means just to kinda like mumble under your breath. It's like you're thinking about it. You know, you're thinking about something, you're talking to yourself almost. You're talking to yourself the word. You're applying it to yourself. You're seeing the pictures. You're thinking about what God is appealing to in your heart. You're changing your thinking, your values.

So now what's that look like after the service? Well, I want to add one other verse, Psalm 1:1-3 is what I mentioned, meditation, but Colossians 3:16. I want to encourage us to all be involved in corporate meditation and I don't mean we're gonna have a class where we all sit on the floor with our knees crossed and, you know, hold our hand. No, nothing like

that. Corporate meditation, Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell within you richly." You plural. Y'all. Let the word of Christ dwell within you richly, "teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." When we get done hearing the word, one of the first things we should do is speak the word to each other. Look for ways to do that. Make this a determination in your mind, in your heart, that you're going to start doing this. You're not gonna let the word that's been given be stolen away from you or other people. We're gonna learn to ask one another questions. Talk with one another.

I mean, this was actually in the book that we gave out, "How to walk into church," Tony Payne. Do you remember that book "How to walk into church" we gave out about a year ago? No. Nobody remembers it. Okay, some of you do. Thank you. It's a very helpful book. He talks about how to prepare to come to church and then after you leave church, and one of the things he says is when the sermon's over, ask one another things like this, "Hey, what did you find really helpful in the sermon today?" And that's a good question and if the other person, sometimes it'll put them on the spot, it's open-ended. Maybe you should say this, Payne says, maybe you should say, "I found it really helpful when the pastor made the connection between how we forgive others and our forgiveness from the Lord. What did you think about that?" That's a little easier way to introduce it. It's like you've helped them. It's not like you immediately like pop quiz after the sermon, "Give me the three points of the sermon right now." No, don't do that. But you know, share something you found helpful. "I found this really encouraging. What do you think about that?"

There is something powerful about the dialogue after the sermon. I mean, I find that when some of you talk to me and you share something about the sermon, I find that often what you say to me I really receive it as better than what I said. I'm like, "I didn't really see that. What you just said, I'm seeing it more clearly because you said that." The Lord made us to need one another so speak the word to each other. Take time, this is why we open up the other building and Jess tells us every so often, we have coffee and water, as much tap water as you can drink over in the other building. Go over there and spend time together. After the service, talk to one another. On the way home, talk with your family members. Talk to your spouse. "What did you find helpful?"

So that corporate meditation and then this week take those notes and meditate on them personally asking yourself, "How does God want me to change? What must I do to change? What is the first step I must take to change? Where and when will I begin?" Ramey asked those four questions, as what we should do after we hear. "How does God want me to change? What must I do to change? What is the first step? So where and when am I gonna begin taking that step?"

This is why home groups, home groups are about a lot of times we're talking about the sermon, the application of the sermons. We're basically one-anothering one another in the word. Let's apply these things. And what we're doing when we do that, is we're actually, we are building one another up. You're building another person in the likeness of Christ when you share what the Lord's shown you. And isn't it amazing, I find that when I'm

telling somebody something, I will be telling them something I need to hear. Have you had that experience? You know, somebody comes in your life and you're like, "Oh yeah, you struggle with this?" And you're telling the verse or you're telling some concept and it's like the Lord has a way of just saying, "This is for you too. I let you have this person come into your life so you could speak this and in the speaking of it, even more commit to that yourself."

So we have to learn to talk with one another, and if we're not going to, we're not going to have the full benefit, we're gonna be in danger of letting the word come in and not have its way in our hearts. May God help us to avoid that perilous situation, that we would not be people who hear the word and don't do it.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for the blessing of being Your children, the blessing of being a part of building Your kingdom and Your temple, one another. Help us, Lord. Help us to commit to welcome Your word. Help us to be people who are ready and eager to be broken before Your word because when Your word cuts and it shows us what's wrong, it drives us to Jesus and there we find in Him our righteousness, there we find in Him our strength, there we find in Him our help and our ability now to be different. Lord, help us walk in Your truth for the glory of Your Son. We pray in His name. Amen.