

Extra Innings: When a Preacher Goes Long

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It's the bottom of the ninth with a runner on third. Your team is down by two runs and the pitch count is 3 balls and 2 strikes. As the batter enters the box, you slide forward on your seat, waiting. The pitcher dips his head to the ground once and glances quickly at third. His eyes are stone. He stands up and begins his motion toward the plate; the pitch slides from his fingers effortlessly, and in that moment you think, "I hope this doesn't go to extra innings! I've been watching for over three hours already and it's way past dinner time."



Wrong. You don't think that. You would never think that because you *want* extra innings. Even the casual observer who doesn't have a favorite team in the game *wants* extra innings. It's thrilling, and everyone invested in the game is still interested in watching.

Much like a baseball game, a sermon can go longer than expected—longer than the congregation expects and longer than the preacher himself planned for. There are many legitimate reasons that this might happen in your church, but the reasons are not all that important. What is important is how you respond to the extended time.

Here are five suggestions to help prepare you for the next time a sermon or lesson lasts longer than you want.

Love the Bible

What if God decided to write down everything you could ever need to follow Him? And decided to give you a copy? Would you cherish it? Remind yourself that God did not have to do put you in contact with the Bible or with information about Jesus, but that He did. You don't exist to hear sermons that suit your status quo, but to hear from God so that you might love Him and love others. You cannot do this without the Bible and pastors who preach it are helping you along.

However, if you only like certain preachers or topics, and don't really care for the Bible, you will not be interested in most sermons. Every Christian should love the Bible and therefore be able to listen, with joy, to any man who reads the Bible and explains its meaning faithfully. If your interest is primarily to understand the Bible, a preacher who takes more time explaining it is not annoying.

Listen intently in the beginning so you want to see how it ends

Much like a story, a sermon needs to be experienced as a whole. If you fail to listen initially, you'll probably get lost before the end and give up entirely. Work at participating from the outset, even if only silently in your mind, as questions are asked or ideas are shared.

And teachers: plan to be interesting as you explain the text. Strive to be faithful above all, but don't discount trying to be memorable as well. The Bible is not boring and its truth should not be merely recited.

Realize that there is something happening that is bigger than you

Before the foundation of the world God chose and predestined us for adoption (Eph. 1:4-5). The existence of a church filled with believers who are encouraging one another in love and listening intently to what God is saying though the Scripture follows an ancient plan that began in the mind of God before He said, "Let there be light." See the universe for the immense masterpiece that it is and remember that God has chosen to work in a special way through believers that not all people, and not even angels enjoy.

Consider what God is doing for you through what is preached

Have you examined your own life so thoroughly that you can legitimately say, "I know what's best for me. I know what God should do?" Surely you wouldn't say that, but a complaint about current circumstance (i.e. a preacher going too long) shows that you *really do* think you know what's best. You probably don't. But God does, and He is working in 1,000 ways you would never plan, expect, or even desire—and He does it all so that you would be like Jesus.

Think about the needs of others above your own

As you sit and ponder the pot roast that is going to be a little over-done if this guy keeps droning on, you've already missed it. You have only considered yourself. "But I'm not hurting anybody else!" Are you sure? What if your discontent is distracting to a young believer who was interested and now is getting bored? How are you going to speak about the sermon to a struggling believer afterward? Maybe the last 15 minutes of that sermon were not mainly God's encouragements for you, but for your brother. Love him like you love yourself and keep listening.