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SERMON FEEDBACK

I don't often deal with preaching in these postings, most recently at [Essay 86](#). But going through my files the other day I ran across this Feedback Sheet and think it's worth sharing. Some background:

Thirty years ago John Scherer, a young pastor in a nearby parish, put this under my nose. He always seemed to me to have some new, creative resource up his sleeve, some personal tack or spin to a familiar problem that was, in my view, totally fresh and original. I owe him a lot, not simply in presenting this posting, but in my professional work generally and even in my personal life. So here's to you, John! And thanks for enriching my life with your friendship!

He proposed to me, in one of our conversations, that it would be a good idea for pastors and preachers to check in with their people every now and then in an effort to make certain that they were hearing, Sunday after Sunday, what he thought he was saying. And yes, sure enough, he had a resource – a Sermon Feedback Sheet – that could help.

I don't know where he got the instrument I present here, or if indeed he invented it. (If there are readers out there who recognize the categories or even the broad outlines of the approach, let me know and I'll be happy to give credit.)

In any case this Feedback Sheet seemed like such a useful tool to me that I myself used it on specific Sundays or Seasons in my own parish setting. And I suppose you could keep a supply of them on hand in the narthex every week, for whenever a worshipper wanted to pass you a tip.

It takes a certain amount of courage for a preacher to invite this kind of review. But that can only be salutary. Maybe we need more of this kind of transparency and vulnerability from the pulpit.

This Sermon Feedback Sheet, you'll note, doesn't ask for a theological review of what

you've said – whether or not you're preaching the Gospel, for instance. Its categories are all chiefly relational and affective. Affective, that is, in how the listener is affected by what you say. Perhaps we'd need another Feedback Sheet for a review of theological matters. (Anyone out there willing to give that a try?)

In any case, here it is. I'd duplicate it on an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper, folded in half and printed "landscape" style so as to end up with a little four page pamphlet worshippers could slip into their worship books. Here's the text as I found it in my files:



GETTING THE MOST OUT OF A SERMON:
A SERMON FEEDBACK SHEET

Our preaching at (name your parish here) is intended to reach you at the deepest levels of your life and contribute to your religious and spiritual growth. But frankly, it's a big job, and we don't always score. Furthermore, any kind of real communication is always a two-way street: It's dialogue, not monologue, and we'd like to improve and facilitate the exchange. So, this feedback sheet.

We'd like your help in evaluating the effectiveness of our preaching. Would you be willing to listen to today's sermon with one or more of the following qualities in mind, and rate the sermon according to the scales suggested on this Feedback Sheet? Return this sheet in the offering or at the door. Thanks for helping us become more helpful to you.



1. EMPATHY has to do with how deeply or thoroughly it appeared to you that the preacher knew how you felt or believed, and how much she understood and communicated to you that she accurately read your feelings and thoughts and accepted them. Did the sermon seem "aimed" at you, or did it "miss"?

Higher: What you said and the way you said it indicated to me that you knew and accepted the way I felt, and your understanding led me to deeper or expanded understanding...

Lower: It appeared to me that you either missed what I was feeling or thinking, that you did not accept me where I was, or that I felt blocked in some way from being touched by what you were saying...

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High

2. RESPECT has to do with the extent to which the preacher showed that he believed in your capacity to discover truth. Did the preacher seem to indicate that he had the right answer, and that you needed to agree with him (pushy)? Or was he accepting of your own ability to see and to grow (not so pushy)?

Higher: It appeared to me from what you said and the way you said it that you respected me and what I think and believe...

Lower: It appeared to me that you did not value me or my own thoughts and feelings but rather wanted me to see things your way...

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High

3. GENUINENESS has to do with how real the preacher seemed to you, the extent to which it seemed to you that “someone was at home” during the sermon. Was the preacher in a role, behind a facade, or right there, present with herself and with you? Did the “words and music” go together for you?

Higher: What you said and the way you said it seemed to come from the “you” that I know elsewhere; You seemed to be deeply and completely natural and yourself...

Lower: You seemed to be speaking from a role, or from behind some kind of mask, not very natural or relaxed; more stiff...

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High

4. CONCRETENESS has to do with how hard or easy it was to understand the sermon. How abstract, vague, or theoretical was it? The more concrete – in touch with real life, using real life examples, and words which you understand – the easier to comprehend. How applicable to life was it?

Higher: You spoke in specific, concrete, simple language, using lots of examples from my experience. What you said made sense to me and felt solid...

Lower: You used abstract, vague, hard-to-grasp theoretical language. What you said was hard to understand, and felt “light”, up-in-the-air...

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High

5. IMMEDIACY has to do with the time-frame of the sermon. Did it deal exclusively with the past, or with the future, or did it touch ground in the present time? The important thing is whether or not the sermon got around to speaking to the immediate present.

Higher: The sermon, even though it spoke about the past or the future, made its point about the present time. At the highest level, you even talked about something going right during the sermon, during the time of the sermon...

Lower: We never got out of Palestine. Or we never got back to the present time from our journey into the future...

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High

6. CUTTING EDGE has to do with the extent to which the sermon challenged you in some effective way, by calling into question something you were holding on to. The basic consideration here is not whether or not you were “cut to the quick”, but more like, did the sermon “cut it”? Or was it fairly bland, with no “bite”, no challenging to something new?

Higher: I felt effectively challenged by what you said, not hurt, but led to a new thought. It had bite, but it “hurt good”...

Lower: The sermon had little or no bite for me, it did not challenge me very much. Or it had too much for me; I felt overwhelmed by the newness of it...

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High

7. SELF-DISCLOSURE has to do with whether or not you learned anything about the preacher which helped you in your search for meaning. Did the preacher reveal to you something of what he thought, felt, or believed in such a way that it helped you deepen your own feelings or beliefs?

Higher: You revealed to me some things about yourself which helped me deepen my own beliefs and feelings...

Lower: You did not reveal to me anything about what you felt or believed. Or what you did reveal got in the way for me, turned me off...

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High

8. THE POINT: What do you think was/were the point or points the preacher wanted you to remember? What do you think she was hoping to accomplish with the sermon? Jot down here what you heard her saying:

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