

Top 10 Rudest Things People Do in Church

It doesn't bother me anymore to hear a phone ringing during a church service. It's part of life in the 21st century. But I'll admit I was shocked last month when I heard a ringtone while I was preaching—and a woman seated in the third row pulled her phone out of her purse and began a lengthy conversation as if she were in the waiting room of a beauty parlor.

That incident prompted me to post a question on Facebook the next day. I asked my friends to share their own stories of rudeness in church. That triggered an avalanche of pent-up frustration about crinkly peppermint wrappers, loud music, smelly feet (yes, someone took off their shoes during the service), unruly children, coffee-sipping saints and parishioners who try to finish their pastors' sentences during sermons.

When I tallied the responses, I came up with this list of the rudest things people do in church:

- 1. Talking during a service.**
- 2. Texting or surfing the web during a service.** (One person mentioned seeing people playing video games on their phones.)
- 3. Sleeping—or snoring!—during a sermon.**
- 4. Clipping fingernails during church.** (I was amazed at how many people listed this offense. One person said his church's sound technician clipped his nails routinely during the sermon, and it was amplified over the loud speaker.)
- 5. Answering a ringing phone in church.**
- 6. Constantly getting up and leaving the auditorium,**

presumably to use the restroom.

7. Walking out of a service early, especially during a prayer.

8. Letting babies cry incessantly in the service.

9. Chewing or smacking gum. (One friend from Puerto Rico said he is particularly annoyed when people “chew gum like a goat.”)

10. Public display of affection. (One person complained about a man and wife who enjoy giving each other back rubs during worship.)

Those were the most common replies. Other infractions mentioned in my unscientific poll included (1) “Pushing people to the floor while praying for them”; (2) “Saying ‘Amen’ 100 times during the sermon”; (3) “Taking change from the offering plate”; (4) “Swearing in church” (I didn’t ask for the details on that!); and (5) “Drinking beverages during the entire service.”

But as I mused over these replies, I couldn’t help but wonder: What does God consider rude?

I don’t think He’s too annoyed by crying babies or rambunctious children. Nor do I think God is offended if a husband and wife get slightly cozy in church. And surely God has compassion for a person whose tiny bladder forces them to go to the restroom more often than everyone else. Some of us just need to lighten up and extend grace to latecomers, fidgety kids, teeth-grinders, young mothers with infants and people who have to report to work promptly at 1 p.m.

But when I look at the Bible, it’s obvious God doesn’t like it when people refuse to focus their attention when He’s talking. He has called us to *listen*. Moses told the Hebrews they would be blessed if they *listened* to God’s commandments (Deut. 11:27, NASB). Solomon said that when we come to God’s house we

should “draw near to *listen* rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools” (Eccl. 5:1, emphasis added).

Isaiah said that God awakened him “to *listen* as a disciple” (Isa. 50:4, emphasis added), while Jeremiah rebuked Israel because they “did not *listen* or incline their ears” (Jer. 17:23, emphasis added). And when Jesus was glorified in His transfiguration, the Father declared, “*Listen* to Him!” (Luke 9:35, emphasis added). There is no possible way we can please God or be His faithful followers if we don’t learn to listen.

Yet today we live in a distracted culture. We are sleep-deprived multitaskers. We surf the web while we watch TV; we text while we drive; we tweet while we work; we take calls when we are meeting friends for conversation. Some people even crash into each other while walking on sidewalks because they are too busy Googling to see another distracted Googler headed straight toward them.

We are so focused on everything that we can’t focus on anything. I sometimes wonder if the proliferation of fast food, sugary drinks, movies on demand, “smart” phones and 24-hour news isn’t rewiring our brains so we can’t focus on what’s really important. We’re turning into media zombies.

I’m not bashing technology. But we could lose the art of discipleship if we don’t reclaim the habit of careful listening. That means when we come to church, especially, we should not just turn off our phones but also tune out all other distractions so we can focus on what God is saying to us—through the preacher, the worship songs, the prayers and the Holy Spirit’s still, small voice.

Please don’t be rude to God. Don’t just go to church. Go and hear the word of the Lord. Don’t talk, text, sleep or take calls when He is speaking. Listen as if your life depended on it.

J. Lee Grady is the former editor of Charisma and the director of the Mordecai Project (). You can follow him on Twitter at @leegrady. He is ministering in Eastern Europe this week.

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