

"Read my lips: No more sermons"

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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Mary Brown took to *HuffPost Religion* recently to [highlight](#) a Lilly-funded study that asked laypeople what they want out of sermons. In short, it appears we want the following:

- Spiritual leadership
- Inspiration for spiritual growth
- "Serious spiritual content about the Bible"
- An impact on our lives

Oh, so that's all! Leaving aside the question of what we want vs. what we might *need*--and assuming an expansive definition of "spiritual"--this seems a pretty reasonable list of criteria for a good sermon. The difficulty, of course, is in *how* to preach in a way that effectively accomplishes all this--and, as Brown notes, how to find the preparation time.

What's more helpful than this summary of the study's findings is Brown's own point on the subject of lay opinions about preaching:

The best preaching conversations I have observed are between a pastor and his/her own people. For a sermon to be a public discourse, it takes a pastor and a congregation. The shape and form of these conversations cannot be prescribed. In a community of faith where there is trust and openness, they will develop organically between the pastor and the people.

Those of you who are pastors and/or preachers: what kinds of helpful conversations have you had with parishioners on the subject of preaching?

Also: how might you respond if [this comment](#) left on Brown's post came from someone at your church?

I've got an idea: read my lips--NO MORE SERMONS! just stop preaching. We laypeople are now literate. We can read books on our own or take classes. We

don't need clergy teaching or preaching at us. The very idea of a sermon is offensive: a lecture where we can't argue back or even ask questions. And so is the very idea of clergy as authorities or intellectual leaders--when in many congregations most laypeople are as educated or better educated.

So shut up already. NO MORE SERMONS. Give us liturgy, sacraments and mystery, and stop the talk. You have nothing to say us.

There's obviously much to argue with here. Is *all* public speaking offensive? Is preaching just about authority? Is authority based in education? Where are these churches where most people are at least as educated as the pastor, so that I can avoid ever, ever participating in their committee meetings?

I'm curious, however, about potential *pastoral* responses--because I suspect that *HuffPost* commenter hebaber, however vitriolic his/her tone, is not the only churchgoer who feels this way.