



## WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

# You Don't Have to Sing to 'Preach to the Choir'

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And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

On this program we explore words and expressions in the English language.

Today, we talk about a type of shared belief. Often in our lives, we come together with others because of a shared belief or purpose. That group can sometimes be called a choir.

A choir can describe a group of instruments of the same type, for example a brass choir.

A choir can be used to describe an organized group of persons or things. For example, many rich, famous people travel with a choir of assistants.

A choir is also a group of organized singers in a church. This is the most common definition. For today's expression, we will focus on the church choir. The expression is "preaching to the choir."

Church leaders preach. That's why they're called preachers. But the word "preach" is not only used in a church.

You can preach about something you believe to be good or necessary. However, people who preach to others, speak to them in an **annoying** way about the right way to behave. They may sound as if they *think* they know better. And books that try to teach a **moral** lesson could be criticized for being too preachy.

But now, let's get back to our expression "preaching to the choir."

One online dictionary gives this definition: If I am preaching to the choir, I am presenting an argument or opinion to people who already agree with it. So, I am not looking to **convince** them. Perhaps, I am just looking to feel good about my idea.

When you preach to the choir, you are sharing your opinion with people who already agree with you. They are already on your side. You don't need to convince them. So, sometimes it means you are wasting your breath, like in this example.

*You know, we need a park in our neighborhood.*

*I couldn't agree more.*

*The empty property at the end of the street would be perfect. And it's near the woods. So, it'll be very quiet.*

*You don't have to sell me on your idea. I brought up that same idea years ago.*

*It would be great not just for the kids, but for everyone! It could be a gathering place and a place for community activities.*

*I already know all this! Now, you're just preaching to the choir. What you need to do is to talk to all the other neighbors on this street and get them **on board**. A few were against the idea years ago.*

Here is another example. If I said to you that learning another language can be good for you in so many ways, and you should try it – you could say, “Anna, you are preaching to the choir! We're already doing that.”

And that's all the time we have for this *Words and Their Stories*.

Until next time ... I'm Anna Matteo.

*Anna Matteo wrote this story for VOA Learning English. Susan Shand was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**annoying** – *adj.* causing slight anger

**moral** – *adj.* of or relating to principles of right and wrong in behavior

**convince** – *v.* to cause (someone) to agree to do something

**on board** – *verbal phrase* to agree with something or someone : to be part of a team or organization

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