

LESSON 3

FACTORS AFFECTING THE LISTENERS

Introduction

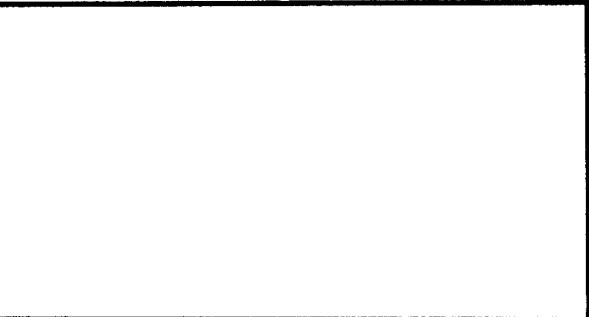
A preaching situation involves the messenger, the message, the hearers, and God. Previous lessons have focused on the messenger and the message. Since preaching is not successful until the audience has heard and understood the message, attention needs to be given to factors which affect the listeners. These factors include the interest of the message and its relevancy to the audience, the mood and attitude of the listeners, and the ability of the audience to listen.

A congregation can be divided into four groups: (1) non-listeners, (2) spasmodic listeners, (3) passive listeners, and (4) active listeners. Obviously, the first three classes profit little from the sermon. Spasmodic listeners may get occasional statements, but they fail to see the idea as a whole. Passive listeners will fail to integrate the new information into their own experiences and will soon forget what has been said. Active listeners consist of both positive and negative hearers. The positive hearers analyse what has been said and assimilate into their own experiences that which appears to be profitable. Negative listeners reject what is being said but profit from the experience because they are agitated to consider and defend their own positions. The role of the speaker is to enable all of the audience to be active, positive listeners. To accomplish this goal, he must consider the factors which affect listening.

The Interest of the Listeners

The subject must be relevant to the listeners

Since preaching is the interpretation, communication, and application of biblical truths to meet human needs, hearers should be kept in mind while the message is being prepared. The sermon should not be prepared just to fill an hour of time, but it should contain instruction and guidance which are useful and relevant to those who are present. To be sure that the sermon is relevant, the preacher must anticipate those who will be present and must prepare his message with the audience in mind. There are various factors concerning his audience which he should know and remember when he prepares his message. Spiritual needs are included, but these will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent lessons.



Four kinds of listeners are: n \_\_\_\_\_  
s \_\_\_\_\_ listeners; p \_\_\_\_\_  
listeners; and a \_\_\_\_\_ listeners.

Match the following:

- 1. Positive listeners      a. reject what is said but profit by having to defend their own position.
- 2. Negative listeners      b. analyse what has been said and assimilate that which appears to be profitable.

(non-listeners, spasmodic, passive, active, b-1, a-2)

To help the preacher make his sermon relevant, he should anticipate \_\_\_\_\_ will be \_\_\_\_\_.

(who, present)

Although it is impossible for the preacher to know who will be present, he should anticipate the probable constituency of his listeners. A miserable person who labours under the load of a guilty conscience or some stranger who has never heard the way of salvation may choose to enter the service. Members of the regular congregation may face unexpected tragedy before having opportunity to attend another service. Since the majority of listeners will be those who are regular in attendance, most of the messages should be prepared with them in mind.

It would be helpful for the minister to write out a description of some members of his church. In his brief analysis, he should evaluate their present progress in Christian growth and note the areas in which they need special attention. Sermons will not be successful unless they begin where the people are and attempt to guide them to the goal of Christian maturity.

It is impossible to adapt a message for each individual in the audience. Certain factors, however, influence the attendance of all those who assemble for the occasion. Attention should be focused upon reasons the people come together for worship and what effect the message should have on their knowledge, beliefs, and future actions. The preacher should attempt to determine the primary interests or needs of the members. The spiritual needs of a church are numerous; therefore, the pastor who knows his members will be able to vary his sermon subjects from week to week to meet the diverse needs of the congregation.

In analysing the people and their interests, the following factors should be considered: (1) age range, (2) educational background and training, and (3) social background and culture. Older people are normally more conservative than young people. Young people are usually more open to new ideas because they have not harmonized their views with their patterns of life. Older people have had more experience and usually require more evidence and logical proof before accepting ideas. Educated people usually can comprehend more technical material and illustrations than uneducated. Those with little education usually accept suggestions with less proof than those with advanced training. The presentation of the material must be more lively and forceful for the less educated. Those who grew up in cities may not be acquainted with illustrations drawn from country life. Those whose travel experience has been limited need fuller explanations of illustrations based on life in other cultures.

The subject should be appropriate to the occasion

On occasions, the pastor will be called upon to address special groups. He may be asked to speak at banquets, community meetings, or special services of the church. He should be sure that his message is appropriate to the occasion. However, he should never

*Is this statement true or false?*

*Evaluating progress in Christian growth of some members will help the preacher in sermon preparation. \_\_\_\_\_*

*(Compare your answer with the text.)*

*The preacher should concern himself with the effect he wants the message to have on his listeners' \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and future \_\_\_\_\_.*

*(knowledge, beliefs, actions)*

*Factors to be kept in mind in analysing people and their interests are:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_ range;
2. \_\_\_\_\_ background and training;
3. \_\_\_\_\_ background and culture.

*(age, educational, social)*

feel that he is obligated to prepare an address which he does not relate to a spiritual subject. Whenever a preacher is invited to address a public gathering, those responsible for the invitation are aware that his emphasis will be religious. On the other hand, a Sunday morning sermon prepared for his church will vary greatly from an address for some civic organization, school function, or other community event. The audience and the occasion must be in the mind of the preacher as he prepares his message.

To prevent embarrassment and unpreparedness, the speaker should secure sufficient information about the group to whom he is to speak to adequately understand the nature and purpose of the meeting. Glenn R. Capp cites an occasion when a business executive was invited to participate in a panel discussion at a conference on leadership. He readily accepted, but upon arriving at the meeting he discovered that the programme chairman meant that each panel member was to give a fifteen-minute speech. Panel discussion to the chairman did not mean informal discussion.<sup>1</sup> Speakers also should understand the purpose of the meeting. A civic club meeting has a different purpose than a school commencement or closing exercise.

Although most of the minister's speaking will be to church groups whose purposes for meeting are oriented towards religion, various groups within a church have varying purposes for meeting. The pastor may be invited to speak at ordination services, women's or men's meetings, youth rallies, and association or convention meetings. His subject should be chosen to conform with the purpose and occasion of the gathering.

### The Mood of the Listeners

Mood refers to a frame of mind or state of feeling. It affects the hearers' receptivity of the message. Current events and physical feelings determine the mood in which the audience enters the service. The spiritual atmosphere, physical surroundings, and comfort of the listeners affect their mood during the service. The goal of the preacher is to lead the people from the prevailing frame of mind when they enter the service to a mood of faith and confidence in God.

### Recognizing the effects of current events

A tragedy or uncertainty in the life of a nation will affect the mood of the people. Isaiah appears to

<sup>1</sup>Basic Oral Communication (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 76.

*In order to make his message appropriate to the occasion, the speaker should understand the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the meeting.*

*(nature, purpose)*

*Various factors which affect the mood of a congregation are:*

1. *current \_\_\_\_\_*
2. *\_\_\_\_\_ feelings*
3. *\_\_\_\_\_ atmosphere*
4. *physical \_\_\_\_\_*
5. *\_\_\_\_\_ of the listeners*

*(Compare your answers with the text.)*

have been depressed by the death of his king (Isa. 6). The army of a foreign power was threatening his nation at that time. The depressed young man turned his thoughts to his God who was housed in the Temple. In an experience of worship, he became aware of the greatness and eternity of God in contrast to the mortality and weakness of the king. His mood of depression changed to courage and optimism. He discovered a new purpose for his life in relation to serving his holy and great God.

The death of a national or community leader, a tragedy within the community or a family, a national election, or a celebration of a historical event will influence the mood of the people. In addition, the physical state of the hearers affects their moods. Those whose bodies and minds are not rested when they arrive at the worship service will tend to be dull in hearing and negative in attitude. The time of the day the service is conducted has some bearing also.

The preacher needs to be sensitive to the changing moods of the worshippers. Depression, defeat, sorrow, sadness, joy, gladness, and victory are some of the moods which are controlled by current events. If he does not lead the people from the prevailing mood at the beginning of the service to spiritual preparation for the Word of God, he will fail to attract their attention to his message.

Creating a spiritual atmosphere

Hymns, prayers, words, Scriptures, and attitudes reflected by the leader can help to carry the hearers from a negative mood of depression to a positive mood of faith. The purpose of the first part of a worship service is to create an atmosphere for worship. Lessons in other study guides are devoted to the planning and conducting of worship services; therefore, no attempt will be made at this point to give detailed attention to these matters. If the sermon is to be effective, it must harmonize with the mood of the worship service and relate to the total service.

The entire service needs to be carefully planned with the sermon fitting into the over-all plan. Those who attend the service have been in the world all week and are not as conscious of God's presence and goodness as they need to be. A planned service can lead them to an awareness of God's presence and a knowledge of His will.

Two facts which affect man's basic attitude towards God and need attention in the worship service are:

List some factors which influence the mood of the congregation.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The preacher must lead the worshippers from their prevailing \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ preparation for the Word of God.

(mood, spiritual)

Use the following words in the statement below.

positive, depression, faith, negative

A \_\_\_\_\_ mood of \_\_\_\_\_ should be changed to a \_\_\_\_\_ mood of \_\_\_\_\_ in a worship service.

(negative, depression, positive, faith)

Is this statement true or false?

A worship service does not need to be planned because the Holy Spirit will direct it. \_\_\_\_\_

(Compare your answer with the text.)

1. The majesty and holiness of God remove Him far beyond man (God's transcendence) and leave sinful man feeling unworthy and condemned.
2. Lonely and sinful man needs a God who is not far removed but who is present (God's immanence) in mercy and forgiveness.

The hymns, prayers, and Scriptures selected for the worship service should give the participating congregation opportunities to express these feelings. The majesty and transcendence of the holy God are recognized in the singing of majestic hymns. A Scripture used as a call to worship may emphasize the greatness of God. As the service progresses, attention should be redirected from the transcendence of God to His presence in love and forgiveness.

Man needs to recognize and confess his sins. Also, he needs to accept his role as the consecrated servant. Although man is a responsible servant of God, his service is not to be in his own strength but in the power of his Lord who has promised to be with him to the ends of the earth. God's presence and power are expressed in hymns about Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The careful planning of the total worship service enables the pastor to lead the people from the spiritual level at which they entered the service to the level of adoring their majestic heavenly Father and rejoicing in His presence with them in Christ. The emphasis of worship which precedes the sermon should correspond to that of the message. Understanding the moods and needs of the people and planning the total service to meet those needs will result in the sermon's being much more effective.

Worship should not be thought of as only solemn and serious, for it includes the joy of the Christian's experience and hope in Christ. Irrelevant jokes, which are told to create a boisterous atmosphere, are out of place, but expressions which focus attention on the joys of the Christian life are indispensable.

Arranging comfortable physical conditions

In the construction of most church buildings, an attempt is made to influence the mood of the people by making the surroundings more conducive to worship. People can worship under a tree, but it is more difficult to keep their attention focused on God. Worship has an aesthetic quality as well as an intellectual. The stained glass windows and the beautiful furniture help to create an atmosphere that is favourable to worship.

Two facts which affect man's attitude and cause him to desire to worship are:

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ of God leaves man feeling unworthy and condemned.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ of God means that He is present with man in mercy and forgiveness.

(transcendence, immanence)

Unscramble the letters and fill in the blanks.

The \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ should be to lead the people--

(loag) (rishwpo)

FROM the spiritual level at which they entered the service

TO the level of adoring their majestic heavenly Father and rejoicing in His presence in Christ.

(goal, worship)

The place of worship should create an \_\_\_\_\_ atmosphere.

(aesthetic)

The speaker should be located where he can be seen by the audience. In large auditoriums, a rostrum enables those near the back to see the speaker. Good acoustics make it possible for his words to be understood easily. The building should be well lighted and ventilated. People have difficulty staying awake in a stuffy room where the air has become stale. A light behind the speaker blinds the audience and has a hypnotic effect which distracts their concentration and makes them drowsy.

#### Avoiding distracting incidents

The majority of those who attend preaching services are not accustomed to concentrating on a subject for an extended period of time. Any incident will distract their attention. "A sparrow fluttering about the church is an antagonist which the most profound theologian in Europe is wholly unable to overcome."<sup>2</sup> Even the movement of the custodian to adjust a window, the crying of a baby, or the whispering of adults can divert the thoughts of the hearers. Almost any abnormal incident in a worship service creates laughter. The mood of the audience is changed from a serious focusing upon the Word of God to the lighter, insignificant incident. If such a distraction occurs, the speaker must attempt to recapture the mood and attention of the people. Although distractions need to be prevented if at all possible, potential disturbances should challenge the preacher to develop sermons of such great interest that the attention of the audience is captured.

Disturbances are not as disruptive if the speaker is near the audience and has established a oneness with them. He should not be removed from his audience any farther than is necessary for him to be seen by all. The farther the rostrum is from the pews, the less personally and directly related are the speaker and the people. A pulpit or rostrum frequently has the effect of creating a communication barrier between the speaker and the people and of causing the address to seem impersonal.

#### The Attitude of the Listeners Towards the Speaker

An attitude is a mental position with regard to a fact or state. The audience will either approve and accept or disapprove and reject a speaker. If he is not accepted, his message will be rejected regardless

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by T. Harwood Pattison, The Making of the Sermon (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1941), p. 358.

Besides an aesthetic atmosphere, other characteristics of adequate worship facilities include:

1. Good location for the s \_\_\_\_\_
2. Good a \_\_\_\_\_
3. Good l \_\_\_\_\_ and v \_\_\_\_\_.

(speaker, acoustics, lighting, ventilation)

The \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ sometimes seems to create communication barriers between the speaker and the people.

(pulpit, rostrum)



how good it is. Unfortunately, people form opinions about others on the basis of first impressions. Sometimes those opinions change when they become better acquainted with the person.

First impressions are based upon the person's physical movements, facial expressions, and attitudes expressed in his words. Unusual mannerisms are noted immediately and should be avoided by the speaker. His physical movements and facial expressions are observed from the moment he enters the auditorium until the service is dismissed. Although the speaker may have a relevant message and use appropriate techniques for delivery, an unusual mannerism can affect the attitude of the audience to the extent that his message is not received. Certain mannerisms irritate the audience to the extent that they turn a deaf ear to the speaker.

### Impressions before speaking

Appearance depends primarily on how one dresses and acts. The speaker's clothing should be moderate and neat. In the past, dark colours have been recommended; however, this rule does not apply necessarily in this day of changing styles. To avoid calling attention to himself, it is better for the minister not to introduce the latest fashions. His clothing should fit the trend of the community. Good taste contributes much to the appearance of the speaker.

Upon arrival, the speaker should be friendly and open in meeting strangers. He should show interest in people and should remember their names when he is introduced. The shaking of hands by men is widely practised as a mode of greeting and friendliness. Customs vary in different areas with regard to shaking hands with women. When talking to a person, eye contact is very important. Shifty and darting eyes give the impression of deceitfulness or insecurity.

The manner in which the minister approaches the platform and pulpit is observed by the people. He should avoid the extremes of strutting or slouching as he walks. Strutting conveys the impression of haughtiness and pride. Slouching expresses carelessness and unconcern. The speaker should neither tip-toe to the speaker's stand nor make a mad dash for it. Both attract attention to the peculiarities of the speaker. He should use a normal stride in walking firmly to the pulpit, while holding his head and shoulders erect. Dignity without haughtiness, briskness without bustle, and erectness without stiffness should characterize his movements.

When sitting on the platform, the speaker should be erect with both feet on the floor, and his hands in his lap or on the arms of the chair. It is

*First impressions about a speaker are based on:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_ movements
2. \_\_\_\_\_ expressions
3. \_\_\_\_\_ expressed in his words

*(physical, facial, attitudes)*

*Unscramble these letters to make words for the blanks in the statement below:*

dentr                  aten                  eredomat

*A minister's clothing should be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and fit the \_\_\_\_\_ of the community.*

*(neat, moderate, trend)*

*A minister should walk to the pulpit with a \_\_\_\_\_ stride, with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ erect.*

*(normal, head, shoulders)*



possible to be both erect and relaxed. Sitting positions which attract undesired attention include:

Leaning forward with elbows propped on legs and eyes fixed on the floor,

Slumping in the chair, wrapping the feet and legs around the legs of the chair, and

Crossing the legs.

If the person is sitting erectly, it is a simple matter for him to arise, without having to pull himself up, and to walk naturally to the pulpit.

### Impressions while speaking

While speaking, the minister should follow the previously discussed principles of good posture. The body should be erect and dignified without giving the appearance of stiffness and haughtiness. The speaker should avoid leaning heavily on the pulpit. He may place his hands on it, but the speaker's stand should not support the weight of his body. Placing his hands in his pockets, rattling coins and keys, or doing anything with his hands that attracts attention should be avoided.

Some speakers develop the distracting mannerism of rocking back and forth on their heels and toes as they preach. Others sway from side to side. These movements are distracting and serve no effective purpose in the communication of the message.

The speaker should avoid distracting elements in gestures and voice. A four-year-old boy who was sitting by his grandmother in a worship service tugged at her coat sleeve to gain her attention. He asked, "Why does the preacher scream and shake his finger at us?" He is not the only one who asks that question. The voice and gestures add force to delivery, but they distract when they are over-used or misused. The clicking of teeth and the twitching of some part of the face draw attention away from the message.

### Impressions after speaking

The preacher may extend the invitation from behind the pulpit, from one side of it, or from the main floor level of the audience. After the benediction, he may choose to go to the main entrance to greet the people or to remain at the front. If he is a visiting speaker, he should make himself available for those who are interested to come by and greet him. Compliments offered concerning his message should receive the response of a simple "thank you."

*The correct sitting posture for a speaker includes:*

1. both \_\_\_\_\_ on the floor
2. \_\_\_\_\_ in his lap or on the arms of the chair
3. \_\_\_\_\_ erect, but relaxed

*(Compare your answers with the text.)*



*Some distracting mannerisms of a preacher while speaking are:*

- placing his hands in his \_\_\_\_\_ and rattling \_\_\_\_\_ and keys, rocking back and forth on his \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, clicking his \_\_\_\_\_, and twitching some part of his \_\_\_\_\_.*

*(Compare your answer with the text.)*



The effect of the speaker's attitude

Facial expressions as well as words convey attitudes and concepts. A speaker who displays a condescending attitude cannot expect his message to be accepted by the audience. One of the most prevalent causes for disrupted relationships in society is the feeling of superiority. Superior attitudes are detected by observing facial expressions and by interpreting the apparent reason certain statements are made. The preacher is a sinner saved by grace and is constrained by his Lord to share that experience with other sinners. He is not an important official who has been chosen, because of his merits and superiority, to be an executive and authority. His pride is a constant source of temptation to make his importance known to others. When he yields to the temptation, his work of communicating God's Word is defeated.

It is unnecessary and unbecoming for the speaker to be overly apologetic. If he has made insufficient preparation, the audience will know it as soon as he begins to speak. If he is not feeling well, that condition will also become apparent. He should be sure that he is well prepared in order to avoid the feeling of needing to apologize.

The best way for a speaker to establish rapport is to show respect for and reveal interest in the people to whom he speaks. Those who have assembled are not his adversaries nor his inferior subjects. They are members of the body of Christ who have been given gifts for other ministries which build up the body of Christ. The preacher's responsibility is to proclaim the Word for which he has been equipped by gifts of the Spirit. Since he cannot claim credit for the spiritual gifts he possesses, he cannot boast of the results of his pulpit ministry. The fact that he has been assigned the responsibility of preaching, while others are assigned other ministries, does not mean that he is superior. God gives to every man as He wills and not on the basis of who deserves divine blessings.

The people who choose to attend worship services have come because they believe God has given the speaker special gifts to enable him to help them grow in grace. He should accept them as friends who are in need of help. The help which he has to offer comes from God. They are not against the cause of Christ and, therefore, do not need rebuking. They do need inspiration and challenge to do the will of God, and training and understanding for the work of the ministry.

Preachers who take the attitude that they are right and their listeners are wrong create barriers which prevent the gospel from being communicated effectively. One of the weaknesses of preaching is

*Read all of the text on this page before doing the following exercise.*

*List four attitudes which a speaker should avoid.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

*(condescending, superiority, overly apologetic, feeling that the people are opposed to him and his message)*

*People who come to a worship service need to be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ rather than to be \_\_\_\_\_.*

*(inspired, challenged, rebuked)*

that the sermon is a type of monologue which implies an authoritarian voice speaking to inferior listeners. In Corinth, the speaker or prophet was one among equals, for there were several who prophesied. If the preacher takes the attitude that the people are opposed to him and his message, they may come to the point of resisting his preaching. People will accept correction from a kind and loving leader but not from a self-righteous and overbearing person. They expect the preacher to point out their wrongs, but they will not accept him as a god who passes judgement on them. Repeated criticisms, pressures, and rebukes will hinder the relationship of the speaker and people and will result in their rejecting his message.

The establishment of rapport with the people does not mean that the preacher must approve of their attitudes and actions. It does mean that he must recognize his own shortcomings and be understanding of the plights of others. Since morality and religion are inseparable, the people expect him to condemn immorality and approve the moral.

Jesus could not establish a close relationship to the self-righteous Pharisees who felt threatened by His honesty, sincerity, and simplicity. They were concerned to have the praise of men; therefore, they did those things which would impress others and bring self-glory. When Jesus threatened to expose their hypocrisy, they reacted violently and contrived His death on the cross. On the other hand, there were guilty sinners whom Jesus accepted and forgave. In fact, He recognized that all men were guilty of sin and in need of salvation. Those honest enough to recognize and to confess their sins experienced mercy, forgiveness, and acceptance by the Lord. Those who denied their sins and proclaimed self-righteousness received His severest denunciation. The preacher should follow the example of Jesus who did not attempt to be accepted and approved by all. To do so means to compromise personal convictions and to neutralize the effectiveness of one's ministry.

People need to know that they are respected and accepted by others. Every person is social in nature; that is, he must relate to others. If he feels that others have rejected him, he becomes emotionally disturbed. Acceptance is shown by interest and concern for his welfare. The preacher who is concerned about the lives of his hearers and is sensitive to their needs will find it possible to establish a fruitful and abiding relationship with them.

*Is this statement true or false?*

*In order to have a close relationship with the people, the preacher must approve of their attitudes and actions. \_\_\_\_\_*

*(Compare your answer with the text.)*

*A fruitful relationship with people will result when the preacher--*

- 1. r \_\_\_\_\_ them*
- 2. is c \_\_\_\_\_ for them*
- 3. a \_\_\_\_\_ them*

*(respects, concerned, accepts)*

## The Listening Ability of the Audience

Ability refers to the mental or physical capacity of an agent. Successful pulpit communication depends to a large extent on the listening capacity of the audience. Listening is more than hearing sounds. It has reference to the audience's hearing the speaker with attention and understanding. Certainly, understanding the message is impossible without giving attention, but there may be attention without understanding. There are several factors which hinder the audience's ability to listen to a speaker.

### Hindrances to listening

The formality of a preaching situation is not conducive to good listening. In order to maintain attention, the hearers need to be actively responding to what is being said. Unfortunately, preaching does not allow opportunity for the listeners to challenge the speaker's statements or to ask questions about the meaning of vague points. Unless the speaker is very alert, he can deliver an entire message without realizing that the listeners are not following him.

People are attentive to that which affects them personally. A previous section of this lesson has emphasized the importance of selecting subjects that are interesting and relevant to the listeners. The variety of people in a congregation makes it impossible for a sermon to be relevant at all points to everyone. This condition results in a hindrance to listening. As a result, the sermon is a poor teaching instrument even though it contains didactic elements. Even the best listeners in a congregation will not receive enough information through the sermons to make them Bible scholars. The sermon does occupy a worthy place in the life of a church since it gives inspiration and some instruction to the people, but more should not be expected of it than circumstances permit it to produce.

The larger the audience and the more formal the service the less personal the message is to each listener. The people sitting at the back of a large auditorium are distracted easily because many things occur between them and the speaker. A speaker is able to communicate more effectively with small groups; he can direct the message towards more specific personal needs and give the listeners opportunities to respond and react to what he says.

Some people in occupations related to education are disciplined to listen even though the address lacks clarity. However, people engaged in manual vocations usually do not have the discipline of study and of intense concentration on a subject. Manual labour tires their bodies and dulls their listening ability.

Effective listening is hearing the speaker with a \_\_\_\_\_ and u \_\_\_\_\_.

(attention, understanding)

Read the rest of the text on this page before doing the following exercise.

Use the following words to fill in the blanks in the statement below:

distractions  
relevant  
formality  
discipline  
interesting

Hindrances to effective listening are--

1. the \_\_\_\_\_ of a preaching situation,
2. the lack of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ subjects,
3. \_\_\_\_\_ in a service, and
4. lack of \_\_\_\_\_.

(formality, interesting, relevant, distractions, discipline)

Their attention span is usually short, and their minds remain on the message only for a brief period of time.

Limited education often contributes to inattentiveness. Listening to someone speak in an unfamiliar foreign language may be fascinating at first, but few people keep their minds focused very long on the foreign sounds. Psychologically, a speaker feels that he must reveal his knowledge of the subject in order to speak authoritatively about it. Often, his erudition goes beyond the ken of the audience and leaves their minds wandering to some other subject. Of course, the speaker can partially solve this problem by keeping his thoughts simple and clear and by using words which are understandable to all the listeners.

Learning by listening is more difficult than learning by reading. The reader can stop and ponder what he has read or reread it. The listener must keep up with the speaker and assimilate what is said at the moment it is uttered. If his mind wanders, he cannot come back to the thought and begin with it again. He must concentrate at all times on what is being said. Concentration is hard work and requires effort. It is easy to turn to day-dreaming or solving of personal problems. Sometimes the mind outruns the speaker and tends to find paths which the speaker will not travel.

#### The importance of listening

Most of a person's education comes through listening. The pupil's primary years in school give attention to his learning to read, but he still learns much from the instruction of his teacher. Higher education is based on lectures in which students learn by listening. Those who fail to develop good listening habits will limit greatly their education and knowledge. Listening and reading are the principal methods for acquiring knowledge. The average citizen who has completed his education spends little time in research. Most of his knowledge comes through listening to those who have accumulated information through study.

#### Listening efficiency of the normal person

Recent studies reveal that the average audience operates at a 25 percent level of efficiency when listening to a ten-minute talk.<sup>3</sup> The more formal the situation and the larger the audience, the less efficient is the level of listening. Even in informal and more personal speaking situations, the average listeners retain less than 65 percent of what the speaker says.

<sup>3</sup> Capp, Basic Oral Communication, pp. 46f.

*Underline which is more difficult:*

*learning by reading*

*learning by listening*

*(learning by listening)*

*Does more of a person's education come through listening or reading? \_\_\_\_\_*

*(listening)*

Probably both the speaker and the listeners share the blame for poor listening efficiency. The speaker is at fault when his message lacks interest and clarity. The listeners are at fault when they fail to put forth any disciplined effort to follow the speaker.

### Improving the ability to listen

If the pastor is to fulfil his role in training the saints for the work of the ministry, he must first help them to increase their capacity for listening; otherwise his teaching and preaching will be ineffective. The ability to listen is improved by increasing the attention and understanding of the hearers.

Improving attention.—An audience gives attention to subjects in which they are interested. This fact has already been discussed and will be given further attention in a subsequent lesson on human needs. Its recurrence emphasizes the importance of speaking to the needs of contemporary man.

Since interest depends on the speaker's ability to select relevant subjects, he might begin his preparation of each sermon with the question: "Why should the hearer listen to this subject?" He should develop the message on the basis of giving his hearers something worthwhile. Another way of discovering their interest is by analysing his own interests. Since he is human, the speaker's problems are likely to be representative of the problems of others. Guidance will come in answer to the questions:

What are the problems I face and what are their solutions?

Why is the subject of this sermon of interest to me?

People are motivated to listen attentively to subjects in which they are emotionally involved. Motive implies an emotion or desire operating on the will and causing it to act. There are certain driving powers in the personality of everyone. If these powers are related to normal actions, they are called instincts. Instincts are emotional or motivational forces which cause seemingly rational acts to be performed without conscious design. If the emotions or desires produce sudden irrational or unnatural actions, they are called impulses. Behind each instinct or impulse is a feeling or emotion which propels (motivates) each action. Subjects relating to self-interest elicit emotional responses and motivate people to listen.

Improving understanding.—Listening is defined as giving thoughtful attention to what one hears. Thoughtful attention is normal in a dialogue in which a person responds verbally to what has been said to him, but attention does not automatically occur in a

*The speaker must choose subjects in which the people are interested if he wants to improve their \_\_\_\_\_.*

*(Compare your answer with the text.)*

*Listening is defined as \_\_\_\_\_ to what one hears.*

*(Compare your answer with the text.)*

preaching situation which is a monologue. Formal speeches require skill in listening if the hearer is to understand and learn from the speaker. Many people have never learned to listen. They are poor students because they have not acquired the skill of listening. If the preacher expects the understanding of the hearers to improve, he must instruct them in how to listen.

### Requirements for good listening

A positive attitude.—One's attitude influences his ability to listen and learn. If he concludes that he knows more than the speaker or already knows the answers, his mind will be closed to any new information. He likely will resist that which does not coincide with what he already believes. He hears only what he desires to hear and may not hear that correctly.

Man's emotional nature tends to determine what he is willing to hear. He accepts that which pleases him but rejects that which is against his actions, whether the contradictory material contains truth or not. Man is irrational because his thought patterns are controlled by his feelings rather than by his knowledge of truth. Disagreements arise because the desires of the parties involved make them unwilling to consider the other person's point of view. Selfish desires give root to prejudice, and they, instead of reason and truth, may be the basis of convictions.

A person should be positive enough in attitude to listen to those who disagree with his position, if for no other reason than to learn what the other person believes. A person whose mind is closed to an exposure to conflicting positions will go through life with a one-sided and unbalanced perspective of controversial issues. Maintaining such a position creates barriers to the solving of problems of conflict and drives him further into a corner of pre-conceived notions.

A person who adopts a positive attitude towards listening determines to hear and learn as much as possible even from those with whom he disagrees. A positive attitude to listening does not mean that the hearer must accept as true everything that is said. Certainly, he should use discrimination in accepting what he hears, but he should not allow his feelings to colour what the other person says.

Mental alertness.—The attentiveness of the hearers is affected by physical conditions. If members of the congregation have had insufficient rest the previous night or their bodies are fatigued from a busy day, their minds will not be alert and responsive. If a listener expects the maximum benefit from a

*Read the second, third, and fourth paragraphs of the text on this page before doing the following exercise.*

*Match the attitudes of listening with their results.*

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <u>1.</u> negative | a. closes mind to new information and resists that which does not coincide with what is already believed.                   |
| <u>2.</u> positive | b. does not accept everything heard as true but learns as much as possible even from those with whom there is disagreement. |

*(a-1, b-2)*

sermon, he must plan his activities in order to be rested and alert when he attends the service.

Critical analysis.—Critical analysis does not refer to negative criticism but to a constant analysing of what the speaker says. If the message is organized according to a train of thought, the listener is able to relate it to his own knowledge and experiences. Since the speaker talks at the rate of 12 to 120 words per minute, the listener, who can comprehend at the rate of 300 to 500 words per minute, has time to analyse the speaker's ideas and supporting facts. In analysing the facts, the listener considers how accurate and valuable they are. If they do not agree with his own experience and understanding, he determines if his own knowledge is limited. If the speaker's points are not convincing, the listener concludes that the speaker is either prejudiced or poorly informed.

A good listener must learn to think. He should not accept automatically everything he hears, but he should weigh the statements and evaluate the facts and opinions.

Disciplined concentration.—Since the mind works faster than the rate of speech, concentration is required to keep the mind on the subject. A person must discipline himself to analyse and respond to the speaker's subject rather than allowing his mind to wander to different and distant matters.

A speaker can help the hearer to concentrate on the central theme if he briefly outlines the purpose and direction of his message in the introduction. When the listener is distracted during the course of the message, he is able to return to the central theme, if the speaker has made it clear. Since even the most disciplined do not hear all that is said on a given point, it is advisable for the speaker to restate his ideas in different words or to summarize his thoughts.

#### A summary of ways to improve listening.

1. Relate what the speaker says to your own studies and experiences. Note whether the points of the speaker agree or disagree with your own conclusions.<sup>4</sup>

2. Hear the theme of the speaker and think ahead of him. As the speaker develops his points, you can determine where he differs from your own trend of thought and whether his support justifies his development.

<sup>4</sup> Capp, Basic Oral Communication, p. 59.

Underline the correct definition of "critical analysis."

1. constant analysing of what the speaker says
2. negative criticism

(1)

To keep one's mind on the subject while listening, he must practise d \_\_\_\_\_  
e \_\_\_\_\_.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

3. Analyse what the speaker says in the light of your own conclusions. Determine whether his arguments are valid and encompass adequate evidence. Determine whether his conclusions are logical or whether they are derived from prejudiced opinions.

Some congregations have been helped by being encouraged to take notes on sermons. Until the skill of taking notes has been developed, a person is likely to lose much of what is said because the process of writing is so much slower than that of speaking. He will need to learn to be selective of what he writes, choosing only the significant statements. After some experience, he will learn to abbreviate statements. Taking notes will have the effect of forcing the listener to concentrate on the subject.

*You have just read three ways to improve listening. Can you list them? Try it.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*(Compare your answers with the text.)*

### Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. Name four types of listeners in a congregation and give two kinds of active listeners.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Give three suggestions to follow in making the subject relevant to a changing and varied audience.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Give three factors which should be kept in mind in analysing people and their interests.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What should the speaker know in order to make his message appropriate to the occasion?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. List five factors which affect the mood of a congregation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. What change in mood should be accomplished in a worship service?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What are two basic attitudes of man which cause him to attend worship services?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What should be the goal of worship? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Give four characteristics of good worship facilities. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. On what basis do people form first impressions about the speaker? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. State briefly the appropriate dress and posture of the minister which will produce favourable impressions. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. List three distracting mannerisms of a preacher when he is speaking. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. What attitudes should a speaker avoid? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. What is required for a preacher to establish a fruitful relationship with his people? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. Define effective listening and list four hindrances to it. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. Why is listening so important? \_\_\_\_\_
17. What is required to improve the attention of the audience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
18. Why is a positive attitude required for good listening? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. What is meant by critical analysis? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
20. List four ways to improve listening. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3):

1. Consider a worship service or Bible study which you have attended recently. Was the beginning of the service relevant to the mood of the congregation? Were the hymns and prayers successful in changing the mood of the audience in preparing them to worship? Write a brief essay analysing the relevancy of the forms of worship to the moods of the people in that service and suggest ways it could have been improved. Be prepared to share your essay with the seminar group.
2. List and analyse the hindrances to listening in the church which you attend and suggest practical ways that listening could be improved.

Advanced activity (Level 3):

In addition to the supplementary activities, select five representative people from the church you attend (a child, a young person, a young adult, a middle adult, and an older adult) and evaluate their interests and listening abilities. Determine the following for each person: the level of formal education attained, the economic and social background of each, the typical mood of each, and the ability of each to listen. In the light of this information, analyse five sermons which have been preached to these listeners and determine whether the sermons were appropriate. Be prepared to share your analyses and conclusions with the seminar.

Seminar Discussion

1. Discuss the kinds of listeners in a typical congregation.
2. Make a list of things that can be done to improve listening.
3. Suggest methods for training people to be better listeners.
4. Make a list of distracting attitudes and activities which the speaker should avoid.
5. Have levels 2 and 3 students share the results of their studies. List typical characteristics of listeners in your area.