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DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH PREACHING AT GARRETT  
MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH, HOPE, ARKANSAS

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Jack Clifton Johnson  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH PREACHING AT GARRETT  
MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH, HOPE, ARKANSAS

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I dedicate this work to my family.

Kristi, you always listen patiently, and I treasure you as my biggest source of encouragement in and out of the pulpit.

To Jack, Samuel, and Sophia, I pray that you will always listen to your heavenly Father as He speaks through His Word and His Spirit.

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## PREFACE

This project is most definitely not the work of one man. Many people worked diligently so that this project could be completed.

Thank you to my wife, Kristi, and our children, Jack, Samuel, and Sophia, who were the loudest cheerleaders, biggest encouragers, and kindest taskmasters who walked with me through this process. They never hesitated in allowing me to spend nights away from home so that this work could be accomplished. They knew success was possible when I did not.

To the gracious faith-family at Garrett Memorial Baptist Church, who are some of the best listeners around, thank you for being a church that goes out of its way to serve its pastor. You have made my work as a pastor a great joy.

To the many professors at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who gave of their time to prepare and lead seminars, your commitment to the expository preaching of God's Word, and your aid in improving the skill of preaching were invaluable. To Dr. Brian Vickers, in particular, thank you for your insights and leadership in getting this work to its current format.

All glory goes to the greatest preacher and listener, almighty God. My hope is that some will be helped to see you more clearly through the preaching of your Word.

Clif Johnson

Hope, Arkansas

December 2014

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to develop and implement a discipleship model about listening more effectively to biblical preaching at Garrett Memorial Baptist Church, Hope, Arkansas.

#### **Goals**

Four goals were in place to evaluate the success of this project. The first goal of this project was to develop an eight-week discipleship class that covers spiritual and practical disciplines that make a believer more effective at listening to biblical preaching. During the development phase, essential spiritual and practical disciplines were identified through research of the Bible along with pertinent biblical and sociological resources. This goal was measured by the ministry project team who used a rubric to evaluate the scope and sequence, biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, and contextual usability of the discipleship model. This goal was deemed successful when the ministry project team verified that the discipleship model curriculum met the sufficiency standards of the rubric by 90 percent.

The second goal of this project was to provide a biblical theology of listening in order to show the responsibility of the one who listens to sermons, thereby exposing the need to become a more effective listener. Church members grew in their understanding of the nature of God as One who communicates to His people today through preaching, and also grew in their understanding of the responsibility of listeners to biblical preaching. This teaching took place in a two-part series preached on consecutive Sundays

during the corporate worship hour. This goal was measured by a group of thirty adult church members completing a questionnaire that evaluated their understanding of the responsibility of one who listens to biblical preaching. The questionnaire was given before and after the sermon series in order to determine if biblical knowledge was gained from the sermon series concerning the listener's responsibility in rightly hearing biblical preaching. This goal was regarded as successful if the post-sermon series questionnaires showed a positive increase regarding the listener's knowledge of their responsibility to listen effectively to biblical preaching.

The third goal of this project was to recruit twenty adult church members who desired to improve their sermon listening skills to participate in an eight-week discipleship class entitled, "Getting the Most Out of a Sermon." Recruitment took place in three ways. First, the two-part sermon series in the previous goal served as a recruiting platform. Second, a general announcement was made through the church bulletin two weeks before class begins. Third, the teacher of the class personally invited church members to be involved in the class. This goal was measured by the use of a rubric employed by the ministry project team to evaluate the clarity of the announcements, presentation of goals of the class, and overall appeal of the recruiting efforts. This goal was regarded as successful when the ministry project team confirmed that the recruitment met the guidelines of the rubric.

The fourth goal of this project was to teach the eight-week discipleship class based upon the research of the development process. The class was taught on Wednesday nights for eight consecutive weeks during the regular adult bible study hour at Garrett Memorial Baptist Church. This goal was measured by the use of a pre- and post-class questionnaire, along with an exit interview. Class members were asked to complete a pre-class questionnaire that tested their current knowledge and use of the spiritual and practical disciplines that will be covered in class. The same questionnaire was given at

the end of the last class session to determine if knowledge and skill usage had increased. Post-class interviews were also conducted two Sundays after the last class to serve as an additional measurement tool. Success for this goal was seen as accomplished if there was a positively significant statistical difference in the usage of the disciplines that the class was built around according to the post-class questionnaire, and if 80 percent of the class articulated during the post-class interviews how they used the disciplines to intentionally apply one truth from the previous two Sunday's sermons.

### **Ministry Context**

These goals were accomplished as the project was implemented at Garrett Memorial Baptist Church in Hope, Arkansas. Garrett Memorial Baptist includes a population of spiritually mature and disciplined adults. These men and women keep consistent quiet times, pray intentionally and specifically, make disciples, read helpful literature, and are continually maturing in their faith. Frequently they have sent an email or dropped by the office to discuss how a sermon impacted their life, caused them to rejoice or repent. For example, following a sermon on evangelism, one of these spiritually mature adults sent an email that read, "The service yesterday ranks among one of the most challenging and moving in a very long time for me."

Not only do spiritually mature and disciplined believers usually listen effectively to sermons, but those who are experiencing a crisis also tend to listen effectively. The words of the preacher in Ecclesiastes 7:2 point towards this: "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind and the living will lay it to heart."<sup>1</sup> This tendency is also seen in the reaction of Peter's audience when he told them in Acts 2:36 that they had crucified the Christ. They responded with listening ears, saying, "Brothers, what shall we do?" The death of a loved

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<sup>1</sup>All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

one, the discovery of a malignant tumor, or the fresh wound of a broken heart tends to make a person's ears sensitive to sermons.

A few days after preaching a sermon that covers how God allows, permits, or ordains everything into a believer's life for His glory and the believer's good, I received a call from a faithful church member. She explained that a few days prior to that Sunday, her family received devastating news about another family member. Yet, because of the sermon just preached, they were confident in God's sovereign control and goodness for their particular situation. She went on to say that in several separate conversations concerning their loved one, many of the family members referred back to the sermon on God's sovereignty and how it brought them hope and comfort.

However, not everyone is spiritually mature or going through a crisis so that their ears are piqued. The majority of those in the congregation have consistent trouble effectively listening to and applying sermons. To be sure, biblical sermons need to be delivered effectively in order for them to be effectively received. But an evidence that listeners have trouble with their responsibility was seen in the amount of pastoral counseling taking place at Garrett Memorial Baptist. Since 2008, more than 120 people joined Garrett Memorial. Of those new members, 22 of them have requested and received pastoral counseling regarding their marriage, walk with Christ, or other life situations. This was not including those members who joined the church prior to 2008 who received pastoral counseling since 2008.

The reason this indicated a lack of effective listening skills is seen in that those who came for counseling mostly receive some sort of instruction and guidance for which they had already sat through in a previous sermon. To receive instruction from a previous sermon is not entirely out of the ordinary. However, what was revealing was that in many cases the counselees received the counsel as if they had never heard it before. For example, the week following a sermon on John 15:5, which applied the principle of

abiding in Christ, a young, married couple wanted to meet for marriage counseling. After going over with the couple on how to abide in Christ and why abiding in Christ was so crucial to the marriage relationship, they both expressed relief, gratitude, and the disbelief that they had never heard this teaching before. However, everything shared with them in that counseling session was from the previous week's sermon on John 15:5, for which they were in attendance.

Why was there a lack of listening skills in the corporate setting, but not in the pastor's office? First, church attendees were rarely trained in how to listen to sermons. When six pastors in the southwest Arkansas region were asked if they ever received training on how to prepare to listen to a sermon, or how to train others to listen effectively to biblical preaching, not one of them answered positively. Only one of the six pastors had briefly discussed how to prepare to hear a sermon with his church in a class setting. Since 2005, Garrett Memorial Baptist did not offer any training on the importance of the sermon, how God uses preaching, or how to prepare for listening to sermons. The only consistent tool given to the congregation to help them listen was a fill in the blank outline of the major biblical principles covered during the sermon. This responsibility rests with the pastors of churches.

Additionally, people were more apt to listen during a counseling session because the counselor made sure he had the counselee's attention, looked him in the eye, or called her name. However, in an audience the listener can hide behind someone, be distracted by the four-year-old in the seat in front of him, or just mentally drift away. Add to this the wrong assumption that preachers make in assuming that since a person is in church, professes to be a Christian, and has two ears, then they must know how to listen. However, if people are not consistently mentally and spiritually prepared to be effective listeners, then they will consistently miss the message. Churches must become equipped, from the pulpit to the pew, with the ability to train their members to be effective listeners.

## **Rationale for the Project**

Not everyone at Garrett Memorial Baptist Church was a spiritually mature follower of Christ. Neither was every believer in the throes of a crisis each week. However, every believer needed to feed on biblical preaching. Counseling every church member individually each week was not possible, nor is it biblical. The preaching ministry of the church was to be the means of weekly encouragement, support, guidance, and direction.

Communication is a two-way street; thus, so is preaching. Those participating in communication, both the speaker and the listener, must do their part in order for communication to work best. Much like a pitcher needs a catcher, and a quarterback needs a receiver, so too does a preacher need listeners. They must work together. If the pitcher is not throwing the ball well, he makes the catcher's job more difficult. Conversely, if the catcher is not paying attention to what the pitcher is doing, the catcher will rarely catch the ball. Both play an important role. Just as God prefers a spiritually-prepared preacher to step into his pulpit, he also prefers a Spirit-filled, sensitive heart prepared to hear from him through the sermon. To attempt to listen to a sermon without depending upon the Holy Spirit to open the ears is just as inappropriate as the preacher stepping into the pulpit in his own power. Both the preacher and listeners have responsibilities, however, the spiritual discipline of listening effectively to biblical preaching is rarely taught in the church. Therefore, this project aimed to develop and implement a discipleship model that helped people understand the important role of listening effectively during biblical preaching as well as develop the spiritual and practical disciplines to listen to biblical preaching well. Understanding the importance of the listener's role motivates the pursuit of cultivating the spiritual discipline.

The significance of the listener's role during the preaching exchange was thoroughly examined during the two-part sermon series. After the sermon series, believers at Garrett Memorial Baptist should be asking the question, "How can I become

a more effective listener in order to fulfill my role, bring God glory and myself joy through my life?”

This question was answered through the discipleship class, *Getting the Most Out of the Sermon*. The class was designed to equip adults with the spiritual and practical disciplines of effective listening skills, positioning them to follow the church in Thessalonica, who “received the word of God . . . accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess 2:13).

Several benefits were reaped when this discipleship model was implemented. First, anticipation and expectations of hearing from God during the sermon increased. In most textbooks on preaching, the preacher is instructed on how to craft an introduction in order to garner the attention of the listener. Because of this, much of the preacher’s time and study is spent coming up with clever ways to invite the audience into his sermon. But what if the pastor teaches his people the priority and purpose of a sermon and how to reap the most from it? Perhaps then, the pastor does not have to spend as much precious study time coming up with antics in order to garner attention. Rather, the people will be primed to hear the sermon before the preacher steps into the pulpit. Those going through this discipleship model understood that the God of the universe desires to commune with them consistently through biblical preaching, therefore their anticipation and expectation to hear from God was increased.

Second, part of the discipleship model defined biblical preaching. Therefore, being trained in effectively listening to biblical preaching equipped the class members to better differentiate between biblical and non-biblical preaching. Third, class members understood that they can regularly hear from God and apply His truths to their lives. This will reduce the need for counseling, thereby freeing up time for the congregation to live out biblical truth and give the pastor more time to focus his attention in other areas of ministry. Finally, an overall benefit for the church was that when more members of the



church are listening effectively to biblical preaching, then the church naturally grew in spiritual depth and cultural influence.

This issue of unprepared listeners makes this project necessary. In *Spirit-Led Preaching*, Greg Heisler writes,

In a perfect world, every member of your church would come to God's house full of the Holy Spirit and full of the Word of God. . . . Unfortunately, we have to wake up from this "perfect world" now and realize that most congregations are poorly prepared to hear the Word of God and that they come with minimal expectations when they come to hear us preach.<sup>2</sup>

Heisler brings to the surface two issues regarding the spiritual discipline of listening to a sermon. First, after a long week of work, school, raising children, worrying about bills to be paid, and being pulled in many different directions, congregants enter the church building hoping to hear something that will bring hope and purpose to their lives, but often times they are spiritually unprepared to do so. They fight against the distractions of the past week and fret over the to-do list of the week ahead. The issue of unpreparedness of the listener can be the result of a second, and even deeper, matter—few congregations are properly shepherded on how to listen effectively to biblical preaching.

The importance of attending to how one hears from God is clear throughout Scripture. After delivering a parable, Jesus told his audience, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," and, "Take care how you hear" (Luke 8:8, 18). The book of Hebrews, in chapter 2, warns the reader to "pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" (Heb 2:1). Later in the letter the author accuses his audience of "having become dull of hearing" (Heb 5:11). The preacher in Ecclesiastes warns the people: "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil" (Eccl 5:1). Making clear the significance of the hearer's role, Jay Adam writes,

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<sup>2</sup>Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 116.

As a matter of fact, not only does the listener have a role to play in the momentous occasion on which God speaks to His people through the mouth of a preacher delivering His word, but the scriptures say more about the listener's responsibility to hear, understand, and implement the message than about the preacher's obligation to faithfully preach it.<sup>3</sup>

This project sought to make clear the Scripture's call to listeners and to provide skills that prepare a people to effectively listen to God during biblical preaching and build into the fabric of their lives what they have gleaned. This model equipped hearers to be active, intentional listeners rather than passive ones.

### **Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

*Effective listening.* Effective listening is the idea of listening to biblical preaching with the purpose of joyfully obeying God once a person understands what God has done and is doing, and what the person is called to do through the Scripture.<sup>4</sup>

One limitation for this project will be the fifteen-week maximum time allotment for the ministry project. Additionally, the discipleship class used during the ministry project will be delimited to no more than twenty Garrett Memorial members, eighteen years old or older.

### **Research Methodology**

This project's design was to elevate church members' awareness of the responsibility in hearing a sermon and increase their skills to listen to sermons effectively. As stated previously, the success of this project was determined by four goals. In the first five weeks of the project, discipleship material was developed for the discipleship class. The ministry project team evaluated the discipleship material by means of a rubric in

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<sup>3</sup>Jay Adams, *Be Careful How You Listen: How to Get the Most Out of a Sermon* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian, 2007), 7-8.

<sup>4</sup>Ken Ramey, *Expository Listening: A Handbook for Hearing and Doing God's Word* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical, 2010), 7, quoting J. I. Packer, *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 20.

order to ensure the subject matter was sufficiently covered and multiple teaching methods were employed, along with being biblically faithful and contextually usable. This team consisted of five men or women who were engaged in the ministry of Bible curriculum development, teaching of the Bible, and were faithful members of an evangelical church.

In addition to the development of the curriculum, in week 3 a questionnaire testing the knowledge of a listener's responsibility was piloted to a group of five church members. In week 7 this questionnaire was given to a sample group of thirty adult church members through the Sunday morning Sunday school (see appendix). The questionnaire provided a base line as to the congregation's understanding of their responsibility in hearing a sermon. During weeks 8 and 9, I developed and preached a two-part sermon series entitled "Be Careful, Little Ears, How You Hear." This sermon series aimed to increase the church members' knowledge of their role in hearing a sermon. To measure any change in knowledge, the same survey was given to the sample group in week 7 after the conclusion of the sermon series. A t-test for dependent samples was used to measure any statistically significant difference the sermon series made within the test group.

Throughout the sermon series, recruitment for the discipleship class *Getting the Most Out of a Sermon*, took place. Emphasis on the benefits and goals of the discipleship class were stressed through the sermon series. Additionally, bulletin inserts informed the congregation of the upcoming discipleship class' time and location. The instructor of the discipleship class also targeted individuals about attending the class. The ministry project team evaluated the recruiting efforts by means of a rubric that identified the clarity of the announcements, presentation of goals of the class, and overall appeal of the recruiting efforts

Following the sermon series, in weeks 10 through 18, an eight-week discipleship class on developing effective listening skills for biblical preaching was

taught. Limited to no more than twenty people, this discipleship class was equipped with spiritual and practical disciplines to better hear from God during biblical preaching.

The class spent the first five weeks studying the essential components of a biblical sermon, along with spiritual disciplines that equip listeners to be spiritually prepared for the sermon, Spirit-sensitive during the sermon, and Spirit-led after the sermon. Spiritual disciplines that help listeners anticipate the sermon included consistent time in the Word throughout the week, praying for the pastor and church, meditating over the passage to be preached, receiving plenty of rest the night before, reduction of media intake, and abiding in Christ. Disciplines that aided in being spiritually-sensitive during the sermon included prayer, reading of Scripture, keeping notes, and being sensitive to what the Holy Spirit may be emphasizing. Summarizing the sermon and thinking through how the truth of the sermon applied to life were spiritual disciplines that were to be utilized after a sermon.

During the next two weeks the class was trained in practical listening skills. These skills included note taking, body language positioning, and removing distractions. One week before the last class session, the class was informed of a passage to read, meditate, and pray over. During the last class session, the class viewed a biblical sermon that covered the assigned passage. This gave the class an opportunity to employ their new listening skills. After viewing this sermon, the class discussed what they gleaned from the sermon, focusing especially on the preacher's main point, how he supported his main point, how the Holy Spirit convicted them during the sermon, how they employed the practical disciplines, and the process they will use to build the truth of the sermon into the fabric of their lives.

At the beginning and conclusion of the eight-week class, a survey was given to measure any change within the class pertaining to their usage of the spiritual and practical disciplines related to listening to biblical preaching (see appendix). A t-test for

dependent samples was used to measure any statistically significant difference the discipleship class made within the group. Additionally, an exit interview of each discipleship student was administered over the course of two weeks in order to hear how the class participants were using the spiritual and practical disciplines and to offer follow-up council (see appendix).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Research Ethics Committee prior to the use in the ministry project

CHAPTER 2  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION  
OF DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH PREACHING

**The Priority of Listening to Biblical Preaching**

God's design of the universe is intrinsically communicative. Psalm 19:1-4 is written,

The heavens *declare* the glory of God, and the sky above *proclaims* his handiwork. Day to day pours out *speech*, and night-to-night *reveals* knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their *voice* goes out through all the earth, and their *words* to the end of the world.<sup>1</sup>

From the time God flung the stars into their place, he used the canvas of the created world to relay the message of His glory, character, and moral law to all humanity in what is called general revelation.<sup>2</sup> Explaining this in the letter to the Romans, Paul writes,

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. (Rom 1:19-20)

General revelation communicates enough to convince man of God's existence and man's accountability to Him. However, God does not stop with general revelation. He also communicates through special revelation. Special revelation communicates to man how he can be made right with his Creator through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and live a life of God-glorifying happiness. The very moment sin entered the world through

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<sup>1</sup>Emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 122.

Adam and Eve's disobedience, God communicated to them with special revelation, promising the defeat of the enemy through the seed of the woman, pointing forward to the defeat of Satan, sin and death through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

### **The Rise of the Prophet**

As the story of the Bible unfolds, it becomes clear that God's primary vehicle for communicating special revelation with mankind is through mankind, particularly the office of prophet. The label of prophet can be traced back to Abraham (Gen 20:7), but the priority of the prophet as God's mouthpiece for the nation of Israel, God's chosen people, takes shape in the book of Deuteronomy.

The fifth book of the Pentateuch is commonly thought of as simply a duplication of the covenant established between God and the nation of Israel at Sinai. The idea of Deuteronomy being a replication surfaced when the authors of the Septuagint based its title of the book on Deuteronomy 17:18, which reads in Hebrew as, "*misneh hattora hazzot*" and translated means, "a copy of this instruction."<sup>3</sup> Thus the Greek title became *Deuteronimion*, meaning "second law," and other translations followed suit.

"Unfortunately," Eugene Merrill explains,

This notion of Deuteronomy as merely a copy or restatement of Exodus has led to a failure in many circles to appreciate the singular uniqueness and importance of the book. Deuteronomy . . . is not a second law but an amplification and advancement of the covenant text first articulated to Moses and Israel at Sinai nearly forty years earlier.<sup>4</sup>

Understanding Deuteronomy as an amplification is important in order to understand Deuteronomy's purpose. The amplification of the law was given to a new generation of people who were not present at Sinai, but who were still under the terms of

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<sup>3</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 21-22.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

the covenant and under the leadership of the covenant mediator, Moses. Needing to understand the covenant as relevant to their day as they approached a new experience in entering the Promised Land, Moses preached to this new generation a germane understanding of the covenant.<sup>5</sup>

As Moses prepared the people for entry into a new land, he also prepared them for his removal from leadership as their prophet. Since Moses was prohibited from crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land with the nation of Israel, a natural concern of the Israelites became how God would communicate with them and to whom they were to listen. Moses answered in two ways.

First, in Deuteronomy 13, Moses warned the Israelites of three groups of people that would vie for Israel's ear attempting to lead them to break allegiance with God and worship false gods as they entered into a new land and interacted with new cultures. The first group was prophets who performed amazing acts, which added credibility to their message. Using that credibility they would attempt to lead the people astray by saying, "Let us go after other gods" (Deut 13:2). Those prophets must not be heeded, but rather executed. Family members attempting to lead their own family away

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<sup>5</sup>Moses' role as covenant mediator is clarified in v. 3: "Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him in commandment to them." However, Moses is not just a mediator, but also a prophet, which is emphasized in two ways. First, the opening line of Deuteronomy follows ancient treaty form that identifies the words contained in a treaty as those of a king. Deuteronomy begins, "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness." Peter Craigie explains, "The formal similarities are clear, but the difference in substance is noteworthy; the book does not open by identifying the words contained in it as those of God, the true King of Israel. The human words are those of Moses. The difference does not mean that Moses was in effect king of Israel; it points rather to his role as the spokesman or prophet of God." Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 38. The second way Moses' prophetic role is emphasized is in the sermon-like tone of the book. S. R. Driver notes in his commentary that even the legislation portion of the book is "essentially parennetic; he 'expounds' them, i.e. he develops them with reference to the moral purposes which they subserve, and the motives by which the Israelites should feel prompted to obey." S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), ii.



from God into idol worship comprised the second group. Moses tells the people, “You shall not yield to him or listen to him” (Deut 13:8). The last situation described in Deuteronomy 13 concerns “worthless fellows” that have led an entire city into idolatry. The citizens of this city must be destroyed. Then, God promised blessing if the Israelites “obey the voice of the Lord your God, keeping all his commandments that I am commanding you today, and doing what is right in the sight of the Lord” (Deut 13:18).

But how will the people know the voice of the Lord if Moses is not there to mediate as God’s prophet? This is the concern. Moses positively answers the anxiety of the people by listing in Deuteronomy 16-18 four sources of authority for the nation: judges, kings, priests, and then prophets. Out of these four leadership and authoritative positions for the nation of Israel, the role of prophet is regarded as the most crucial because God promises to put his words in the prophet’s mouth so that the prophet will speak to the Israelites all that God commands him in order to guide the people. Tigay explains,

To Deuteronomy the prophet is the most important and authoritative leader. In contrast to the king, whose power it limits, Deuteronomy strengthens the authority of the prophet. It affirms that he is the successor of Moses, the highest authority during the desert period (v. 15). His word is God’s word, and whoever disobeys it is threatened with divine punishment (v.19). Prophecy is the only office whose legal basis Moses described by quoting the words of the God rather than using his own words (vv. 17-20).<sup>6</sup>

When God promised the Israelites a prophet like Moses, no particular prophet was intended, but only as occasion necessitated would God “raise up” such a man.<sup>7</sup> Thus began a long line of prophets who served as God’s mouthpiece to the nation of Israel.

Hobart E. Freeman writes,

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<sup>6</sup>Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society), 172.

<sup>7</sup>J. G. McCoville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1966), 302.

To their contemporaries they were the moral and ethical preachers of spiritual religion, calling the nation to obedience in conformity to the Mosaic legislation. They fearlessly rebuked vice, idolatry, infidelity, oppression, unfaithfulness, iniquity, and social, moral and political corruption wherever it was to be found.<sup>8</sup>

The prophets removing and anointing kings by God's command reflect the priority of their position as spokespersons for God (1 Sam 10:1, 16:12; 1 Kgs 19:15-16). The prophet Nathan, under direction of the Lord, stared King David in the face and boldly proclaimed, "You are the man," exposing the king's adultery, murder, and cover up in 2 Samuel 12. Eli the priest was rebuked by a "man of God" who started off his message with, "Thus the Lord said" in 1 Samuel 2:27.

### **The Precedence of Listening to the Prophet in the Old Testament**

Since the role of the prophet is recognized as the primary means of God's communication throughout the Old Testament, the priority of listening to the prophet's message carries precedence for the people of God. The necessity for the people of God to engage in listening to the prophet's message is made explicit in Deuteronomy alongside the priority of the prophet's role. One should not listen to false prophets who lead people away from God (Deut 13:1-3), listen to family members who privately lead away from God (Deut 13:6-8), or listen to a whole city if they attempt to lead others to break their allegiance to Yahweh (Deut 13:12-15). Rather, "God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen. . . . And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him" (Deut 18:15, 19).

Not just in the book of Deuteronomy, but the whole of the Old Testament resounds with God's call for His people to listen to His word through true prophets. God exclaimed through Isaiah the prophet, "Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind that you may

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<sup>8</sup>Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), 49.

see,” and, “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel,” as well as, “Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord” (Isa 42:18, 46:3, 51:1). God instructs Jeremiah to “proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord,” and “Stand in the gate of the Lord’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord” (Jer 2:1, 7:2, 11:2). In praying for the people, Daniel confesses, “We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land” (Dan 9:6). Amos, fulfilling the role of a prophet, declared that a judgment of not having prophecy would strike the land when he said, “Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11).

### **The Precedence of Listening to Preaching in the New Testament**

Proclamation through prophets as God’s chief means of communicating to His people is maintained throughout the New Testament along with the church’s chief responsibility to listen. However, a difference exists between the prophets of the Old Testament and the preachers of the New Testament. Christopher Ash notes that the prophets prophesied in two major ways. First they were preachers of the covenant word. Second, they progressively revealed the promised messiah.<sup>9</sup> When Christ came, he perfectly fulfilled the covenant obligations and was the fulfillment of the prophets developing revelation of the messiah. Today the need of the progressive revelatory function of the prophet does not exist since Christ has been fully revealed. Yet, proclamation of God’s Word concerning the revealed Christ remains a priority because God still desires to communicate the special revelation of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>9</sup>Christopher Ash, *The Priority of Preaching* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2009), 30.

However, the New Testament church faces the same problem as did the nation of Israel standing at the Jordan River—to whom is she to listen since Jesus has ascended? Similar to Moses' farewell address in the book of Deuteronomy, Jesus gave the apostles comforting words in John 13:31-16, preparing them for his departure. Throughout this section he eased the apostles concern with words, such as

little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, "Where I am going you cannot come." . . . Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. . . . I will not leave you as orphans. (John 13:33; 14:1, 18)

So to whom is the church to listen? Just as God gave the nation of Israel the command to listen to true prophets whom he would raise up and who would preach the covenant Word of God, so too God gives the church preachers who proclaim the revealed Christ and the apostolic message through the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:11). Ash explains,

As with Israel after Moses, so with us after the apostolic age: we too have a written covenant document. Theirs was foundational but incomplete. Ours is full, sufficient and final, the canon of scripture. . . . But just as they needed living prophets to preach the covenant, so we need living preachers to proclaim the word.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, just as God warned his people concerning false prophecy in Deuteronomy 13, he also warns against false teaching in the New Testament with words such as "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1), "beware of false prophets" (Matt 7:15), and "from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert" (Acts 20:30).

Since God maintained the priority of the proclaimed Word in the New Testament, he also maintained the priority of listening to the word preached. They go together. Hearing is deemed an essential part to the awakening of faith (Ro 10:11). The author of Hebrews urges his readers to "pay much closer attention to what we have heard,

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 33.

lest we drift away from it.” When the believer ceases to make listening a priority, he “drifts” from the message being proclaimed and becomes “dull of hearing,” marking him as one who is immature (Heb 2:1, 5:11-14). When gravity is placed upon the preacher and his role in delivering the Word of God to the people of God, then equal weight, then, falls onto the role of the listener, thus making listening to preaching a priority for the believer.

### **The Purpose of Listening to Biblical Preaching**

If God places such importance upon communicating with people through the preached Word and the corollary priority of listening to the preached Word, does God have a consistent theme, or purpose, in His communications that he desires people to hear?

Knowing the priority of listening to biblical preaching is helpful, but knowing what to listen for focuses the mind and heart. If a person wishes to cultivate the discipline of listening, it is beneficial to know the fruit that the discipline is intended to produce. If a person knows the purpose of listening to preaching, he will know what results to look for in his life to validate that true listening has taken place. Thankfully, God laces Scripture with the purpose, or goal, of preaching, thereby giving hearers their purpose in listening.

As noted earlier from Psalm 19:1, God communicates His glory through His creative order, general revelation, so that man can enjoy Him. This theme of general revelation also infuses the purpose of preaching. John Piper, in his book *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, quotes the Scottish preacher James Stewart as saying that the goal of preaching is “to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the

love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”<sup>11</sup> Biblical preaching and listening concerns itself with the exaltation of God in the life of the listener so that man’s devotion can be deepened through Jesus’ exaltation.

### **Listening for Jesus to be Exalted**

When considering the purpose of listening to preaching, Colossians 1:24-29 proves helpful because the purpose of preaching is so clearly presented. Paul writes,

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works in me.

In this passage Paul explains that he willingly endured suffering for the sake of the church because he was appointed by God “to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.” The term “mystery” does not refer to a hidden secret that must be figured out. Rather, in a Jewish context, a mystery refers to secrets that are uncovered or revealed over time. In other words, for Paul to make the Word of God fully known, a “mystery” needed to be uncovered.

Paul explains what it means to make this mystery fully known in verse 28 when he declares that the purpose of his apostolic ministry was to proclaim Christ along with “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”<sup>12</sup> Each word used to describe the task of preaching

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<sup>11</sup>John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 19.

<sup>12</sup>Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 159.

(proclaim, warn, and teach) adds depth to the overall purpose of preaching, thus building the purpose of listening to preaching.

Proclamation (*καταγγέλλω*) is the act of formal announcing. When used outside of the New Testament, the word generally referred to official reports. In the religious sphere, but still apart from the New Testament, the word was used to announce official games or festivals. Within the New Testament, the verb is used to announce or proclaim acts achieved by a person rather than ideas.<sup>13</sup> Both James Dunn and Robert Wilson suggest that the use of *καταγγέλλω* in the New Testament bears nuances of a sacred, or solemn, announcement.<sup>14</sup> Paul demonstrated with his life how serious he considered the task by enduring sufferings and struggles in order to accomplish the job. To proclaim Christ, in Paul's mind, meant to herald and exalt Christ, no matter the cost, as God's revealed purpose for the world, and as superior to any competing rival one might have.

In describing his proclamation, Paul used two adverbial participles that add depth to the goal of preaching and the related purpose of listening. Proclaiming Christ includes "warning" (*νουθετέω*) all believers either to stop a particular behavior or to avoid a particular behavior.<sup>15</sup> Teaching (*διδάσκω*) is another component to Paul's solemn proclamation and carries the idea of instructing in the practical application of the

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<sup>13</sup>J. Schniewind, "Angelia," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and abr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 12 .

<sup>14</sup>Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 123; Robert McLachlan Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 180.

<sup>15</sup>Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 679.

gospel.<sup>16</sup> Charting a course to follow in life in light of the person and work of Jesus is the task of teaching.

Each of these modes of communication serves to make known the riches of Christ's glory. Proclaiming Christ is the exalting of his person and deeds above all others as the ultimate demonstration of God's justice, love, and grace. Warning believers sounds the alarm to the foolishness of straying from such a Savior and urges them back to the Savior. Instruction concerning Christ pertains to all that Christ is for the believer and why He is worthy of following. All three of these communication techniques aid in the exaltation of Christ. Without the proclamation of Christ's deeds, there is no gospel, only legalism. Without the presence of the warning element, no confession or repentance takes place. If there is only warning, then grace is undermined and fear-based, moralistic living and is produced. If teaching is present, but no warning, or a cross-centered framework through which to understand the teaching, then only information transfer is accomplished.

### **Listening for Devotion to be Deepened**

The goal of exalting Christ through these communicative activities is that the believer may be presented as mature in Christ. But what does this mean? The ESV opted for the translation of the Greek word *τέλειος* as "mature." However, capturing the true essence of the term for this context proves difficult. Moo suggests that "mature" is too weak of a translation because of its relative nature. One can always find another Christian at a lower level of maturity with which to compare himself, but when compared with Christ, no one is ever mature. "Perfect" is the translation in the NIV, but this, argues Moo, is too strong because perfect carries the ideas of perfectionism and

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<sup>16</sup>Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 124.



absolutism.<sup>17</sup> J. B. Lightfoot proposes that the word is a metaphor brought over from the “ancient mysteries” where it was used to delineate between initiates and those fully instructed. So within the first century church, the term was used, suggests Lightfoot, to refer to the baptized as opposed to those who were being catechized prior to their baptism.<sup>18</sup> A “τέλειον,” according to Lightfoot, is one who had been fully instructed.

David G. Peterson offers an interpretation of τέλειος that finds support with Moo. Peterson notes, “In the LXX there is a particular use in the sense of ‘blamelessness’ or ‘wholeheartedness’ in relation to God.”<sup>19</sup> Following this line of thought, Moo observes that “similar to the Hebrew *tamim* (which is translated by τέλειος five times in the LXX), τέλειος connotes the quality of being so wholehearted in one’s devotion to the Lord that one can be said to be blameless in conduct.”<sup>20</sup> This Hebrew perspective of τέλειος makes sense when one considers that Paul also prayed that the Colossian church would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding: “So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10). The idea is that a person is wholly devoted to God in light of all he knows and understands about God. This thought is further demonstrated in the way Paul prayed that the believers in Colossae may be “strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father” (Col 1:11-12). The mature, or perfect, man, is one who lives a gospel-centered life in light of the

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<sup>17</sup>Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 161.

<sup>18</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1879), 170-71.

<sup>19</sup>David G. Peterson, “Mature in Christ,” in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul’s Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 192.

<sup>20</sup>Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 161.

riches of the glory of Christ, full of perseverance, bearing fruit, and thankfulness, brought about by the means of proclaiming the gospel, warning against straying from Christ, and teaching the excellencies of Christ and the residual outgrowth of abiding in Him.

Now that the purpose of preaching is made clear, light falls on the purpose of listening to biblical preaching. The purpose of listening is to have Christ elevated in the listener's life so that he sees the riches of Jesus' glory more clearly, and is thereby induced to hand over his life to Christ, completely, in order to gain joy and live in a manner fully pleasing to him. The exaltation of Christ in the listener's life takes place when a habit is exposed as harmful or sinful (warning), when a better understanding and application of a scriptural truth is achieved (teaching), or when the gospel is simply proclaimed, stirring deeper affections for Christ.

Second Timothy 4:1-4 supports this purpose of preaching and listening. Paul commands Timothy, in the presence of God and in light of the return of Christ, to "preach the word . . . rebuke, reprove, and exhort with all patience and teaching." The reason Paul gave Timothy this command resulted from people's itching ears that were gathering to themselves teachers who suited their own passions. In other words, people wanted their own desires and wills exalted and triumphed. However, the purpose of preaching is to knock down those sinful desires with the overwhelming news, beauty, glory, and power of the gospel. This destruction is only accomplished when Christ's glory, desires, and will for man are powerfully proclaimed in the truth of the gospel.

The exaltation of Christ as the means of producing believers mature in Christ because they find their sufficiency in Him is not only the purpose of preaching and listening in the New Testament, but it was also the purpose of preaching and listening in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 40 God prepares the Israelites for a time of bondage, but also promises them a future deliverance. When the promise was fulfilled and the people were making their return to their homeland, God instructs a herald to race to the top of a

mountain to proclaim a message for all to hear: “Behold your God!” is the preacher’s message. In light of the return from captivity, who is to receive credit and worship? Answer: Behold your God. Isaiah then goes on to exalt the greatness of God over and above any competitor. Closing his sermon he says, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable” (Isa 40:28). What should an Israelite be listening for when a prophet presents God’s message? He should be listening for a greater understanding and exaltation of God for his own life.

### **The Power and Preparation to Listen to Biblical Preaching**

The priority of listening to God seems obvious. If the God of the universe desires to communicate with man, why would man not desire to listen? Adding to that, God’s purpose in communicating with man involves God’s glory and man’s joy; it only makes sense that people stand ready and willing to listen. Yet, this is not the case.

### **The Peril of Sin and the Work of the Spirit**

When God spoke to Adam the first command, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die,” Adam heard God initially, but later he chose to give more precedence to his wife’s voice than God’s. As a result of Adam’s turning his ear away from God and towards his wife, Adam’s ultimate joy in God was replaced with God’s curse. Every person born after Adam receives an ear muted to God and tuned to his own selfishness. The apostle Paul describes this reality as being “dead in the trespasses and sin in which you once walked” (Eph 2:1). Spiritually dead people cannot hear from God. Jesus says,

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. . . .

If I tell you the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. (John 8:43-44, 46-47)

David compares the situation to the “deaf adder that stops its ear, so that it does not hear the voice of charmers or of the cunning enchanter” (Ps 58:4-5).

However, the break in communion and the ensuing curse did not keep God from pursuing man in order to restore man’s joy in God. “The natural person,” Paul writes, “does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). Only God unstops the ear. The ability to hear must come from the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration in a person’s life. When a person is convicted of his sinfulness in light of God’s holiness, along with his need for the atoning work of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and places his faith in Jesus, the work of regeneration has taken place, bringing the new believer life in Christ and the ability to hear God spiritually. He has been born of God spiritually (John 3:6-7).

But even the new birth does not eradicate the tendency to turn spiritual ears away from God and towards competing voices. Just because a person possesses the ability does not mean that the person employs the ability. If this were the case, Moses would not have had to warn the Israelites about the temptations that awaited them in the Promised Land. In fact, the Old Testament is filled with instances where God’s people stopped listening to Him. Summarizing the situation, Ramey writes, “The entire Old Testament is one long, sad commentary on God’s desire to be heard and the failure of His people to listen. . . . They were stubborn and stiff-necked and refused to use the ears God had given them.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ken Ramey, *Expository Listening: A Handbook for Hearing and Doing God’s Word* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical, 2010), 17. Ramey goes on to quote Puritan Thomas Shepard, “One might almost say that the epitaph engraved on the nation’s tombstone was: ‘The Lord God spoke to his people but they refused to listen to God’s Word.’”

How does one who has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit properly benefit from the new birth in this area of listening? Knowing the priority and purpose of listening to preaching are two huge steps, but the third step in listening involves the discipline of preparing the heart.

### **Sower, Seed, or Soils?**

The gospel writer Mark describes the importance of this cultivation in his recounting of Jesus' parable and interpretation of the soils in Mark 4. Even though Mark stresses the teaching ministry of Jesus throughout his gospel (1:14-15, 22, 27-28, 38; 2:13; 6:2-3, 34; 10:1), he includes only two extended teaching sections, one of which is Mark 4.<sup>22</sup> No doubt Mark had many teaching stories to choose from to include in his gospel, so the fact that he selected teaching that focused on hearing stresses the importance of hearing.

So far in Mark's gospel, people committed themselves to Jesus such as the twelve apostles, while others accused him of blasphemy (Mark 2:7), while still others responded to Jesus' teaching by saying that he was "possessed by the devil" (Mark 3:22). There were those who were healed by him, those who eagerly gathered around him to receive his teaching, those who were hostile towards him, and then there was his own family who thought he was crazy (Mark 3:21). How can there be so many different responses to the good news brought by Jesus?<sup>23</sup> Most scholars agree that the parable of the soils is included in this section in order to explain how there can be such differing responses to the same teaching.

Scholars differ on the emphasis of the parable and interpretation. The three

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<sup>22</sup>The second teaching section is Mark 13.

<sup>23</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 182.

obvious features of this parable are the sower, the seed, and the soils, each of which are said to be the dominant element and interpretive key, depending upon whom you read.

James R. Edwards contends that the parable demonstrates the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus, represented by the sower in the parable:

The sower's earnest and profligate sowing, which at first looked mistaken and futile, is vindicated by a bumper crop. Throughout the Gospel Jesus teaches, preaches, and proclaims (2:2; 4:33; 8:32; 9:10; 10:22, 24; 11:29; 13:31; 14:39) as tirelessly as the sower sows.<sup>24</sup>

Citing Mark's use of the same word for the farmer "going out" in 4:2 and Jesus' stated purpose in 1:38, Edwards argues that the sower should receive the focus of attention. Although he is right to highlight the invasion of the kingdom of God through Jesus, he misses the focus of the parable. Those claiming that the sower is the central feature of the parable have a difficult time explaining the sower's sparse appearances (only once when the parable is given, and only once in the interpretation). The sower in the parable does not even receive an explanatory note in the interpretation.

Other scholars believe that the seed and its harvest is the focus of the parable. William Lane suggests that since the end of the parable holds the climaxing point, it thus contains the main focus of the parable: "The harvest is a common figure for the consummation of the Kingdom of God, and in the parable there is a significant reflection on the future, eschatological aspect of the Kingdom: it shall be glorious in character."<sup>25</sup> Although this thought is pleasing, it does not do justice to the repetitive use of the word family ἀκούω (to hear). Within the giving of the parable and its interpretation, a verb form of ἀκούω is used eight times. Directly following the parable of the soils is another

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<sup>24</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 129-30.

<sup>25</sup>William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 154.

parable that uses the verb form three times, consequently reinforcing the theme of hearing. Additionally, no explanation or further development is given to the harvest element in the interpretation section of the passage.

Robert Guelich claims, “The focal point of the parable lies clearly on the seed that has been sown.”<sup>26</sup> According to his view, the seed represents the arrival and proclamation of the kingdom of God. The parable explains, by means of the differing soils, why the same type of seed yielded such varying results. Some vigorously opposed the proclamation while others gladly embraced it. The interpretation and stress of the parable, Guelich claims, is the fragile but redemptive nature of God’s kingdom.<sup>27</sup>

Guelich’s reasoning is similar to Lane’s until Guelich questions the legitimacy of Jesus having offered the interpretation given in verses 13-20. The interpretation reflects more of an early church context that “goes beyond the limits of the parable in detail and structure,” according to Guelich.<sup>28</sup> With the early church community taking its cues for interpretation from the imperatives to listen in 4:3, and 9, Guelich claims the result is a misconstrued interpretation of the parable. What is interesting, however, is his sense of need to interpret verses 13-20 as having the same purpose as the telling of the parable, with the seed as the focus, even though he conjectures that the interpretation is not original with Jesus, but rather an insertion designed to lay the emphasis on hearing.<sup>29</sup> The fault with Guelich’s reasoning is his unwillingness to take the text as Mark presents it. In Mark’s mind, the meaning of the parable for his readers, whatever the original interpretation may have been, focused on the condition of the soil and its rejection or

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<sup>26</sup>Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1:-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 196-97.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 224.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 223.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 224.

reception of the seed. To conjecture a purpose of the parable beyond what is given in the text is to go beyond the bounds of solid hermeneutics.

The main thrust of the parable does not fall solely on the seed or its harvest, although they serve as important features of the parable as a means of motivation to hear rightly. The emphasis of the parable focuses attention on the four different types of soil and the corresponding results once the seed falls on them. The parable is a warning to Mark's readers to pay attention to how they go about hearing the Word. The opening and closing of the parable stress the importance of listening. As mentioned previously, the abundance of the word "family." ἀκούω, used throughout this section focuses the reader's attention on the importance of hearing rather than on the seed or the harvest.<sup>30</sup> The development of the different types of soil and what happens to the seed once a particular type of soil hears the Word stresses the function of hearing. Ben Witherington brings this particular point to light when he writes, "Notice that the sower, the seed, and the method of sowing are the same in each case. This strongly suggests that the point has to do with the reception of the seed."<sup>31</sup> This interpretation also answers the question as to why some rejected the Word and others embraced it. For Mark's readers, the explanation served as encouragement and motivation to be the good soil. The motivation is two-fold. First, the prospect of the seed being stolen, or the fruit withering, or being choked out served as motivation to be good soil. The second means of motivation relates to the joy of the fruit of the harvest. In the parable that follows, the stress on hearing and the two-fold motivation is repeated when Jesus says, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. For the

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<sup>30</sup>The word ἀκούω or its cognate is used nine times in the parable and its interpretation.

<sup>31</sup>Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 165.



one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away” (Mark 4:24-25).

### **Knowing the Secret is Not Enough**

Before considering the different types of hearing represented by the differing soils, consideration must be given to the placement and purpose of verses 10-12. What is agreed upon among scholars is that verses 10-12 were inserted, resulting in a passage that does not read chronologically. In the opening of the chapter Jesus is at seaside teaching the crowd from a boat. In verse 10 a transition takes place to Jesus being alone with the twelve apostles and “those around him” (Mark 4:10). Only this group receives the interpretation to the parable of soils. If this were chronologically arranged, it makes little sense why the private group asked Jesus about the parables (plural) when Jesus spoke only one parable up to that point. Additionally, verses 33-36 seem to indicate that Jesus spoke the last three parables from the boat to the seaside crowd. To go from the seaside crowd to a private instruction time with just a few disciples, and then back out to the crowd to continue teaching, seems unreasonable. An explanation for the apparent clumsiness of Mark surfaces, however, when one considers that verse 13 states that understanding the interpretation to the parable of the soils is the key to understanding the rest of the parables. Therefore, for the benefit of his readers, Mark uses verses 10-12 as a flashing light so that they will pay attention to crucial interpretive key in verse 13.

Much debate exists, however, as to the intended meaning of verses 10-12. The ones who pursued Jesus, seeking explanation of the parables after he taught the crowds, are the ones to whom the secret of the kingdom of God had been given. What is that secret and does it affect the interpretation of the parable, which emphasizes hearing? Also, who are those “outside” and what is meant by the *ἰνα* clause of verse 12 that introduces Isaiah 6:9, describing the outsiders as those who “may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven” (Mark 4:12)?

The secret spoken of carries the same idea as explained previously. This mystery is not some knowledge reserved for spiritual elites who have cracked a code, but rather an unveiling, or revealing of something that was once unknown. Robert H. Stein spells out clearly what this secret is when he writes,

What is revealed about the kingdom of God is not stated in the present verse, but the context of 1:1-4:9 reveals what this is. The perfect tense of “has been given” indicates that the knowledge of the mystery of the kingdom of God has already been given to Jesus’s followers. They know that the kingdom of God has now come (1:14) and that, although its consummation still lies in the future, it is nevertheless now present (1:15). The manifestations of the kingdom are visible for all those with eyes to see. Lepers are being cleansed (1:40-45); paralytics are being raised (2:12); withered hands are being restored (3:1-6); demoniacs are being delivered of their unclean spirits (1:32-34); the prince of demons has met his master (3:22-27); fasting has given away to feasting (2:18-22); outcast sinners and toll collectors are finding forgiveness and life (2:13-17); and the Christ, the Son of God, is present in their midst (1:1) What was once a longed-for hope is now being proclaimed for all to see.<sup>32</sup>

What must be understood about the giving of this secret is not that full knowledge or understanding has been granted, which is seen in the fact that Jesus has to explain the parable to the apostles and the others around him in a private setting, but simply that there is an understanding that the kingdom of God is present among them through Jesus.

In the next verse, Jesus turned his focus from those who have been given the secret of the kingdom of God to those “outside” (Mark 4:11). Verse 12 is spoken, not to those outside, but in reference to them. Disagreement exists as to what Jesus precisely meant when he quoted Isaiah 6:9, saying, “so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”

In shortened form Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9, introducing the quote with *ἵνα*. A debate surrounds the intended meaning of the *ἵνα* clause. Some understand the clause as a statement of result.<sup>33</sup> With this understanding, Jesus communicates that one of the results

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<sup>32</sup>Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 208-9.

<sup>33</sup>Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 159. Lane suggests that a proper understanding of *ἵνα* would be “in order that it might be fulfilled.”

of his ministry is that people will see but not perceive, and hear but not understand or believe. Others see the clause as stating purpose, making the verse to claim that Jesus spoke in parables in order to keep those outside from perceiving and understanding his true identity and the implications for their lives, thus resulting in repentance and forgiveness. Still another understanding of Jesus' quote of Isaiah 6:9 views the *ἵνα* functioning epexegetically, interpreting or characterizing the current situation of insiders and outsiders.<sup>34</sup>

To get to a better understanding of Mark 4:12, a correct understanding of Isaiah 6:9 must be sought. Here, God lays out for Isaiah what he can expect from the Israelites regarding his prophetic ministry. Verse 9 states, "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive." Two faculties are in view with this verse. A physical hearing is spoken of, along with an inner hearing, or understanding. This is paralleled with the use of the sight reference. The first thing Isaiah needed to understand about his prophetic ministry was that people would hear him, but they would not internalize, or embrace his message. The oddity of this verse is explained by John N. Oswalt:

It expresses for the Hebrew the strangeness of the contradiction, for to hear was normally synonymous with acknowledging and doing (Deut 1:43; 63). Here the prophet is saying that the disease of pride and rebellion has gone so deeply that they will simply misperceive the truth of what they hear (cf. 2 Ti 3:7).<sup>35</sup>

The next verse in the Isaiah passage reads, "Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." Understanding this verse, along with verse 9 is not too difficult. Coming to grips with the implication, however, is

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<sup>34</sup>Guelich, *Mark 1:-8:26*, 211.

<sup>35</sup>John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 189.

difficult. Is God commissioning Isaiah to preach in such a way that people do not respond, but are, rather, hardened against God's Word? J. Alec Motyer sets forth a simple way of discovering what is intended in these verses when he writes,

How did Isaiah obey them? According to the criticism leveled at him in 28:9-10, Isaiah taught with such simplicity and clarity that the sophisticates of his day scorned him as fit only to conduct a kindergarten. The Isaianic literature as it has come to us bears all the marks of a plain, systematic, reasoned approach. It is clear that Isaiah did not understand his commission as one to blind people by obscurity of expression or complexity of message.<sup>36</sup>

If it was not by difficulty of message that dulled the hearts of this people, what was it? The immediate text does not definitively say, but chapter 1 reveals the deplorable condition of Israel's heart as seen by God, and his plea to them to "reason together" with him (Isa 1:18). Thus, by the time the reader reaches 6:9-10, grace was offered and rejected; rebellion persisted, and now judgment comes in the form of God hardening their hearts.

This understanding of Isaiah 6:9 must be an interpretive guide for Mark 4:10-12. The question is how Mark intended the use of ἵνα clause to influence the shortened quote. Of the three options previously mentioned, the exegetical use of the clause seems most appropriate. To say that the Jesus is simply speaking of results is a rare usage for ἵνα. Seeing the clause as an introductory term bearing on the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy is grammatically plausible, and even seems to be Matthew's use of it in his account (Mat 13:14). However, according to Craig L. Blomberg, "Verse 14a probably means *the prophecy of Isaiah applies to them*."<sup>37</sup> Additionally, nowhere else in Mark does the ἵνα clause function as an introductory term for scripture.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 79.

<sup>37</sup>Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 217, emphasis original.

<sup>38</sup>Guelich, *Mark 1:-8:26*, 211.

The exegetical use of the clause remains as the favored interpretation, with the Isaiah quote viewed as material that illustrates, or further explains, how there can be “outsiders.” The exegetical use is also found in Mark 8:18 and 9:12.<sup>39</sup> This support, coupled with Matthew 13:14 seen primarily as application rather than fulfillment, clarifies the use of Isaiah 6:9 in Mark 4:12. Also, with the exegetical use, Jesus’ use of parables can be viewed in the same way as Isaiah’s prophecy—as a response to and a cause of “outsiders” unwillingness to embrace Jesus. Since some were hostile and hard-hearted towards Jesus, the parables serve as judgment on them, but grace to those who have been given the secret. Those on the outside of the kingdom of God, and remaining on the outside, are those who are not open or willing to understand Jesus or his message. They are hostile and hard-hearted towards him and what they have will be taken from them (Mark 4:25).

According to verse 13, the interpretation and application of the parable of the soils unlocked the door for understanding the rest of Jesus’ parables. Therefore, Mark inserted verses 10-12 to serve as encouragement for a continued pursuit of Jesus. As the interpretation demonstrates, merely hearing about the kingdom of God does not equate to automatic harvest. The right soil is necessary.

### **Prepare Your Heart to Hear**

Equipped with this knowledge, the question can now be asked, “What are Mark’s readers supposed to know and glean from the parable of the soils and its interpretation?” The focus of the interpretation concerns the four different types of soils. Jesus begins the interpretation in verse 14, by means of allegory, equating the seed with the word. Mark’s readers would have associated the sower with Jesus, but also more

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

broadly to include any Christian who proclaimed the gospel. Concerning how one should understand “the word,” Stein explains,

What the original expression was that Mark found in the tradition is uncertain. It is possible that Jesus himself used the Hebrew *rbR* (*dábár*, word) as the prophets did. If so, the meaning of the ‘word’ would have involved the message of Jesus as found in 1:15, but for Mark’s readers, the ‘word’ would have had a more pregnant meaning and included the postresurrection understanding of the life and message of Jesus.<sup>40</sup>

With this perspective, one concludes that the sower and the Word are equivalent to a preacher and the gospel.

The four soils differ in their location and surroundings, each representing different types of people and how they hear. One soil is “along the path” (Mark 4:4, 15). This most likely refers to an area surrounding the plot of land that was being worked. The path would be packed down from constant foot traffic of the sower and others, thus making the soil hard-packed and resistant to receiving anything, especially seed. The seed, or Word, since it remains on the surface and left exposed, is quickly snatched away by Satan. This type of soil is representative of a person who is indifferent, or hard-hearted, to the message of Jesus. They hear it, but have no intention of receiving it. No cultivation of the heart takes place in order to make it ready for the seed. The message never penetrates the heart or mind and is left exposed for Satan to quickly come and take it away.

The next type of soil mentioned is labeled, “rocky ground” (Mark 4:5, 16). It is not that this soil has rocks within it, but rather the presence of a layer of limestone sat just beneath a thin covering of topsoil.<sup>41</sup> The interpretation stresses how quickly and joyfully this type of person accepts the Word, but just as quickly, due to shallowness within themselves and pressures from outside of themselves, these people trip and stumble. The Word sown does not take root.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 217.

<sup>41</sup>Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 153-54.

The third type of soil not only has seed sown in it, but also has the seed of thorns sown in it as well. As the seed of the Word grows, so too do the weeds and thorns grow around it. This soil represents the heart of a person who hears the Word, but the comforts, cash, and cares of the world strangle the Word so that it is not productive.

The fourth type of soil is labeled as “good soil.” This can only mean that it is good in comparison to the other three types. It is not hard-packed soil; it is not shallow soil with a rocky layer underneath that prevents roots going deep; nor is it soil where weeds grow. As a result, this type of person “hears the word, accepts it and bears fruit, thirtyfold, and sixtyfold and a hundredfold” (Mark 4:20).

So is this just a parable stating the hard facts of life? Are these simply the different types of hearts there are and it is merely the luck of the draw as to which type a person receives? Of course not. The parable serves to explain why some reject and others embrace the kingdom of God as revealed in Jesus. The parable demonstrates that the major difference between insiders and outsiders is directly related to how they hear the Word. The parable spurs on Jesus’ disciples and Mark’s readers to make sure their hearts are continually good soil. How do they do this? They do this by making sure their hearts are open and willing to receive the Word. They do this by understanding that in truly receiving the Word, tribulation and persecution will arise. Having one’s heart prepared as good soil does not protect a person from the trials of life, but instead trusts the truth of the Word and uses it as an anchor to steady himself during the storm. Living on the “inside” of the kingdom does not mean weeds and thorns will not attempt to grow, but rather the person living in the kingdom will do the work of weeding out the cares of the world before they overshadow God’s Word. Preparing one’s heart to be good soil for the reception of the Word means valuing the content of the Word, namely Jesus, as greater than the contents of the world. When a person cultivates their heart to hear from God’s Word and accepts the truth from God’s Word, fruit will be produced in his life.

To drive home the need for preparing the heart, right after the interpretation of the soils Jesus says, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away” (Mark 4:24). In other words, what a person brings to a sermon (openness, humbleness, seriousness, willingness) determines what a person will take away from the sermon.

More weight lands on the necessity of preparing to hear the Word of God when one considers the two other seed parables in Mark 4. One parable alludes to the kingdom’s undiscernable growth (Mark 4:26-29). The next parable speaks of the kingdom’s tiny beginning but substantial maturation. The entire chapter addresses a misconception commonly held in Jesus’ day about the kingdom of God. The arrival of the kingdom was anticipated by the people to be with much fanfare and instant conquest. However, in this chapter, Jesus highlights for his disciples the kingdom’s small beginning, seeming vulnerability, and hiddenness, but also the kingdom’s ultimate remarkable harvest. Thus the importance of paying attention of how one hears.

### **The Proof of Listening to Biblical Preaching**

The work of listening does not end when the sermon is over. Instead, the Bible presents listening as complete when biblical truth is obeyed in faith. A heart that is prepared to hear the Word of God yields proof that it has truly heard. In the parable of the soils, the proof is a bountiful harvest that is produced by means of the seed being in good soil.

The concept of listening finding its completion in obedience is seen in the Hebrew word, *shamea*. The word can be understood as “to hear” or “to obey.”<sup>42</sup> In

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<sup>42</sup>Robert Young, *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), s.vv. “hear,” “obey.”



Jeremiah 11:3-4, the Lord says, “Cursed be the man who does not hear (*shamea*) the words of this covenant that I commanded your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Listen (*shamea*) to my voice, and do all that command you.” The curse is not for someone who simply does not hear the words of the covenant being spoken. The curse, rather, is on those who hear but do not obey.

Additionally, in Genesis 3:17, when God confronts Adam and Eve and pronounces a curse upon each of them, Adam’s curse is “because you have listened to the voice of your wife *and* have eaten of the tree.”<sup>43</sup> God’s curse is not because of two sins Adam committed (listening and obeying), but rather that Adam’s listening was completed in obeying the voice of his wife.

Listening finding its completion in obedience is also seen in Hebrew poetry and parallelism. One Old Testament example is found in 1 Samuel 15, where King Saul received a battle plan for war with the Amalekites from Samuel. The instructions were to kill Amalek and destroy all that the Amalekites have. When Saul returns, boasting in his obedience, Samuel asks, “What then is the bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen I hear?” (1 Sam 15:14). Saul stumbles for an answer, to which Samuel responds, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of the rams” (1 Sam 15:22). In this verse, listening and obedience are tethered to one another in a parallelism.<sup>44</sup> Where there is no obedience, true listening has not taken place.

### **Understand the Demand**

In the New Testament, James, the brother of Jesus, makes clear the concept of

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<sup>43</sup>Emphasis added.

<sup>44</sup>David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 401-2.

obedient listening in his brief letter to the twelve dispersed tribes of Israel. Pinning James' original readers down to a particular context and situation proves difficult, given that the introduction of his audience as "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion," is general (Jas 1:1). However, no trouble exists in discerning major themes of the letter, i.e., faith and works, speech, suffering, prayer, and wisdom. Martin Dibelius tries to make the case that "not every admonition in James is prompted by a concrete situation in the life of the church," but instead the author addressed a Christianity that was drifting towards a lifestyle that looked more like the world than Christ.<sup>45</sup> Working against Dibelius' case, Peter Davids notes that since the depiction of the different groups of people are specific, then knowledge of the original readers' *sitz im leben* is possible.<sup>46</sup> If the material of James' letter is traditional material that he picked up from some other source, then the material casts light on the situation when the material was originally formed instead of James' original readers. But since James addressed wealthy merchants who had forgotten the Lord in their daily affairs (Jas 4:13-17), and wealthy farmers who oppressed their workers, he must know something of a specific situation concerning his readers. To make generalities about wealthy merchants and farmers presumes too much.

Knowing that James focused on a particular audience for this letter brings weight to the argument that James does not just pass on loosely connected proverbial advice. Rather, James put together an argument for wise living that is rooted in listening to God's Word.<sup>47</sup> James' desired for his audience to possess a wise and active faith that

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<sup>45</sup>Martin Dibelius, *James*, trans. Michael A. Williams, Hermenia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 46.

<sup>46</sup>Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greet Testament Commentary (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1982), 34.

<sup>47</sup>Two of the major concerns addressed in James are the use of speech and having a faith that works versus a faith that is dead. Both of these concerns are mentioned in this section of Scripture, and both find their genesis in a right hearing of God's Word.

springs forth from listening to God's Word.

Kurt A. Richardson writes in his commentary on James, "Wherever wisdom is the goal, hearing will be a first virtue."<sup>48</sup> James introduced this "first virtue" of hearing in 1:19: "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." James' demand for being quick to listen versus quick to speak stems from what he has written in the previous section (1:2-18). There, James noted the presence of suffering (2-4), instability (5-8), poverty (9), and temptation (13-15), all of which have the potential for producing division, hastiness in speech towards God and man, and anger. To protect against these things, and to cultivate harmony, James told his audience that God, the giver of every good gift and the one who is immutable in character, "brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (1:18). In this imagery, the Word of truth is pictured as a seed that springs forth in life, which is similar to Jesus' parable of the soils.<sup>49</sup> In the parable, the seed (Word) that is planted in good soil (a prepared heart ready to hear) brings forth a harvest. In James' letter, how will the seed (Word) bring forth firstfruits? Verse 19 answers this very question—"let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (Jas 1:19). The verse is not general advice casually tossed into the community of believers. Verse 19 is a spiritual warfare strategy designed to counter the wavering, oppression, and temptation experienced by James' readers, and to produce a harvest of joy in the believer.

James not only makes reference to the implanted Word that his readers are to be quick to hear (Jas 1:18, 21), but also to the preparation process for hearing, which, again,

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<sup>48</sup>Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, The New American Commentary, vol. 36. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 88-89.

<sup>49</sup>Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 49-52. McCartney shows the parallels existing between the teachings of Jesus in the synoptic tradition and the epistle of James, particularly Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

echoes the parable of the soils. In James 1:21, he instructs his readers how to be quick to listen: “Put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” As stated previously, one of the keys to biblical listening is preparing the heart to hear, which includes repenting and forsaking sin, as well as making room in one’s heart to receive God’s Word in faith.

### **Heed the Danger**

A warning in verse 22 follows the exhortation in verses 19-21 to hear and receive, explaining what it means to “receive” the implanted Word. The warning establishes the idea of listening as being a dynamic activity rather than a static one: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” If the hearing does not translate into transformation, then the hearing has not been perfected, or completed, and the hearer has deceived himself.

“Deceive” is used in one other place in the New Testament, Colossians 2:4. In both instances, the idea can be to deceive, delude, or defraud.<sup>50</sup> The question oftentimes asked of 1:22 is, “What is the deception?” Help in understanding what the deception is referring to comes in the form of an illustration in 1:23-25:

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

The analogy of a man looking into a mirror and forgetting what he looks like parallels to a person who is a hearer only, and not a doer. Mirrors in the ancient world were not hanging around the house, thus it is not unlikely that most people were somewhat unfamiliar with the appearance of their own faces.<sup>51</sup> So when the opportunity

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<sup>50</sup>Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 768.

<sup>51</sup>McCartney, *James*, 121.

arose for one to look at himself in a mirror, they might “look intently” at their “natural face.” Literally translated, this phrase reads, “A man who looks at the face of his origin.” The idea is that a man who looks into a mirror sees himself as he really exists, or appears. The man in verse 23 sees himself as he really exists, walks away and immediately forgets his true appearance.

It seems difficult to imagine how a person who rarely sees his image in a mirror can forget what that appearance truly is. However, what is embedded in the word “forget” is more than just a lack of ability to remember. McCartney notes that “ἐπιλανθάνομαι” carries with it the idea of disregard.<sup>52</sup> So a man who hears only is like a man who sees his face in a mirror as it really exists, and then neglects, or cares nothing about his true existence.<sup>53</sup>

The illustration begins to unfold when verse 25 reveals the identity of the mirror as the “perfect law, the law of liberty” (Jas 1:25). When a person looks into God’s Word, then a true reflection of themselves emerges. One who is a hearer only, hears the Word preached, which reveals his true nature as filthy and wicked (Jas 1:21), and God’s true nature as holy, righteous, and just. Yet, this revelation makes no identifiable change in the person’s life due to the neglect of his true condition. It is of no consequence to him. The exhortation is simple. If God’s Word continually makes no identifiable impact on a person’s life, there should be no expectation of God’s blessing. Additionally, there is much reason to question the authenticity of their profession of faith if one was made.

### **Listen to Do**

The illustration of the mirror also describes the person who responds to the hearing of the Word, or as he mentioned in verse 21, “receives” the word.

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 374.

James described the process of receiving was to be done ἐν πραύτητι (with meekness) (Jas 1:21). Some debate exists as to whether this attitude of meekness modifies “put off” or “welcome.” Most commentators view ἐν πραύτητι as modifying δέξασθε (receive). McKnight makes a syntactical case for associating ἐν πραύτητι with ἀποθέμενοι (put off), citing how the phrase is used in other parts of Scripture.<sup>54</sup> If the attitude of meekness is associated with repenting and forsaking sin (putting off), then the person is already responding to God’s Word with meekness. The argument really implies that both the putting off of sinfulness and welcoming the Word is done in meekness.

A person who receives the Word with meekness, clears out sinfulness and makes room in his heart to surrender to God’s Word in faith, which leads to action. The proof of his hearing is seen in his action, and he “will be blessed in his doing” (Jas 1:25).

### **Conclusion**

God is in the communication business. He makes it his priority to speak his Word of special revelation. Man’s priority is to listen. But man is separated from God, unwilling to hear God’s good news and live for God’s good purposes. To overcome man’s stubbornness, and in his sovereignty and grace, God alone opens up the human ear so that a person can respond to the gospel message in repentance and faith in Jesus. Every act of communication between God and the believer finds its purpose in bringing man ultimate joy in the glory of God. But in order to be abundantly receptive to God’s continual message through proclamation, man must view the hearing of God’s Word as a priority and its purposes as good. When this perspective is embraced, the believer will be quick to do the work of preparing his heart to receive and respond to the Word with gladness.

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<sup>54</sup>Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans), 142.

## CHAPTER 3

### EFFECTIVE LISTENING TO BIBLICAL PREACHING INCREASES DISCIPLESHIP IN THE CHURCH

Now that the theological foundation for listening has been established, it is time to examine the connection between listening to preaching and discipleship within the church. Not only does effective listening to biblical preaching play a significant role in an individual's walk with Christ, but true biblical listening results in greater discipleship within the church as well.

#### **Effective Listening to Biblical Preaching Births Discipleship in the Church**

Listening is not all that is involved in discipleship. Hands-on training was part of Jesus' discipleship curriculum, as was allowing his disciples to learn from their mistakes. However, none of these discipleship tools are effective without effective listening. Even responding to the initial call to come and follow Jesus begins with listening.

Paul makes clear the necessity of listening for the beginning of a disciple's walk with Christ when he pleads, "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? . . . So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:14, 17). In the letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul asks the rhetorical question, "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?" (Gal 3:2).

Roger E. Van Harn in his book *Pew Rights* states, "When we listen to a sermon

*we have the right to sit at the center of the church's mission.*"<sup>1</sup> Drawing this statement from Paul's plea in Romans 10:14-17 for the church to be a sending agent, Van Harn argues that Paul specifies a proper order for the church and a proper order for salvation. The church's order consists of sending, preaching, and hearing. The salvation order is made up of hearing, believing, and calling. "Hearing," writes Van Harn, "stands at the center between preaching and believing. It fulfills the purpose of the sending and makes possible our calling on the name of the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

So entering into a covenant relationship with Jesus begins with hearing the proclamation of the gospel. But until the disciple of Jesus understands that listening is a skill to sharpen, he will be slow to grow as a disciple. The disciple must come to the realization that listening is a main highway to learning, and being a learner is the mark of being a disciple.

### **Listening Is Learning**

The human ear displays the creative genius of God. No other man-made instrument comes close to demonstrating the capabilities that the human ear can achieve. However, the goal of this project is not to improve upon the biological aspect of hearing, but rather to increase listening. Emilia Hardman draws a careful distinction between hearing and listening in *Active Listening 101*:

When we say we heard someone tell a particular story before or we heard something like a noise in the basement, it merely indicates that we processed the information. Sound waves entered our auditory canal and traveled via impulses to the brain. But, we need to take this one step further and ask ourselves, "Did we listen?" . . . Listening includes four stages of hearing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding to what was heard."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Roger E. Van Harn, *Pew Rights: For People Who Listen to Sermons* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>3</sup>Emilia Hardman, *Active Listening 101: How to Turn Down Your Volume to*



Madelyn Burley-Allen describes listening as a “more sophisticated mental process than hearing. It demands energy and discipline.”<sup>4</sup> In the book *Helping Johnny Listen: Taking Full Advantage of the Sermons We Hear*, Thadeus L. Bergmeier, after giving definitions for hearing, listening, and obedience, states that “listening, then, is the hinge upon which hearing becomes obedience.”<sup>5</sup>

Mary and Martha serve as a good example of the distinction between hearing and listening. Luke 10:38-42 records the story of Jesus and his disciples spending time in the home of his friends Mary and Martha. Martha was “distracted with much serving,” while Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching.” Undoubtedly, Martha heard through the faculty of hearing the sounds and voices and words that were being produced by Jesus, but she was not interpreting, evaluating, or responding to them. Mary, however, was paying close attention to Jesus’ words, and she received the adulation from Jesus of having chosen the good portion.

Perhaps it is true, as many parents and teachers have stated, that God gave two ears and one mouth because he wants man to listen twice as much as he talks. However, the skill of listening is strangely underdeveloped. When the amount of time used for listening within the communication process is compared with the amount of training in listening one receives in school, or any other place for that matter, it becomes glaringly obvious that a major oversight has taken place within the education system. Ralph Nichols reports on a study completed in 1929 that revealed that 70 percent of the subjects waking hours were spent in verbal communication. Out of that 70 percent of verbal

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*Turn Up Your Communication Skills*, ebook (n.p.: self-published, 2012), 135, Kindle.

<sup>4</sup>Madelyn Burley-Allen, *Listening, The Forgotten Skill: A Self-Teaching Guide* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 3, Kindle.

<sup>5</sup>Thadeus L. Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny Listen: Taking Full Advantage of the Sermons We Hear* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), xiii.

communication time, 45 percent was spent in listening, 30 percent in talking, 16 percent in reading, and 9 percent in writing.<sup>6</sup> Nichols discovered that in Detroit public schools, reading received 52 percent of the emphasis in classroom instruction, while training in listening received only 8 percent of the emphasis. This research was confirmed years later when Madelyn Burley-Allen released her book *Listening, The Forgotten Skill*. In the book Burley-Allen reported that listening is the channel most often used for learning, more than reading, writing, or speaking, yet listening receives the least amount of training, as demonstrated by table 1.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1. Years of training versus time used for each mode of communication

Mode of Communication	Formal Years of Training	Percentage of Time Used
Writing	12 years	9%
Reading	6-8 years	16%
Speaking	1-2 years	35%
Listening	0-1/2 years	40%

The myth seems to be that if a person is born with the faculty to hear, then he knows how to utilize the skill of listening. This simply is not the case. Not only does a person's lack of training in listening skills affect their ability to listen well and learn, so too does their social upbringing affect their listening. For example, when a baby lying in a crib cries out, a parent usually comes to check on her. The message the baby receives is that making noise produces more rewards than listening.<sup>8</sup> As that child grows, she receives all sorts of information about her role in the communication process, such as

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<sup>6</sup>Ralph Nichols, *Are You Listening?* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957), 6.

<sup>7</sup>Burley-Allen, *Listening, The Forgotten Skill*, 38.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 22.

“children are to be seen and not heard,” or “don’t argue with me,” or “don’t speak until you are spoken to,” or even “be quiet and listen.”<sup>9</sup> Even though these appear to be harmless messages, they shape one’s attitude towards the importance of listening. These messages to children implicitly champion the spoken word as the locus of control, power, and authority, of which they are not old enough to obtain. Their job is to listen. However, if good listening skills are not modeled for them, how will they learn to listen? Furthermore, if being listened to as a child is perceived by that child as an unpleasant task, that child is taught that listening itself is unpleasant. Continuing with this thought, Burley-Allen writes,

The way in which adults listen to children tells children something about themselves. Parents who interrupt their children, look stern while listening, ignore their children’s feelings, or turn away when their children are talking send a message that what the children have to say is stupid or unimportant. . . . Studies show that when people are anxious or worried about approval, they have trouble concentrating on what is said.<sup>10</sup>

A person’s training in listening, or lack of, along with their social upbringing regarding the importance of listening, impacts their ability to learn. Hardman states, “Listening is also a means to learning. So, it follows that the better you listen, the more you can learn.”<sup>11</sup> “To be a good listener,” writes Nichols, “we must apply certain skills that have to be learned. . . . If a person hasn’t acquired these listening skills, his ability to *understand what he hears* will be low.”<sup>12</sup> Burley-Allen claims, “Improving how we listen in class often means better grades.” She also relates listening well to better job performance:

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>11</sup> Hardman, *Active Listening 101*, 31

<sup>12</sup> Nichols, *Are You Listening*, 7, emphasis added.

Employees frequently have excellent ideas about improving productivity of the work environment. Managers who listen for these ideas solve more problems than those who do not. These managers create a sense of concern for their staff while *receiving* better-quality information.<sup>13</sup>

Writing more from the relational benefits of listening, Michael P. Nichols declares, “A listener’s empathy—grasping what we’re trying to say and showing it—builds a bond of *understanding*.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Disciples Begin Learning through Listening**

Obviously, listening is a crucial aspect of the communication process, but often overlooked as a skill that is to be learned. Yet when this skill is learned, it increases the ability to learn. If effective listening increases learning, then every disciple needs to listen well because, by definition, every disciple is a learner.<sup>15</sup>

Effectively listening to biblical preaching must be a priority for the follower of Christ because listening is a primary task of a disciple of Christ. In Thabiti Anyabwile’s book *What Is a Healthy Church Member*, the first chapter is entitled “A Healthy Church Member is an Expository Listener.”<sup>16</sup> By positioning this particular chapter as the first one, Anyabwile emphasizes that listening to biblical preaching is paramount in the life of a disciple. In John Stott’s *The Contemporary Christian*, the first section directed to the disciple is labeled “The Listening Ear.” Before addressing the mind and emotions, ministry, or even the fruit of the Spirit, Stott supports the primacy for effective listening:

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<sup>13</sup>Burley-Allen, *Listening, The Forgotten Skill*, 7-8, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup>Michael P. Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships* (New York: Guilford, 1995), 9, Kindle, emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup>Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), s.v. “Μαθητης.”

<sup>16</sup>Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 19.

“One of the most important—and most neglected—ingredients of the Christian discipleship is the cultivation of a listening ear. Bad listeners do not make good disciples.”<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the Bible, transformational events in the lives of God’s people carry a call to listen effectively. As Moses prepared the people for entering the Promised Land, God punctuated Moses’ message with exhortations for the Israelites to hear or listen to God’s Word (Deut 4:1, 10, 5:1, 6:3-4). Equating their very life with their ability to listen and respond to God’s Word in Deuteronomy 8:3, Moses wrote, “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” After the settlement of the Promised Land, God continued to call his people to listen to him, as Psalm 81:8 indicates when it says, “Hear, O my people, while I admonish you! O Israel, if you would but listen to me!”<sup>18</sup>

Both Matthew and Luke place Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount as the first major teaching section in their gospels. Both gospel writers emphasize that Jesus preached this sermon to his disciples (Matt 5:1; Luke 6:20), and both conclude with the call for the disciples to hear and obey (Matt 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49).

The Synoptic Gospels record the transfiguration of Jesus in the presence of his closest disciples (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-35). Standing in the glorious presence of the transfigured Christ, God the Father intensifies the moment by enveloping Jesus, along with Moses and Elijah, in a cloud of his manifest presence and says to the disciples, “This is my Son, my chosen One; listen to him!” (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 10:35).

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<sup>17</sup>John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1957), 101.

<sup>18</sup>John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 111.

Many commentators see in this scene an obvious allusion to Deuteronomy 18:15, with Jesus being the eschatological prophet like Moses to whom Israel must listen. However, what makes this scene even more pertinent to discipleship and listening is what precedes it. In each of the Synoptics, just before his transfiguration, Jesus declares what he must suffer at the hands of the religious leaders of Jerusalem. In light of this reality Jesus also defines the task of anyone who wants to be his disciple: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

Drawing the connection between the task of discipleship and the command to listen to Jesus, William L Lane writes, “The exhortation has bearing upon all of Jesus’ words, but has particular relevance to the new instruction Jesus had been giving to his followers concerning the necessity of his sufferings and of their participation in his humiliation.”<sup>19</sup> According to God’s words at the transfiguration, disciples fulfill their task of following Jesus by constantly listening to Jesus. The reason a person would “take up their cross and follow” Jesus is if they have listened to him, understanding and embracing him as their Lord. It is effective listening that leads to learning, which results in discipleship.

Listening as the kickstarting element in discipleship comes across in Jesus’ teaching as well. In John 10:16, Jesus says, “And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” Continuing this picture of the sheep and shepherd, in 10:27 Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

A person cannot begin a journey of faith in Jesus without “ears to hear.”

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<sup>19</sup>William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 321.

Listening is paramount to the birth of a disciple. But effective listening is also a necessary element that continues the discipleship process in the church.

### **Effective Listening to Biblical Preaching Continues Discipleship in the Church**

Churches usually promote some sort of discipleship program as the means of leading people down the path of spiritual maturity. Whether or not preaching shows up in the brochure of available discipleship options, it is an essential part of the discipleship process in the life of a follower of Christ. The apostle Paul makes clear the need for preaching when he gives Timothy the order to “preach the Word” (2 Tim 4:2). The context surrounding this order connects preaching to discipleship. Paul’s days were numbered. He knew his time for departure was close at hand, and he wanted to communicate some essential encouragement to his son in the faith, Timothy. So Paul tells Timothy the basis of teaching, reproving, correcting, and training in righteousness in order to produce competent and equipped followers of Christ is the Word of God. He then tells Timothy to preach this Word. Preaching shapes the minds, hearts, attitudes, and actions of those who walk with Christ. This is discipleship.

All of discipleship is not bound up in preaching, but preaching holds an essential part in helping create what Mike Breen and Steve Cockram call “life-long learners of Jesus.”<sup>20</sup> A life-long learner of Jesus knows how to learn from and follow Jesus because someone taught them how to learn from and follow Jesus. Producing life-long learners of Jesus achieves the Great Commission task of making disciples by teaching people to observe all that Jesus commanded. In this case, biblical preachers play the role in producing life-long learners of Jesus. After all, the pulpit was made for the

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<sup>20</sup>Mike Breen and Steve Cockram, *Building a Discipleship Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 246, Kindle.

pew, not the other way around. Preaching is not designed so that pew-sitters can be dazzled by the pulpiteer's excellency of speech, but rather, preaching is designed to be a means of helping and equipping people to grow in Christ-likeness.

Scott Attebery clarifies an often misconstrued aspect of the Great Commission by delineating between exhaustive and productive learning:

Jesus does not call believers to “teach them all things” but to “teach them to *observe* all things.” The former requires the discipleship process to continue until the disciple has exhaustive knowledge. The latter requires the disciple to acquire the productive skill of learning.<sup>21</sup>

Part of the productive skill of learning is learning to listen well. When effective listening is coupled with biblical preaching, the listener receives tools that equip him to be a life-long learner of Christ. Those tools include learning where to find spiritual food and learning how to digest it.

### **Biblical Preaching Leads Listeners to Green Grass**

The apostle Peter describes the task of the elder as that of a shepherd (1 Pet 5:1). One of the roles of a shepherd of a flock is to lead that flock to places of green pasture so the sheep graze and eat. The same is true of the pastor when he preaches. He is to lead his flock to spiritual pastures where their souls are filled with nourishment. The green grass that biblical preachers should always lead their listeners to is the Word of God, since this is where listeners encounter God as he has revealed himself.

The biblical preacher does not have anything to offer his listeners except the Word of God, and because of that, effective listeners learn over time that the scriptures suffice to be the diet of the life-long learner of Christ. The charge of the biblical preacher

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<sup>21</sup>Scott Attebery, “Disciples for Life: Maximizing Explicit Discipleship Training to Create Life-Long Learners of Christ” (D.Min. project, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2014), 29.



is not to preach his own ideas about life or God, but to faithfully present, explain, and apply what God has said through a grammatical, historical, and literary study of a biblical passage in its context.<sup>22</sup>

Scripture remains the biblical preacher's source of spiritual nourishment for his listeners because it is in the scriptures that they discover the glory of God displayed in Jesus Christ. What listeners need every time the preacher opens his Bible is to see and hear about the glory of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Even though every passage of scripture does not present the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in full color, every complete passage does shed light on an aspect of our fallen nature.<sup>23</sup> As depressing as this may seem, the truth is that man's sinfulness is kept in focus only because it leads to the glorious reality of the gospel.

The effective listener who sits under preaching that always has the meaning of the Word of God as its message, and is biblically faithful in drawing the hearer to Jesus, learns that their spiritual food is Jesus. As Jesus said, "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me" (John 6:57).

### **Biblical Preaching Teaches Effective Listeners How to Feed Themselves**

When a person is spiritually prepared, week after week, to listen to the Word of God from the man of God, he will begin to identify key traits of the preacher's message. Not only does biblical preaching lead effective listeners to the greenest of grass,

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<sup>22</sup>Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 20.

<sup>23</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 267. The claim made by Chapell that every passage of scripture highlights some aspect of man's fallen condition is what he calls the "fallen condition focus."

biblical preaching also teaches the effective listener how to properly feed on the grass. When a biblical preacher discerningly draws out a passage's main point through careful exegesis and also diligently applies that truth, he implicitly teaches those who are paying attention how to feed off of God's Word. Every biblical sermon will contain several of the same characteristics that listeners can learn to use in their own personal study, which equips them to be life-long learners of Jesus.

**The characteristics of discernment.** One characteristic of biblical preaching is the exercise of discernment. In 1 Kings 3:9, Solomon makes the request of an understanding mind so that he can discern between what is good and evil. According to Keil and Delitzsch, the word for "understanding mind" can be translated as a "listening heart."<sup>24</sup> On any given sermon preached, the biblical preacher pleads to God for an understanding mind and uses spiritual discernment, or a listening heart, in deciding on an interpretation and application of a text. However, the preacher knows that his interpretation is not always flawless, and will encourage his listeners to test what he says with their own study. The skill of discernment is one that is critical to the life-long learner of Jesus and one that the preacher should encourage in his listeners.

In encouraging the use of an inquisitive mind, and even tying it to the role of the pastor, John Stott writes,

We who are called to be Christian preachers today should do all we can to help the congregation to grow out of dependence on borrowed slogans and ill-considered clichés, and instead to develop their powers of intellectual and moral criticism, that is, their ability to distinguish between truth and error, good and evil. . . . This kind of open but questioning mind is implicit even in the 'pastoral' metaphor. Sheep, it is true, are often described as "docile" creatures, which may be so, but they are

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<sup>24</sup>C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: 1 and 2 Kings & 1 and 2 Chronicles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1866), 31, quoted in Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 20-21.

fairly discriminating in what they eat, and are certainly not uncritically omnivorous like goats.<sup>25</sup>

The exercise of discernment by a congregation is exemplified by the Bereans in Acts 17. They were called “noble” because they eagerly received Paul’s teaching, but then did their own follow up study in Scripture to verify the truth of Paul’s preaching (Acts 17:10-12).

Paul instructs the church at Thessalonica to “test everything,” keeping hold of what turns out to be good and shunning what turns out to be evil (1 Thess 5:21). The root word of “test” is δοκιμάζω, which carries the idea of examine or discern. Tim Challies in his book on spiritual discernment observes that all things that pertain to the Christian life and faith need to be tested. Since the Christian life is related to all of life, and since no one contains perfect knowledge on any area of life, then the disciple of Christ needs to exercise the skill of discernment in every area of life.<sup>26</sup>

The author of Hebrews connects the use and growth of discernment with effective listening to biblical preaching. In Hebrews 5:11-14, the author writes,

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

The hearers addressed in the book of Hebrews were not spiritually immature because of an inability to learn, but rather their immaturity was a consequence of an unwillingness to listen effectively. The author calls this dull, or sluggish, hearing.

As a result of their dull hearing, they were also unskilled in the “word of righteousness,” which, in this context, refers to the dull hearers’ inability to make

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<sup>25</sup>Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 177.

<sup>26</sup>Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, 83.

righteous and wise decisions on their own.<sup>27</sup> Just like a baby needs someone to feed him milk, so too do the spiritually immature need someone to make decisions for them.

On the other hand, the spiritually mature are those who constantly employ their powers of discernment. The only way he can employ powers of discernment is if he has first effectively listened to the Word of God preached and extrapolated techniques for learning from God's Word. When this is done, he is enabled to continually feast on the solid food of Christ, which nourishes the soul.

**The characteristic of contextual study.** Another trait of biblical preaching the effective listener will notice is that the sermon is anchored in context. No biblical text for preaching is interpreted or explained apart from an understanding of its historical, grammatical, or literary context. An effective listener picks up on this trait. Undoubtedly this is part of the discernment process that was praised in the Bereans. They examined the scriptures to see if what Paul said concerning the Christ and his necessity to suffer and rise from the dead was contextually accurate.

When an effective, spiritually-prepared listener is consistently exposed to preaching that is rooted in historical, grammatical, and literary contexts, he knows that the authority the preacher derives is not from the preacher himself, but from the text: "If preachers wish to preach with divine authority, they must submit themselves, their thoughts and opinions, to the Scriptures and echo the word of God."<sup>28</sup> Thus, the listener is trained to rely upon the authority of Scripture discovered through contextual study in his personal Bible study.

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<sup>27</sup>William Hendricksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 151-52.

<sup>28</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 12-13.

**The characteristic of application.** Not only are biblical sermons preached in context, but biblical sermons also move “from doctrinal exposition to life instruction.”<sup>29</sup> Application answers the question, “so what?” of the biblical truth. God’s Word was not delivered to man so that man can simply learn, but rather so that man could be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Constantly having the Word of God applied to their life through preaching teaches effective listeners to be diligent in application, thus fulfilling the command to observe all things that Jesus commands.

### **Biblical Preaching Expects Effective Listeners to Disciple Others**

A church never wants to be described like God described Ezekiel’s congregation:

As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, “Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.” And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it. (Ezek 33:30-32)

The sad commentary on churches in a highly customized and self-centered culture, however, is that many church members come to be entertained by the music and amused by the stories they hear in the preaching. When a church member approaches a service with this attitude, they can feel that the service is geared towards them to do with what they please, not expecting consequence from the church for living contrary to the message of the gospel. Perhaps just as damaging to the church are those who come to be spiritually uplifted, but have no intention in engaging in the life of the church. As Michael Fabarez writes, “Today, more than ever, people want a church (and a god) that

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 45.

doesn't expect much from them.”<sup>30</sup> They believe that their faith is a personal matter that they can tinker with and adjust according to what suits them, but the pastor, and especially the church body, has no business meddling in such a personal matter.

To take it a step further, in today's advanced society, one does not even have to go to church to hear biblical preaching. From the comfort of their bedroom, they can pop in ear buds and tune to a favorite preacher via podcast without having to worry about the accountability of a church family.

A privatized faith, however, is nowhere to be found on the pages of the New Testament. When Paul looks for metaphors for the church he rarely describes her as a single entity. Rather most of his metaphors are many parts that make up one entity. For example, he describes the local church as one body made up of many parts working together (1 Cor 12:12-30), one building being built up and growing together (Eph 2:20-22), and one flock with a shepherd (1 Pet 5:1). None of these images present a privatized faith that is to be lived out in isolation from other brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, Hebrews says that faithfulness to the church should increase with each passing day (Heb 10:24).

Part of that faithfulness to one another in the church is the aspect of accountability. The church made up of effective listeners realizes that there are other brothers and sisters who have encountered the same Word of God. They are now accountable to one another, to some degree, for its outworking in their lives.

In an interview with Thad Bergmeier, he stated that being present with other church members under the same preaching with a live preacher is needful because “when a person is in spiritual community, there is encouragement. It is one aspect of God being

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<sup>30</sup>Michael Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 173.

involved in their life, as is the Tuesday lunch with a small group member.”<sup>31</sup>

In Romans 15:14, Paul was convinced that such good listening had taken place in the church at Rome that they could instruct one another. He says that they were “filled with all knowledge,” but certainly he was not referring to his letter as that which filled them with knowledge because he is referring to them as already filled. Rather, he must be referring to their hearing and embracing biblical preaching. Additionally, the author of Hebrews fully expected his listeners to teach others, but because of their dullness of hearing, they were still needing to be taught themselves (Heb 5:11-12). Yet the implication is clear—effective listeners are expected teach and counsel others on how to live the Christian life, which is discipleship.

### **Effective Listening Encourages the Pastor to Greater Passion for Preaching**

Discipleship is a never-ending learning cycle. Since God is infinite and his wisdom is inexhaustible, disciples will be learners for eternity.<sup>32</sup> The more a disciple abides in Christ, the more room God creates in the disciple’s life for love and knowledge of Christ. The practical outworking of this process can take place within the church.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul expresses his gratitude to the church at Thessalonica by saying that he repeatedly was grateful to God for them. The reason for Paul’s thankfulness was not the reception that the church gave to Paul and his companions, but rather the reception the church gave to the preaching of Paul and his companions: “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess 2:13).

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<sup>31</sup>Thadeus Bergmeier, telephone interview by author, May 6, 2014.

<sup>32</sup>Attebery, “Disciples for Life,” 32

No wonder Paul was desperate to return to that church. He wanted to preach to a room full of spiritually-prepared listeners. He had a word of encouragement and hope for them in their time of suffering and affliction that he was sure they would embrace and employ in their lives as disciples of Christ (1 Thess 2:14; 3:1-5).

When a pastor knows that he is preaching to active, prepared listeners, whether there be a roomful or just a handful, his passion for preaching skyrockets. Ken Ramey remarked that knowing he has “expository listeners” motivates him to study harder and prepare better for his sermons.<sup>33</sup> This, in turn, brings well-prepared spiritual food to the Sunday morning preaching event on which the prepared listeners feed.

From here, discipleship within the church spirals to ever deepening depths. The spiritually-prepared preacher brings to the preaching event a Spirit-saturated sermon. The spiritually-prepared listener intensely feeds on the Word preached. The preacher sees this taking place during the sermon, but also knows that effective listeners are working the truth into their lives during the week. This reality encourages him to be diligent in his sermon preparation for the next week. It also convicts him of the gravity of the task of delivering the life-giving Word of God.

The preaching of the Word from the pulpit and the discipleship of the people in the pew are connected at the point of effective listening. When the person in the pew has as his aim biblical listening, discipleship will be the result.

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<sup>33</sup>Ken Ramey, telephone interview by author, April 8, 2014.



## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS OF THE MINISTRY RESEARCH PROJECT

The ministry research project revolved around two main elements: a two-part sermon series followed by an eight-part teaching series. The sermon series, preached to the church, introduced the topic of effective listening. The teaching series included those who, after hearing the sermon series, desired to learn more and gain skills concerning the spiritual discipline of effective listening. The tools of measurement for the project consisted of a ministry project team, a curriculum rubric, pre-test and post-test surveys, and an exit survey. These tools were used to measure the project's three main goals: (1) to develop an eight-week discipleship class that covered spiritual and practical disciplines that make a believer more effective at listening to biblical preaching; (2) to provide a biblical theology of listening in order to show the responsibility of the one who listens to sermons, thereby exposing the need to become a more effective listener; and (3) to teach the eight-week discipleship class based upon the research of the development process in order to equip participants with listening skills.

#### **Scheduling of the Project**

The two-part sermon series was preached on the first two Sundays in June. The eight-part teaching series began the following Wednesday night and lasted through the month of July. A timeline of the project's various details consisted of the following:

1. May 19—Assemble the Ministry Project Team
2. May 19—Began developing eight-part teaching series
3. May 25—Administered survey, "For Those Who Listen to Sermons"

4. May 26—Sent eight-part teaching curriculum to Ministry Project Team for evaluation
5. June 1—Begin Sermon Series
6. June 8—Ended Sermon Series
7. June 8—Administered post-sermon series survey, “For Those Who Listen to Sermons”
8. June 11—Administered “Listening Skills” survey
9. June 11—Began teaching eight-part series, “Getting the Most Out of the Sermon”
10. July 30—Completed eight-part teaching series
11. July 30—Administered post-survey, “Listening Skills”
12. August 3-9—Conducted exit interviews of the participants in teaching series

### **Ministry Project Team**

Before any teaching was executed, a ministry project team was assembled in May to serve as evaluators of the eight-part teaching series. This team was comprised of four men and one woman, each having background in Bible curriculum development, teaching of the Bible, and faithful membership in an evangelical church.

The team members were Larry Silvey, Scott Attebery, Mark Livingston, Cindy Williams, and Jimmy Walker. Larry Silvey served as the Executive Director of the publishing arm of the Baptist Missionary Association (B.M.A.). Silvey pastored various churches in Texas and Arkansas, and also taught Bible classes at Central Baptist College in Conway, Arkansas, and Garrett Memorial Christian School in Hope, Arkansas. Scott Attebery serves as the current Executive Director of the publishing ministry (DiscipleGuide Church Ministries) for the BMA, and has also served as a pastor in Arkansas. Mark Livingston is the pastor of Keltys Baptist Church in Lufkin, Texas, and teaches Bible at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Jacksonville, Texas, along with writing curriculum for DiscipleGuide. Cindy Williams currently works for Arkansas State Childhood Services helping create and teach preschool teachers how to become

more effective. She began teaching Sunday school in 1967 and continues to do so. Additionally, Williams helped develop and write Bible training materials for teachers in the United States, Russia, and Ukraine. Jimmy Walker serves as the principal for the Garrett Memorial Christian School, and is actively involved in teaching Sunday school.

Each participant was contacted via email or through a personal request, and the requirements for serving on the team were explained: to evaluate the eight-part teaching series according to a rubric. I emailed the curriculum to each person on the team. The rubrics were returned by the end of May, 2014. I used the results of the evaluation to make adjustments to the curriculum so that it met the standards of the rubric.

### **The Pre-Sermon Series Survey Administered**

The pre-sermon series survey consisted of 4 statements that sought demographic information, 1 question that regarded frequency of church participation, and 28 statements with answers set up according to a 6-point Likert scale. Thirty adults at random were given the survey, so long as they agreed to be present for the two-part sermon series. The survey was designed to evaluate a person's knowledge concerning his responsibility in listening to sermons.

The core of the survey consisted of the 28 statements set up on the 6-point Likert scale. Six statements gauged attitude towards the responsibility of listening, 8 statements gauged practice and habits that influence how one listens to sermons, and 14 statements sought information regarding a person's knowledge of their role as one who listens to biblical preaching.

The pre-sermon series survey was handed out on Sunday, March 25, to over 40 adults (eighteen or older) during the Sunday school hour in hope of receiving back at least 30 correctly and completely filled out surveys. Forty-one surveys were returned.

## **Summary of Sermon Series**

The sermon series focused on 2 Timothy 4:15 with the theme of “Be Careful How You Hear.” Two messages were preached from this passage, each emphasizing why a follower of Christ needs to be careful how they hear sermons. The design of this sermon series was to persuade listeners that they have an active responsibility in listening rather than a passive one. Additionally, the sermon series was designed to stir up a hunger for learning how to be a better listener.

The first sermon covered verses 1-2 and stressed four reasons listeners need to pay attention to how they hear preaching.<sup>1</sup> The four major reasons a listener should pay attention to how they hear included, because of who is present during preaching, the perspective that is to govern preaching, God’s persistence in preaching, and God’s power given to preaching.

The second sermon was devoted to verses 3-5.<sup>2</sup> While the first sermon stressed God’s role in preaching, the second sermon focused on examining the heart that listens to preaching. The examination process is necessary because human passions are a fierce enemy to biblical preaching. They oppose biblical truth. Human passions pursue validation rather than transformation. They also take a person down the path of deception.

## **Post-Sermon Series Survey**

The post-sermon series survey, which was identical to the pre-sermon series survey, was distributed on Sunday, June 8, at the conclusion of the second sermon in the series. Twenty-two church members completed the pre-sermon series survey correctly and attended both sermons of the series were asked to fill out the post-sermon series survey. Using the same survey allowed accurate evaluation of the sermons’

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<sup>1</sup>See appendix 5.

<sup>2</sup>See appendix 6.

effectiveness in attaining the project goals by comparing the pre and post-survey outcomes.

### **Pre-Class Survey**

The pre-class survey consisted of 4 statements that sought demographic information, 1 question that regarded frequency of church participation, and 20 statements with answers set up according to a 6-point Likert scale. The survey, which was distributed to all class participants, was designed to measure the use of listening skills. Seventeen of the statements were related to listening skills currently in use, while 4 of the statements measured knowledge attained while listening.

### **Summary of Class Sessions**

Following the two-part sermon series, an eight-week class entitled, “Getting the Most Out of the Sermon,” was offered that helped participants develop a love for listening to sermons as a means of discipleship by equipping them with tools that helped them get the most out of sermons. Twenty church members participated in the class. Ten of the participants were females and ten were males. Three of the participants have been Christian for at least ten years, while the rest of the participants have been Christians for twenty or more years. This class examined passages from the Old and New Testament that not only stressed the importance of listening to biblical preaching, but also highlighted techniques for anticipating, attending, and applying biblical preaching.

### **Lesson 1**

The first lesson laid the groundwork for the purpose of listening to sermons by examining the purpose of preaching.<sup>3</sup> Using three key teaching points, the lesson defined

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<sup>3</sup>See appendix 7 for outlines of the lessons.

what goes into biblical preaching, the key ingredients of a biblical sermon, and the purpose of preaching. The purpose of listening was drawn from the purpose of preaching.

## **Lesson 2**

The second lesson connected effective listening to biblical discipleship. Four key teaching points were made in order to connect listening to discipleship. First, a disciple was defined as a life-long learner of Jesus. Building upon that it was demonstrated that listening is a major means of learning. Next, the lesson proved how preaching is a means of equipping effective listeners with Bible study tools. The last key teaching point showed from Hebrews 5:11-14 how the author anticipated effective listeners to be disciplemakers.

## **Lesson 3**

Building off of the previous two lessons, the next four lesson equipped participants with effective listening skills. Lesson 3 focused on spiritual disciplines to make a person's heart ready to here. Four key teaching points were highlighted. The parable of the soils in Mark 4 proved that disciples need to prepare their hearts. Various scriptures demonstrated the next three key teaching points, which concerned preparing physically, mentally, and spiritually.

## **Lesson 4**

The fourth class session focused on skills that aid effective listeners during the actual sermon event. Five key teaching points were given, which are the Five S's of listening: Listen with Sweat, Listen Spiritually, Listen Sharply, Listen for the System, and Listen Strategically. Listening with Sweat was derived from the rebuke the Hebrews received in Hebrews 5:11 when they were told that they were "dull of hearing." Listening spiritually reminded the participants that listening to preaching is mainly a spiritual

discipline and that listening is to be done with an open, welcoming heart. Listening sharply refers to the need for discernment displayed by some listeners in Hebrews 5:14 as well as the Jews in Berea in Acts 17-14. Listening for the system means to listen for the type of structure the preacher is using to deliver his sermon. Finally, the key teaching point of listening strategically offered some practical active listening skills such as sitting close to the front to minimize distractions, sitting posture, and taking notes.

### **Lesson 5**

This lesson continued the discussion on attending to the sermon being preached by exposing the participants to two key teaching points. The first key teaching point was to be aware of the filters through which listeners listen. Filters such as ethos, pathos, and logos were discussed. The inherent use of these filters was displayed by showing video of recognizable speakers. Before the video was shown, a picture was shown of the speaker and the group was asked how they thought of the person and how their perspective of the person affected how they would listen to him. The second key teaching point was how to overcome environmental obstacles such as room temperature or distracting people.

### **Lesson 6**

Lesson 6 focused in on the spiritual discipline of applying the sermon. Using three key teaching points, the lesson underscored the necessity of application from both Old and New Testament, a process for application, and finally a plan for application. The bulk of the teaching focused on the process of application. The process for application was developed from the apostle Paul's statement to the church in Thessalonica and how they "received the word, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers." The

process developed from this passage was to R.A.I.D. the word: receive the Word, accept the Word, inspect your heart, do in faith.

### **Lesson 7**

This class session was an extensive review of lessons 3 through 6 in order to ensure the class participants understood all elements and skills for effective listening. At the conclusion of the session, the book of Esther was assigned to be read during their personal devotions and the class was encouraged to use the skills they had learned for anticipating a sermon in order to prepare their hearts for lesson eight.

### **Lesson 8**

Lesson 8 consisted of the class watching Hershael York deliver a sermon entitled, “For Such A Slime As This,” that was preached at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.<sup>4</sup> After the watching the video, the class discussed how the skills of anticipating the sermon affected how they listened. The employment of their newly learned attending skills was also discussed, along with how class members would R.A.I.D. this sermon.

### **Post-Class Survey**

At the conclusion of class session 8, the post-sermon class survey was handed out to the students. When the pre and post-surveys were compared, fifteen of the participants filled out the post-survey completely. Using the same survey allowed accurate evaluation of the sermon’s effectiveness in attaining the project goals by comparing the pre and post-survey outcomes.

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<sup>4</sup>Hershael York, “For Such a Slime as This” (sermon given September 12, 2013, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), accessed July 23 2014, <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/chapel/for-such-a-slime-as-this/>.



### **Post-Class Interview Questions**

After the students completed the post-class survey, they received the post-class questionnaire. This questionnaire measured the immediate use of the listening skills taught in the class by asking the participants how they have employed the skills from two sermons that followed the conclusion of the class. Fifteen of the questionnaires were returned for analysis by Sunday, August 10.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Preaching is one of the main ministries, if not the main ministry, given to the church to help fulfill Jesus' commission of making disciples of all nations. Jesus said in Mark 1:38, "Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." When Jesus sent the twelve apostles out in Mark 6, the apostles "proclaimed that people should repent." However, preaching is a joint venture; it must be heralded by God's man and heeded by God's people. The members at Garrett Memorial Baptist Church were great listeners before they were subjected to this project. Many in the congregation are faithful to take notes on sermons and ask questions regarding the sermons. They regularly practice the discipline of applying the truths of a sermon through the sermon-based small group ministry at Garrett Memorial. But there is a population at Garrett Memorial, and most likely at any church, that are passive listeners. They have never been trained on the importance of effective listening.

#### **Evaluation of Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to create and implement a discipleship curriculum concerning effective listening to biblical preaching. The aim of the discipleship curriculum was to convey the importance of the role of the listener when it comes to biblical preaching, as well as to equip class participants with skills that move them from being dull hearers to dynamic listeners of biblical preaching. When a person embraces their responsibility to be a spiritually-prepared, dynamic hearer of the Word, in return the person is better prepared to learn principles of Bible study from preaching that aid in

being a more devoted follower of Christ throughout their life. The goal was not simply to train them in a spiritual discipline, but rather for them to see the spiritual discipline of effective listening as a vital means of their being a life-long follower of Jesus Christ. The purpose was a worthy undertaking for any pastor attempting to equip his church with spiritual disciplines that help the members become more faithful in their relationship with the Lord.

### **Evaluation of Goals**

The first goal of the project was to develop an eight-week discipleship class that covered practical and spiritual disciplines that equip a believer to be a more effective listener to biblical preaching. The curriculum evaluation rubric consisted of nineteen areas to be judged. Based upon the ministry project team's assessment, the curriculum met the sufficiency standards of the rubric by 96 percent.

The second goal of the project was to show the importance of listening to sermons by means of two consecutive sermons, which emphasized God's role in preaching and the battle listeners must wage against selfish passions in order to fulfill their responsibility as an effective listener. The goal was measured by a pre and post survey. Due to a number of surveys that were incomplete, or lacking the proper identification number, the total number of comparable surveys was 21, 9 shy of the intended number of 30. Although the post survey showed a positive increase, it was not a statistically significant difference, barely missing the significance mark by 0.02.<sup>1</sup>

When I analyzed the surveys to discover why a statistically significant difference was not achieved, I discovered that the average pre-sermon series survey score for 9 of the survey statements received a score of 5 or higher on a six point Likert scale. These scores either remained the same or only slightly increased in the post-sermon

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<sup>1</sup>The t-test for dependent sample showed p as 0.07

series survey. I was anticipating lower scores on many of those statements for the pre-sermon series survey. For example, on statement 16, “I am responsible for my attentiveness during a sermon,” the average pre-sermon series score was 5.4.<sup>2</sup>

On 6 of the 7 statements that necessitated a low score in order to show proficient knowledge of responsibility as a listener, the average pre-sermon series survey score was 2.7 or lower. Once again, these types of scores were not what I expected. For example, statement 18 read, “God will hold my preacher primarily responsible if I do not understand something in the sermon.” The average response to this question was 1.6, which was much lower than I expected.<sup>3</sup> The post-sermon series average answer to this statement remained at 1.6. Another example includes question 25: “The majority of responsibility for applying a sermon lies upon the one preaching the sermon,” which received a pre-sermon series average score of 2.<sup>4</sup> The scores regarding these particular 49 statements indicated that many of the participants possessed a greater amount of knowledge concerning their responsibility as a listener than I had anticipated.

Even though there was not a significant difference made overall, it seems that this was due to a high number of survey participants already understanding their role as a listener. Though the goal was barely missed, I was encouraged to see a statistically significant difference made when the 15 lowest pre-sermon series scores were paired with their post-sermon series result.

The third goal of the project revolved around recruitment for the class, “Getting the Most Out of the Sermon.” The goal was to have 20 class participants complete the class. Recruitment was employed through bulletin announcements, personal

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<sup>2</sup>See appendix 8, table A16.

<sup>3</sup>See appendix 8, table A18

<sup>4</sup>See appendix 8, table A25

invites, and during the two sermons. Since 20 adults participated in the class, and the ministry project team validated the recruitment efforts, the goal was met.

Teaching the eight-week discipleship class in order to increase listening skill usage was the fourth goal of this class. A pre and post-class survey, dealing mainly with the use of the employment of listening skills, was used to determine whether or not a significant statistical difference was achieved. A t test for dependent samples showed a statistically significant increase of the use of the skills learned in the class ( $p < 0.002$ ).

In addition to the pre-class and post-class survey, an exit interview questionnaire was used to find out specifically how the participants utilized the listening skills learned in class. Twelve exit interviews were completed and returned by the deadline. Of these 12 interviewees, 10 detailed how they were applying the truths they had heard from two sermons that they heard after the completion of the class.<sup>5</sup> Many of the truth applications revolved around contentment since one of the two sermons they heard after the completion of the class dealt with learning and living in contentment. For example, one participant wrote, “Untangling my life by learning contentment and living it. Wow! We are not born content. I am learning to be content where God has me. This is not always easy, but through God’s help, I can achieve this.”

Another class participant described his applying a sermon on generosity by writing, “I chose to come to church on Saturday morning and help another church member get classrooms together as a way to be generous with my time. Being selfish comes natural. Being generous requires intentionality.”

After hearing a sermon on the need for family discipleship, a female class participant described how she was beginning to realize how important personal Bible

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<sup>5</sup>The remaining two interviewees had not been in attendance for two sermons because of work or vacation before the questionnaire was due.

study is for her family and resolved to stay consistent in the Word for the benefit of her family.

Again, after hearing a sermon from a missionary, a class participant wrote,

Our guest speaker spoke about how as Christians we are to spread the gospel; we are not exempt from this because we are not the “professionals.” Every day this week I have looked for ways to do this in conversations with my children at home, or just by the way I conduct myself around others. I want to show others Christ in the small ways, not just in teaching a lesson on Sunday.

How the class participants were currently using their new listening skills was also asked on this exit interview, which was the most encouraging part of reading their exit interview answers. One participant wrote, “During the service I am specifically looking for the teaching point, and seeking how I can apply it to my life.” Another responded by writing that she prays diligently before each service for the pastor and for an “open ear and clear mind.” One practical preparation cited by several of the participants was to make preparations of clothes on Saturday night in order to reduce the chance of a frantic Sunday morning.

Since the surveys showed a statically significant difference, and 80 percent of the reviewable exit interview questionnaires showed an aptitude for application, this goal was successfully met.

### **Strengths of the Project**

After having heard from those who sat under the preaching and the class lessons, three strengths emerged. The first strength regards the general premise of the project. So much is written in Scripture concerning the role of the listener, yet it is rarely taught or preached. Simply exposing this truth drew many positive comments from church members and class participants.

Another strength of the project involved exposing the class participants to the listening filters that are usually in place when a person listens to someone deliver a

sermon.<sup>6</sup> The filters are usually unnoticed by the listener unless they have been trained in active listening. This particular strength of the project centered on the influence these filters have on how a person listens. If a person is unaware of these filters, they can negatively impact how they receive information. However, if they are aware of the listening filters, then they can keep them from negatively affecting how they listen.

The third strength of the project was an unexpected gem mined during the curriculum development. The application process of R.A.I.D. (Receive the Word, Accept the Word, Inspect your heart, Depend upon Christ) was the best thing that came from this project. Many people have the same process for application as they do for listening, which is to say they do not have one at all. They just hope something sticks. But intentionality is key when it comes to listening to biblical preaching. A preparation process is vital. So it is with applying sermons, yet very few have an intentional approach to application.

The R.A.I.D process was developed from studying the parable of the soils in Mark 4 and Paul's honoring of how the Thessalonians received his preaching. In Mark 4, the good soil hears the Word, accepts the Word, and the Word bears fruit. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, the believers received the Word, accepted it as God's Word, and put it into practice. Once I noticed the process in both Mark 4 and 1 Thessalonians 2:13, I looked for a pattern in Scripture. The process can be found peppered throughout the Bible, including such significant places as Psalm 119, which is centered on the Word of God, as well as Acts 17 where the Jews in Berea are called noble for the attention they gave the examining of the scriptures that was preached to them.

As more time was spent thinking about the R.A.I.D. process, I realized that the process involved the whole person. Receiving the Word preached engages the mental

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<sup>6</sup>See appendix 7, class lesson 5.

aspect. Accepting the Word and inspecting the heart involved will and emotions. Doing the Word in faith relates to the physical side of obedience.

A final strength of the project was the opportunity to teach class participants the components of biblical preaching. These components were taken from Haddon Robinson's famous definition of expository preaching.<sup>7</sup> Equipping a congregation with a conservative, yet widely held definition of biblical preaching builds safeguards around the pulpit ministry of the church and puts listeners on alert when a message does not contain those expository components.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

One weakness of the project was the lengthy time commitment for those who participated. In order to receive the maximum benefit from the sermons and the class, a participant was expected to attend ten different sermons or classes. If I were to do the class over again, I might consider holding a weekend seminar to cover the eight lessons.

### **Theological Reflections**

For the last three years a biblical understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in my life has been growing. This was due in large part to Greg Heisler's book, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, along with Arturo Azurdia's book *Spirit-Empowered Preaching*.<sup>8</sup> I was going through a personal revival of understanding the working of the Spirit in conjunction with the Word of God. As I began to pray about my ministry project and how it might most benefit Garrett Memorial Baptist Church, it dawned on me that if a preacher needed to

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<sup>7</sup>Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 20.

<sup>8</sup>Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: B & H, 2007). Arturo Azurdia, *Spirit-Empowered Preaching: Involving the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1998).



depend upon the Holy Spirit throughout the preparation process and preaching event, so too does the listener.

As I researched the topic I discovered that information pertaining to listening was disproportionate to the amount of resources available pertaining to improving the skill of preaching. One person preaches a sermon to many listeners, yet very few resources are available that train the listener, while resources abound for the preacher. This, in itself, is an evidence of the widespread false mentality that if a person has the faculty of hearing, then they must know how to listen.

I believe the church would greatly benefit from understanding that the first position of a disciple is the position of listening. It would serve the church well to learn the rich, yet often times underdeveloped, theological theme that biblical listening is only completed when the truth of the Word is built into the fabric of the listener's life.

### **Personal Reflections**

After having spent vast amounts of time putting myself in the listener's seat, I am more committed to preaching expository sermons that go the extra mile in being clear in purpose and content. Many listeners have trouble listening because the preacher has trouble communicating a clear point. Additionally, I have become more sensitive and take into consideration during my sermon preparation the events taking place in the lives of the people I shepherd. I pray this helps me become an expositor of the Word who wisely applies the balm of God's Word to those who are hurting, healing, or rejoicing.

## APPENDIX 1

### SURVEY FOR THOSE WHO LISTEN TO PREACHING

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your understanding of the listener's role during a sermon. Clif Johnson is conducting this research for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

- I agree to participate  
 I do not agree to participate

The first section of this questionnaire will obtain some demographic information about the people listening to this sermon series:

1. Please circle your age group:  
15-20    21-30        31-40            41-50            51-60            61-70        71+
2. I have been a Christian for:  
1-5 years    5-10 years    10-15 years    20+ years
3. Please circle your gender:  
Male    Female
4. Please circle the number of years you have been attending GMBC:  
1-5 years        5-10 years            10-15 years            20+ years
5. How many church services do you normally attend in a month (SS, Corporate Worship, LifeGroup, Wednesday Night Bible Study, Outreach Ministry)?

Please continue to the next page

Read each statement, indicating your answer by using the scale below. Circle the number that most accurately reflects your answer at the end of the statement.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I regularly prepare my heart for the Sunday morning sermon.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Being present at church to hear sermons from my pastor is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Biblical preaching is a major form of communication between God and His people.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I expect to hear from God in a biblical sermon.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. When presented with a truth of scripture during a sermon with which my life is not aligned, I confess it as sin and repent.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I come to church mentally prepared to hear a sermon.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Getting plenty of rest before I hear a sermon is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I spend more than five minutes praying that I would be receptive to the Sunday morning sermon.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Being consistently present at my church to hear biblical preaching is a major part of my spiritual life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. When presented with a truth of scripture during a sermon with which my life is not aligned, I take time after the sermon to think about how I can conform my life to that truth.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. My mind usually drifts during a sermon.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. It is important to me to get my heart ready on Saturday night for preaching on Sunday morning.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. The purpose of preaching is to help me have an easier life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I can't wait to go to church to hear biblical preaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. I don't have to be consistent in hearing biblical preaching because God uses other means to speak to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I am responsible for my attentiveness during a sermon.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. God does not speak to me through every biblical sermon.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Please continue to the next page

Read each statement, indicating your answer by using the scale below. Circle the number that most accurately reflects your answer at the end of the statement.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18. God will hold my preacher primarily responsible if I do not understand something in the sermon.					1	2 3 4 5 6
19. I have a plan for becoming spiritually prepared before I hear a sermon.					1	2 3 4 5 6
20. God himself speaks through biblical preaching.					1	2 3 4 5 6
21. I have a good understanding of my responsibility as a listener of sermons.					1	2 3 4 5 6
22. It is the preacher's job to keep me interested in the sermon.					1	2 3 4 5 6
23. I am responsible for what I hear during a sermon.					1	2 3 4 5 6
24. The majority of the responsibility for understanding a sermon lies upon the one preaching the sermon.					1	2 3 4 5 6
25. The majority of the responsibility for applying a sermon lies upon the one preaching the sermon.					1	2 3 4 5 6
26. God expects the preacher to get the congregation spiritually ready to hear the sermon.					1	2 3 4 5 6
27. Listening to sermons includes obedience to the biblical truth presented in a sermon.					1	2 3 4 5 6
28. I carefully consider what the preacher says to make sure it is in accordance with scripture.					1	2 3 4 5 6

## APPENDIX 2

### LISTENING SKILLS SURVEY

#### Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your personal preparation skills before a sermon and listening skills during the sermon. Clif Johnson is conducting this research for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

The first section of this questionnaire will obtain some demographic information about the people listening to this sermon series:

1. Please circle your age group:  
15-20    21-30    31-40    41-50    51-60    61-70    71+
2. I have been a Christian for:  
1-5 years            5-10 years                            10-15 years                            20+ years
3. Please circle your gender:  
Male    Female
4. Please circle the number of years you have been attending GMBC:  
1-5 years            5-10 years                            10-15 years                            20+ years
5. How many church services do you normally attend in a month (SS, Corporate Worship, LifeGroup, Wednesday night Bible Study, Outreach Ministry)?

Please continue to the next page

Read each statement, indicating your answer by using the scale below. Circle the number that most accurately reflects your answer at the end of the statement.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I fill in the sermon outline in the church bulletin.					1	2 3 4 5 6
2. I take notes during the sermon.					1	2 3 4 5 6
3. I study my Bible at least three times a week.					1	2 3 4 5 6
4. Sitting close to the front of the auditorium is important to me.					1	2 3 4 5 6
5. I jot down questions I have about the sermon to study later.					1	2 3 4 5 6
6. I follow along with the outline provided by the preacher.					1	2 3 4 5 6
7. I keep eye contact with the preacher.					1	2 3 4 5 6
8. I am convicted by the sermons.					1	2 3 4 5 6
9. I get plenty of rest on Saturday night when I know I will be attending a preaching service on Sunday morning.					1	2 3 4 5 6
10. I eat breakfast before church on Sunday morning.					1	2 3 4 5 6
11. I meditate over the passage to be preached before Sunday morning.					1	2 3 4 5 6
12. I am usually unsure of how what is preached is relevant for my life.					1	2 3 4 5 6
13. I stay out later on Saturday night than on other nights.					1	2 3 4 5 6
14. I study Scripture at least three times a week.					1	2 3 4 5 6
15. I spend concentrated time before the sermon praying that I will hear from God during the sermon.					1	2 3 4 5 6
16. I have a daily quiet time with God through His word.					1	2 3 4 5 6
17. I know what God calls me to through His Word after most sermons.					1	2 3 4 5 6
18. I am dependent upon the Holy Spirit to illuminate God's truth to me during a sermon.					1	2 3 4 5 6
19. Praying for the preacher's preparation is an important part of my prayer time.					1	2 3 4 5 6
20. I have a plan for applying the truths of the sermon to my life					1	2 3 4 5 6

## APPENDIX 3

### POST-CLASS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your personal preparation skills before a sermon and listening skills during the sermon. Clif Johnson is conducting this research for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

1. How long have you been regularly attending corporate church services?

2. Describe a time when a sermon made a dramatic impact upon your life?

-Was there anything unique happening in your life at the time?

-What changed in your life after that sermon due to the sermon?

3. Describe your attitude towards preaching before taking this class?

-What would you have said was the purpose of preaching?

-What role did it play in your life?

4. How would you describe your attitude towards preaching today?

-What is the purpose of preaching?

-What role does it play in your life today?

5. What was your plan/approach to listening to preaching before this class?

6. How are you using the disciplines you learned in class?
  
7. Can you describe how you have applied at least one truth from the last two sermon to your life?



APPENDIX 4

LISTENING SKILLS CURRICULUM  
EVALUATION TOOL

<b>Listening Skills Curriculum Evaluation Tool<sup>1</sup></b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. The curriculum framework includes scope (what should be taught) and sequence (guidance for the order in which to teach).					
2. The scope addresses major developmental areas (knowledge, attitude, skill)					
3. The scope addresses all content areas.					
4. The scope and sequence includes meaningful and functional skills and concepts.					
5. The curriculum uses the major biblical passages regarding the subject being taught.					
6. The curriculum addresses the pertinent biblical issues regarding the curriculum topic.					
7. The curriculum demonstrates a high view of Scripture.					
8. The curriculum demonstrates faithfulness to the biblical text.					

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Kristie Pretti-Frontczak et al., “Curriculum Rating Rubric,” accessed July 18, 2013, [http://www.ehhs.kent.edu/odec/documents/CurriculumFrameworkRatingRubric\\_000.pdf](http://www.ehhs.kent.edu/odec/documents/CurriculumFrameworkRatingRubric_000.pdf)

9. The curriculum uses the Bible as its foundation for teaching.				
10. The curriculum framework includes activities and instructional practices.				
11. The activities and instructional practices include hands-on experiences.				
12. The activities include combinations of individual, small group, and large group instruction.				
13. The activities and instructional practices assist the learner to develop skills through application for meaningful, authentic uses (contextual).				
14. User can easily adapt the curriculum to desired teaching setting (small group, Sunday school class, Bible study, etc).				
15. User can easily identify major sections of curriculum.				
16. User can easily identify goals for each class session.				
17. The teaching plan for each class session is clear.				
18. The teaching plan for each class session includes suggested resources.				
19. Information is organized in a way that a user can easily find information and matches users expectations.				

## APPENDIX 5

### BE CAREFUL LITTLE EARS HOW YOU HEAR, PART 1

#### **Intro**

How many of you remember the old song “Be careful little eyes what you see”? That was a fun little song with an interesting message. One verse went like this—“Oh be careful little ears what you hear.” The message of that verse seems to be a warning about the places you put yourself in and what you allow yourself to hear. That part of the song is actually pretty biblical.

#### **Mark 4:24 “Pay attention to what you hear...”**

#### **Luke 8:18 “Take care then how you hear...”**

You know, not a lot of attention is paid to the scriptural role of listening. In fact, if you went to the amazon website and searched for books on how to prepare for and listening to sermons, you wouldn’t find very many. But if you searched for books that gave instruction on how to prepare sermons, and deliver sermons you could find hundreds of books. The ironic thing about all of this is that when a person looks into the pages of scripture, God has much more to say about listening to his word than the preaching of his word.

So why don’t we hear more about listening to sermons? Well, I think part of the reason is that all of us think we know how to listen, when we really do not. We may have the faculty of hearing, but just because you have the faculty of it, and all the physical mechanics work right, does not mean you know how to listen.

You know, the communication process is a two-way street. It requires a sender and receiver, and both are crucial in order for communication to take place. To see the speaker as the only one important is the same as saying that in baseball, the pitcher is necessary but the catcher is not, or in football, the quarterback is necessary but the receivers are not.

So for the next two weeks, we are going to study the aspect of listening to biblical preaching, asking the question, “Why should we be careful how we hear?” and we are going to investigate it from two different aspects—from God’s role in the preaching event and our role in the preaching event.

And then, starting on June 11, we are going to offer an intense Bible study that equips you to listen better to sermons. One of the reasons we have trouble listening to sermons, and drawing all that we should from sermons, is because we do not see listening as worship, we do not take our role seriously, we do not view listening as a spiritual discipline that we need to improve. So this study will address those areas, and equip you to become an effective listener to preaching.

“Why we should be careful how we hear?” Many biblical answers exist to that question, and this week we are going to consider one of them from the text of 2 Timothy 4:1-4.

### **Read Text: 2 Timothy 4-15**

Timothy was the young pastor in the struggling church at Ephesus. The church had some obstacles that Timothy was going to have to address. Paul, the courageous, bold apostle and missionary, was on the verge of martyrdom. There was no way he could come to Ephesus and straighten the church out himself. Young, timid, Timothy must take the reins. Young, introverted Timothy now carried the responsibility of making sure the gospel was kept in tack in that church.

You can see some of the hurdles present in Ephesus that Timothy was going to have to face in chapter 3:1-5. And in the face of doctrinal impurity, rampant greed, useless quarrels and gossip wildfire, Paul gives Timothy one overarching command—**PREACH THE WORD!**

The word that is used for “preach” here is the idea of public proclamation. It is not the idea of teaching, but of loud, clear heralding. It is the raising of the voice for all to hear. It is a clear and courageous cry for all to hear and to respond. It is the same word that is used if the king commissioned the town crier to walk into the middle of town and deliver a message, “Hear ye, Hear ye! The King has a word for all to hear!”

“The word” that is to be proclaimed is described earlier in 3:16 when it says, “All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

That is the commission for the church—never back away from the preaching of the word. So what does Paul say?

If the church is flourishing, preach the word!  
If the church is floundering, preach the word!  
If the church is stagnate, preach the word!  
If the church is steady, preach the word!

***“Cut the word of God.”***

This is the call of every man that has been led to stand behind the pulpit.  
2 Timothy 2:15 “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”

The phrase “rightly handling” means to “cut along a straight line.” That idea is seen in some other translations that say, “rightly divide the word of truth.” It is referring to the straight, precise, careful communication of the gospel. Rightly handling the word of truth means to get it straight and to give it straight. The call is not to try and make you happy; the call is not to tell you what you want to hear; the call is to open up this book and rightly divide the word of truth

The church is not to let anything step in and replace the bold, declarative, heralding of the preaching of God’s word. When it seems like it is out of style, preach the word. When it seems, like the people want something else, preach the word. When it is a difficult time, preach the word; when it is a season of growth, preach the word!

And now we begin to understand a little bit of why we should be careful how we go about hearing, but let us press further into this text to see what else it uncovers for us.

## **BE CAREFUL HOW YOU HEAR BECAUSE:**

### **I. PREACHING IS A SERIOUS EVENT, vss. 1-2**

#### **A. It is made serious by who is present during it.**

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus...”

You immediately see the seriousness of Paul’s words in that one word “charge.” That is an aggressive, forceful word. Paul wants Timothy to understand that preaching is not a side event, a secondary event, but it is the pastor’s main task. To charge someone in the presence of other people is to put them under oath. The idea is that Paul is passing the ministry over to Timothy.

So Paul comes out of the gate fast and furious. “This admonishment that I am giving you Timothy is given to you in the presence of God Almighty and His Son Jesus Christ. I stand accountable before them to give you true and correct instructions. And you stand accountable before them to abide by the instructions.” Do you think Paul takes his ministry seriously? He is asking Timothy to do the same.

But it is not just that the Godhead is called to stand as witness to Paul’s instruction to Timothy to preaching the word. Paul is charging him with a certain duty that is to be carried out under the watchful and loving gaze of God the Father and God the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is present among us right now, watching, observing with the greatest of interest to see if I am cutting the word accurately, and to see if you are listening with a heart that desires to hear!

But even more, it is not just that Paul pronounced this charge, calling the Godhead to

serve as witnesses back then, and it is not just that God is present among us right now with keen interest in what is taking place now, but also something remarkable is taking place. As we look through the pages of scripture we see that God himself places authority on the biblical preaching of His word as if HE is speaking to us right now.

1 Thes. 2:13 “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”

You see this same idea even way back in the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 18:18 “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me (Moses) from among you...it is to him you shall listen...I will raise up for them a prophet like you (Moses) from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.”

And then throughout the OT, God would raise up prophets who said, “Thus sayeth the Lord.” And when you get to the NT, Jesus is the ultimate prophet, the fulfillment of all the prophets’ messages. But now, God calls and empowers men to speak His word regarding the revealed and resurrected Christ. And when it does correctly, and His word is preached biblically, Paul says it is the word of God.

1 Peter 4:10-11 “s each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks the oracles of God...”

So as you sit there, engaged in this communication event, you should not be listening for what Clif has to say, but you should be listening for what God is saying.

***Be careful how you hear because preaching is a serious event, which means listening is a serious event as well.***

**B. It is made serious through a right perspective for it.**

“and by his appearing and his kingdom...”

Not only is preaching made serious by who is present during it, but also, preaching is made serious through a right perspective for it. What does Paul mean by this? Paul is talking about the way in which you view the world, your worldview.

Paul says that he charges Timothy in the presence of God and Jesus Christ, AND by his appearing and his kingdom.

“Timothy, you are carrying out your duties with God and Jesus Christ watching. Take it seriously. The pulpit is not a playground, and neither is the pew.” And then Paul adds another layer of seriousness to it by saying, Jesus Christ will return, will judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will be completed.

This is the proper perspective of life. In what type of atmosphere, in what type of reality, what type of perspective of life should I have that will inform the reason for my preaching? This is ultimate reality according to the Bible. Jesus Christ will return. Jesus Christ will judge the living and the dead. Jesus Christ will complete the establishment of His kingdom. I am to preach in light of those realities. You are to listen with that perspective in your mind and heart. We are to live in light of those truths. Timothy, be faithful in preaching the word of God because the Son of God will return to set up the kingdom of God.

There is a tone of urgency, faithfulness, and seriousness. Time is ticking, eternity is approaching, Jesus is preparing. There is this great tension that we are to live with. On one hand we long to see our Savior return, but on the other there should be a great desire to see others come to him while they can. And we want to be found faithful in the desire to see His return, and also to be about the business of spreading his fame to the ends of the earth.

“Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, and all the more as you see the day approaching.” Hebrews 10:25

The preacher of the word feels that weight, but so too should the listener. I will be held accountable with what I preached and how I preached it, and the perspective that I had when I preached. You will be accountable to what you heard and how you received it. This is not in here to scare us, but to keep us from minimizing the weight and impact that the preaching event should have in our lives.

***Be careful how you hear because preaching is a serious event, which means listening is a serious event as well.***

**C. It is made serious by God’s persistence of it.**

“be ready in season and out of season...be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry”

Preaching is made serious by God’s presence, through a perspective for it, and also by God’s persistence of it.

Paul tells Timothy to be ready in season and out of season.

The words here are eukairos and akairos. Kairos means “time”. Eu is a prefix that means “good” like in eulogy (to say good words). The “A” is prefix that negates, as in atheists (I person who believes in no god).

So the command here is that Timothy is to be prepared to preach the word at all times, whether it is a good time or a bad time. “Timothy, when people are really taking in the word of God, keep preaching. Those are good times. But even when people are not eager to hear the word of God, when it seems like the word of God is having no effect and it appears that it would be useful to switch to a different means, don’t do it. Keep

preaching.”

Paul is getting Timothy ready to face a battle that will quickly be coming down Timothy's lane. The time is quickly approaching, Timothy, when people will not want to hear biblical preaching. You must continue preaching anyway. Be sober-minded about this Timothy. Endure the suffering that comes with this Timothy. Complete your task as a preacher Timothy.”

**D. It is made serious by the power within it.**

“reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

These directions hearken us back to 2 Timothy 3:16 where it tells us why the inspired scripture is profitable.

Why is God persistent that His word be preached even when it may be an ill-suited time in the culture, even when it does not look like it is having any impact, even when it is being said that preaching is an archaic means of communicating. Why the insistence and persistence of preaching the word? Why not move to a more self-esteem approach, or a therapeutic approach to communicating with man? The reason is because God has inspired His word. There is power in God's message, and the reason we continue to preach the word of God, even when it may seem like it has fallen out of vogue is because the gospel message is still the only message that has the power to save everyone who believes.

God says that His word is living and active, and it is like a sword, able to discern deep within your heart.

But it not only has the power to save, God also uses the word of God to reprove, rebuke, exhort, teach, and train us, but only when it is proclaimed, whether you proclaim it to yourself, it is proclaimed from this place.

**Conclusion:**

I remember when the kids were little, and how excited we were and how cool we thought it was when they began to talk and communicate with us. We wrote down the words they mis-pronounced, and how they used certain words for certain things. We so anticipated those days, they were filled with such expectancy and hope. And yet, those babies were completely dependent upon us. They could not add one word of help in real life by the words they spoke, yet we looked forward to it so much. And here we are gathered together with the God of the universe wanting to speak to your heart, your life this morning.

Did you walk in here with anticipation and expectancy and excitement and eagerness, knowing that the Lord of the universe desired to speak to you? And He desires to speak to you words that give you life.

Are you beginning to see why we need to be careful how we hear? God has not given us



this activity just to keep us busy. He has laid upon it much weight and gravity. It is one of the chief means, if not the chief means, He has chosen to communicate with us... the preached word. And he is present when it is done biblically, empowering, convicting, comforting, encouraging, rebuking, reproofing. That is not me doing that, that is the living God.

You know, that little children's song says, "Oh be careful little ears what you hear, for the father up above, he is looking down in love, oh be careful little ears what you hear."

He is looking down in love. The father desires to communicate with you, and promises to communicate with you, if you would but listen. But it is going to take some prep work on your part. Did you come in here this morning anticipating the God of the universe to speak to you?

I wonder if we have been living under the myth that says, since we have two ears that work, then we must know how to listen. Don't be fooled. Listening is a heart matter.

## APPENDIX 6

### BE CAREFUL LITTLE EARS HOW YOU HEAR, PART 2

#### **Intro**

Do you know what you are doing here this morning? If someone asked you, “What are you doing at church this morning?” could you answer them succinctly, and more importantly, biblically?

In just about every book on preaching that I have read, the author writes about how important the introduction to a sermon is. It serves as the onramp to the rest of the sermon, and the preacher attempts, through the introduction, to get as many of his listeners as possible, to take the on ramp with him.

But within these preaching books, most of the authors have drawn a foregone conclusion about you the listener. See if you can figure it out:

Read from preaching books:

*“A good introduction orients the congregation to what will be said by arresting and interesting the congregation. When you begin to preach, many (perhaps most) of the members of the assembly are thinking of other things...Arresting, or getting attention, is absolutely essential; until you have done so, the congregation will hear nothing that you have to say, no matter how valuable or interesting it may be.” Jay Adams, *Preaching With Purpose*, p. 59-60*

*“You need to grab them by the lapels, shake them awake, get in their face, and put them on alert that what you have to say is something they desperately need that will change their lives!” *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, Hershael York, p. 179.*

The assumption made by many authors of preaching books is that congregations do not know why they are at the preaching event, they are not initially interested in the sermon, and that they do not take preaching seriously. That is the assumption made about you. The assumption is that you have to be arrested, grabbed by the collar, startled and shocked into listening because you have a flippant, uninterested attitude towards preaching.

So the solution offered is to shock, arrest, startle, knock you off balance somehow in order to get you to pay attention.

I don't like that solution too much. I don't think it is the most biblical approach to preaching. That seems to be treating a symptom than dealing with the root issue. Rather, I think we have to cultivate in our church an understanding of the seriousness and the privilege of what takes place when we gather together. That is what we preached on last week, that we should be careful how we hear because preaching is a serious event, and its made serious by several factors: who is *present* during it, a right *perspective* for it, God's *persistence* of it, the *power* within it.

Today, we want to see another reason, of which there are many, why we should be careful how we hear.

The reason we need to pay attention to how we hear revolves around the truth that preaching is a serious event, and that the effective listening to preaching does not happen automatically. There is a fight involved in listening. And when you refuse to wage war, then you let your selfish passions win, and your passions are a fierce enemy to effective listening. *The reason we need to pay attention to how we hear is because selfish passions are a fierce enemy to the listener's role in preaching.* And if we do not pay attention to how we hear, we will walk into this place, into this event, with a hard heart, a shallow heart, or a distracted heart, but not one that is prepared to listen to receive God's message.

The hard heart says, "I know better than God. What can he possibly do for me?"

The shallow heart says, "I want to know God better so he can bless my with an easy life. I love the Lord as long as it is easy and convenient to do so."

The distracted heart says, "There are more important matters that need to occupy my mind and attention."

And at the root of each one of those types of hearts is a selfish passion.

*Read text: 2 Timothy 4:1-4*

**PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU HEAR BECAUSE PASSIONS ARE A FIERCE ENEMY TO EFFECTIVE LISTENING.**

You will notice that the people's passions, at the end of verse 3, are the motivation for abandoning turning off their ears to healthy preaching and pursuing pleasant sounding words.

Passions are our desires, sometimes translated lusts. It describes a "strong longing after something." They can be a good thing or a bad thing. So for instance, in Philippians 1:23, Paul says, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ..."

But every time the noun form of this word is used in the pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus), it is in reference to sinful passions.

1 Ti. 6:9

2 Ti. 2:2

2 Ti. 3:6

Titus 2:12

Titus 3:3

*Selfish passions are a fierce enemy to the listener's role in preaching.*

*Now what makes the passions mentioned in 2 Ti 4:3 so dangerous, and why should it lead us to be careful how we hear?*

**1. Selfish passions are in opposition to biblical truth.**

“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching...”

Jeremiah 5:31 “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land; the prophets prophecy falsely, and the priests rule at their discretion; my people love to have it so,”

Why is it that people in Jeremiah's day, and the church at Ephesus, and people today do not want to be under biblical preaching? The answer lies within our hearts, our desires, our passions.

It is going to be important for us to get our terms correct.

“Time”—not chronological time, as if Paul was thinking of next Tuesday, but a season of time, an epoch. Paul was telling Timothy that a season of time would come upon the church there in Ephesus when people would turn away from truth. And those seasons have come and gone throughout church history.

What kind of season do you think we are in right now? Before you answer that, let me define a few more words

“Endure”—The word here does not mean that bear up underneath something that is burdensome, but rather the idea is that you hold to something. So a season is coming Timothy, when people will not hold to, tolerate, embrace sound teaching.

“Sound”—What does Paul mean when he says “sound”? We get our English word “hygiene” from this Greek word. The idea is clean or healthy or without disease

So get the picture—“Timothy, a season is coming when the people will not hold or tolerate healthy teaching. They will turn away from it; they will shun it. They will not listen to it.

So let me ask again, “What kind of season do you think we are in today in the church?”

There are areas and small pockets of revival taking place, but not like what American history has seen before. My friends, we are living in a day when not just society, but the ones within the church herself do not tolerate, welcome or receive the healthy teaching of the word of God, and even worse, we live in culture full of people who stand behind pulpits who serve up sermons just to scratch the itching ears. They preach with job security in mind rather than biblical faithfulness and truthfulness.

And before we think that this cannot happen to us, let's be very clear in understanding whom Paul is talking about here. He is not talking about people outside of the church that turn away from biblical preaching, but rather people within the church. People within the church will abandon listening to biblical preaching.

And here is the danger—the person who walks into the preaching event unprepared to listen effectively and receive God's word leaves themselves exposed and vulnerable to be captured and influenced by their sinful passions, which will lead you down a dangerous path.

Listen to what Paul says in Romans about these passions:

Romans 6:12 “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”

What is Paul describing here in Romans 6? He is describing a fight, a battle, a confrontation, a decision that you have to make. Sin wants you to embrace its passions. And those passions are opposed to God and His truth. Will you relinquish your body, in particular, your ears over to the enemy, or will you offer them up to your Savior?

So how do I fight this fierce enemy that stands in opposition to biblical truth. Let me give you just one way to fight. This is just a sampling of what we will be studying in the bible study that begins this Wednesday night. I am looking for 25 adults who want to dive deep into this subject with me. There is so much more uncover than what we will talk about here, and I really do believe that this study could do God-sized things for your life and for our church.

Now remember, we could talk about a lot of physical things to help you prepare, and we will talk about those things in the class, but preaching and effective listening is foundationally a spiritual event, so the prep must be spiritual prep. Paul tells us that our battle “is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

### ***Come hungry***

1 Peter 1:14, 2:1, 11 “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your

former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct... So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation... Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”

So one way to fight is not only to reject worldly passions, but then to replace those with biblical passions, i.e. seeing the benefit of God’s word and longing to be nourished by it.

You saw last week in LG the connection between the word of God and life. And here in 1 Peter you see the connection between worldly passions and the destruction of your soul. This is a huge warning sign—worldly passions seek to destroy you, but God’s word brings life! Crave and long for that which satisfies.

Jeremiah 15:16 “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.”

So how do I develop this longing, because it is not like you just turn these cravings on.

Have any of you ever had to deal with a picky eater? Many times, parents deal with a picky eater by preparing that picky eater whatever they want to eat. So sometimes, that means the one preparing the meal fixes two meals. One for the picky eater who will only eat certain foods, and then they fix the rest of the family their meal. Do you know how we usually deal with our picky eater? We don’t feed them what they want, we let them get hungry enough to where they will eat what is before them. If they choose not to eat at that point, that’s okay. But when they come asking for a snack, or saying that they are hungry, they will be directed back to what was prepared for them earlier.

In the same way, in order to create a hunger for God’s word, a longing for God’s word, I have to recognize that my selfish desires are destructive to me and those around me. So I need to starve myself of those desires, refuse them access to the throne of my heart. And then replace those desires with what is good and healthy, which is God’s word, which unveils his passions and desires.

I need to be careful how I hear because if I do not pay attention to it, then I leave myself open to be carried away with my selfish passions, which stand in opposition to biblical truth.

**2. Selfish passions pursue validation instead of transformation.**

“having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions...”

Not only do selfish passions oppose biblical truth, selfish passions seek validation rather

than transformation. In other words, when we are guided by our selfish passions, we do not listen first and then decide whether what we heard is truth, but rather we first decide what we want to hear and then seek teachers that will accommodate my demands.

Have you ever known someone who had an idea, and no matter how many people told them it was a bad idea, if they could find one person to side with them, that one person became the smartest person in the world. When you see that happening, that person is seeking validation instead of transformation.

If you want to worship a golden calf, there are plenty of Aaron's around who will fashion one for you.

These people are not looking to have their lives transformed by the power of the gospel, they are not looking to be changed into the likeness of Christ, they are looking for someone to come along and say that what they believe and how they live is totally okay and good and right, even though it runs contrary to the word of God. They are looking for someone to tickle their curiosity. They are looking to be entertained.

The results of this danger made its way into the headlines just this last week. A Baptist church in California affirmed "same-sex sexuality." The pastor of the church said that he was walking along the beach when he realized that he didn't believe in the traditional teachings of scripture regarding homosexuality.

So what was it that changed this pastor's mind? Was it scripture? That is not what he said. He said it was mainly the testimony of gay friends of how the church has marginalized them. This pastor could see the culture changing around him. He could sense the tension surrounding this issue, and he became one of the very ones who tickles the ears of those more interested in their own selfish passions than biblical truth.

But listen closely, we must be careful of this as well. It is easy to point the finger outside of ourselves and identify how others fall prey to this, but more difficult to see it within our own hearts. But let me give some scenarios. When we let our experience become the determiner of truth, we commit this sin. For instance, when we may go through a divorce for an unbiblical reason, and then say "I know what the Bible says, but..." at that point we are looking for validation instead of transformation.

When we come to church to have the entertainment itch scratched by the service, we commit this evil of pursuing validation rather than transformation.

Ezekiel 33:30-33 "As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, 'Come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.' And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on

an instrument, for they hear what say, but they will not do it.”

These people come and all their hearing amounts to is to scratch the itch of entertainment that they have. They have no intention of being transformed by God’s word. They are controlled by their selfish passions, and they just like the stories, they like to hear Ezekiel’s eloquence in speaking, but they do not listen effectively.

So how do we combat this?

***Come open & ready to change***

James 1:21 “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your soul.”

When we gather together for the preaching of God’s word, can you honestly say that you come with an attitude of “What I may hear today could change my life, could transform my life.” Do you come with that attitude of expectancy and openness? I am not talking about listening blindly to what I say. But I am talking about being open to what the Bible says, examining what I say to make sure it is in line with the Bible, and being sensitive to the Holy Spirit and then letting that truth mold me.

Do you know what parents discover of their picky eaters, when they refuse to validate their pickiness, and instead feed them a steady diet of the food that everyone else is eating? They discover that their children do not starve. And over time, they discover that taste buds transform to enjoy what is laid before them.

***Be careful how you hear because if you do not pay attention to how you hear, it might be said of you, “For he hears what I say, but he will not do it.”***

**3. Selfish passions take you down the path of deception.**

“will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

Biblical preaching deals in truth—it threatens the present condition of your life, and seeks to transform it.

But when we let our passions reign, we don’t want truth, we want our own way.

So we will employ those that cater to us, which will lead us into living lies.

Listen, when you turn away from truth, what is there to turn to but lies, fables, and myths?



Be careful how you hear because if you do not pay attention to how you hear, when you do not tune in your ears and heart to receive truth, you will inevitably be tuning your ears, your heart, your mind to the station of deception.

**Conclusion:**

I pray, that if it is your desire to be a faithful student of God's word, that you will consider joining me for this bible study that begins this Wednesday night at 6pm. It could enrich your life, equipping you with skills that will serve you for the rest of your life.

Do you know what you are doing here this morning? Could you honestly answer that question biblically?

The world has figured out that we have a problem paying attention. Have you ever wondered how strange it is that they have an organ player at baseball games? Do you know what the job of the organ player is? To keep you in the game.

When you go to a movie theater, they keep you in the movie by turning off all the lights so that your eyes are drawn to the screen.

But here the issue is far deeper. As you walk through those doors, a war ensues. It may start at your home, in your bed. But a war ensues and the battleground is your heart and your mind. Do you come hungry to hear from God? Do you come ready to be transformed and walk in obedience to His word? Or do you come seeking validation? Do you come seeking a pat on the back just for attending? Do you come to hear the music, laugh at the stories, and go on your merry way? If so, you are walking a dangerous path. But you can turn from that path today and begin walking in truth.

## APPENDIX 7

### LESSONS

#### **Lesson 1—Connecting Biblical Preaching and Biblical Listening**



#### 3 Objectives

- You will be able to list elements that make up an expository sermon.
- You will be able to recognize a sermon that is expository in nature.
- You will be will to explain the purpose for listening to sermon.

**Topic: Expository preaching, Effective Listening**

#### **Learning Objectives**

1. Participants will be able to list elements that make up an expository sermon.
2. Participants will be able to recognize when a sermon is expository in nature.
3. Participants will be able to explain the purpose for listening to sermons.

### **Scripture Passages**

Nehemiah 8:5-8; 1 Ti 4:13; 2 Ti 2:4; Co 1:28

### **Teaching Plan**

*Hook* (5 minutes)

Welcome to the class “Getting the Most Out of the Sermon.” Some of you may be wondering what this class is all about. “Why do I need a class on getting the most out of a sermon?” Well, the truth is that just because we know how to hear does not always mean we know how to listen, especially when it comes to sermons. Just because you know how to talk does not mean you could automatically stand up and deliver a speech or a sermon. There would need to be some prep work done, both physically and spiritually in the case of a sermon. I don’t imagine that any of you expect me to get up in front of this class, or in front of the church on Sunday morning and just automatically begin to preach or teach without having done some prep work. Even more so, you do not want me to get up in front of you to present God’s word without having spiritually prepared either, correct?

But what about the listener? What about you? If you expect the preacher to be prepared physically and spiritually, should I expect the same thing out of you? After all, communication is a two-way street. So this 8-week class is all about getting equipped with the spiritual discipline of listening.

Before we can begin talking and studying about effective listening, we need to define what biblical preaching is, so that we have a good idea to which we are supposed to be listening.

There is a movement in health circles today encouraging people to move towards foods that are Non-GMO (Non-genetically modified organisms). The reason for this is that a person can know exactly what is in a NGO product. (Read off the list of ingredients in fruit snack. Then read off the list of ingredients of a

Non-GMO granola bar.)

### **Gelatin**

This is not a new ingredient in gummy candy, but we know that not everyone is aware of where it comes from. Gelatin is made from the collagen inside animals' skin and bones. It's primarily derived from pork skins, pork and cattle bones, or split cattle hides. If you're a vegetarian, you might not want to be eating gelatin-based products.

### **Carnauba wax**

This wax is made from the leaves of the palm tree. Carnauba wax is used to provide a glossy waxy sheen to these fruit chews, just like it does for cars (in automobile waxes), shoes (in the polish), dental floss, surf boards and floors. It's also used for paper coatings in the U.S.. Turns out our fruit chews get the same shine treatment as our floors and our cars.

### **Food Colorings**

The food colorings found in fruit chews are red 40, yellow 5 and blue 1. Red 40 and blue 1 were originally manufactured from coal tar, but are now mostly made from petroleum. Those two colors have been banned previously in many European countries including Denmark, Belgium and France, though are now widely used in countries belonging to the European Union. Despite their attention in Europe, they've been used in the U.S. without too much resistance.

Yellow 5, however, is a different story. This food coloring, also known as tartrazine, has been known to cause serious allergic reactions (particularly for people who are allergic to aspirin). In 2008, the Food Standards Agency issued a warning about yellow 5 causing hyperactivity in some children.<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, I am sure the fruit snacks look the most appetizing. But after reading the ingredients, which is better for us? Most people, after knowing what is in the fruit snacks and the non-gmo granola bar, would rather eat the Non-GMO granola bar because they know exactly what they are putting into their body.

If we have that concern over our physical bodies, we should most definitely have that concern over our spiritual lives. But many times, we don't pay that much attention to how preaching takes place from the pulpit, or what it is made up of, which is a form of spiritual food for our souls. In many places, the preaching is like the fruit

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<sup>1</sup>“What's in Your Fruit Chew Snacks,” Huffington Post, February 28, 2012, accessed June 11, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/28/fruit-chew-snacks-ingredients\\_n\\_1304369.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/28/fruit-chew-snacks-ingredients_n_1304369.html).

snacks—too much human engineering and artificial flavoring in order to tickle the ears. What we really need from pulpits is the pure milk/meat of the word with no artificial sweeteners.

But how do you know what to listen for? How do you know if what you are hearing is biblical preaching? What exactly is biblical preaching? The reason we need to investigate this question is because every preacher believes they are preaching biblically. But we need to define biblical preaching by what God’s word shows us.

*Book* (5 minutes)

Call upon three students to read the following passages. Have the other students see if they can pick up on commonalities between the three in regard to what should be involved in biblical preaching.

Nehemiah 8:5-8 “And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. ***They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.***

1 Timothy 4:13 “Until I come, devote yourself to the ***public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.***”

2 Timothy 4:2 “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ***preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort***, with complete patience and teaching.”

*Look* (35 minutes)

**Teaching point 1—Biblical preaching begins with discovering a biblical concept uncovered through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage of scripture.**

Let’s begin in the pastor’s study to see what needs to be taking place there as he sits down to prepare a sermon.

Introduce and explain Haddon Robinson's definition of expository preaching:

*The communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.*"<sup>2</sup>

Here is what I want us to see and understand from this definition of biblical preaching. A biblical concept must come from study of these different elements of the passage of scripture: historical context, grammatical structure, literary genre. We don't have time to go into all of these elements, but I want you to understand that it is these elements that allow us to get to the original meaning of a text, and that is exactly what we want. The text means what the text meant! It has not changed meanings. You may think, "Well of course Clif! That just makes sense." But here is what I want us to realize—when we make a text mean something that it could not have meant to the original audience, then we have the meaning of the text wrong. This is the difference between exegesis (leading out of the text) and eisegesis (leading into the text).

Let's look at one example:

Revelation 3:15-16 "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."

How many of you have heard this passage preached to mean this: "I'd rather you be on fire for me (hot) or completely against me (cold) than to be caught in between (lukewarm)."

Our initial reaction to this text is based on an understanding of concepts that we have in our culture, but were foreign to the original audience. We think that "hot" and

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<sup>2</sup>Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 20.

“cold” must refer to being on fire for Christ, or being against Christ. In our culture we have used these words in this way. To be “cold” to something means to be disinterested or even against that thing. We think of the “cold shoulder.” Eisegesis reads into the text this cultural understanding that we have.

Exegesis leads a person to study the historical, grammatical, and literary contexts of this passage, resulting in a far different interpretation than eisegesis. For instance, an historical study would uncover that Laodicea was a real place that was known for its wealth, textile industry, and medical breakthroughs, especially for a medicine that aided in eyesight. So when Jesus calls them poor, naked, and blind, he is taking elements from the physical culture and saying that they add no value to you the condition of your heart.

Furthermore, an historical study would also reveal that Laodicea lacked cool water. Instead, they had to use an Aqueduct to pipe in water from a neighboring city (Colosse). By the time the water got to Laodicea, it was lukewarm and therefore had all sorts of bacteria and parasites, making it unusable. The people would have to boil their water before drinking it, otherwise they would get sick. Thus, cold water was viewed as refreshing and drinkable, while hot water was viewed as purifying. Given this historical insight, Christ is saying that Laodicea is neither refreshing to the general populace (via servant hood, helping the poor, etc) or purifying to the general populace (via sharing the Gospel). He wishes they would at least be one of them, but they are neither, they are indifferent to both. All they care about is amassing wealth and because of this, Jesus says they are diseased. He draws an illustration to what would occur when someone drank the lukewarm water – they got sick and would throw up violently. Thus, Christ is saying the church in Laodicea is sickening.

So the preacher must do this work in the study. But what is the task he needs to perform in the pulpit?

**Teaching point 2— Biblical preaching presents the word, explains the word (by means of explanation, illustration, and application), and gives exhortation based upon the word.**

First of all, biblical preaching concerns itself with what the Bible has to say. The Bible is not a sidebar to the message. Rather, the Bible, and what it has to say, must be the central, unifying element of the sermon. Biblical preaching unfolds the meaning of a biblical passage of scripture.

Second, not only must the word of God be front and center, but a preacher must work to help the listener understand the meaning of the God’s word. This is what we call **explanation**. We are going to talk about explanation in greater detail in just a moment, but for now I want us to see that explanation makes the biblical text clear and understandable to the audience. This may include defining words, phrases, contextual situations, etc. So in biblical preaching, the audience should be able to understand the meaning of the text.

**Explanation** includes the components of illustration and application.<sup>3</sup> Each of these parts aid the listener in understanding and activating the truth of scripture so that preaching is not reduced to information transfer. Explanation helps the listener know what the text says. It answers the question, “What does the text say?” Illustration demonstrates what the text says. Application answers the question, “What does this text look like in my life?”

The final element of biblical preaching deals with **exhortation**. A preacher who does not plead with his listeners to respond to biblical truth does not complete the exercise of preaching. Exhortation is the warning to stop a certain action or avoid a certain attitude based upon the truth of scripture. It is the strong encouragement to build into a person’s life a promise or a discipline or an attitude based upon the truth of the scripture being presented. When you look at the phrase in Nehemiah that reads, “giving

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<sup>3</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 83.



the meaning so that the people could understand,” the idea is that the priests explained the word in such a way that the people could use the information that was imparted.

So the three elements you want to look for, be aware of, when listening to preaching are word presentation, word explanation, and word exhortation.

- Why do you think these elements are necessary to biblical preaching?
- How do the elements of Robinson’s definition fit with Chapell’s presentation, explanation, exhortation classifications?

Group Study: Assign a sermonic passage (Acts 2:14-39; Matthew 5-7; Acts 17:1-3) and break the group up into three teams. Assign each team a passage in order to identify the three elements of presentation, explanation, and exhortation.

**Teaching point 3—If these are essential elements to preaching, is there an overall purpose for preaching?**

- Have students read Colossians 1:28. Have students deduce from the purpose of preaching what is the purpose of listening.

When considering the purpose of listening to preaching, Colossians 1:24-29 proves helpful because the purpose of preaching is so clearly presented. Paul writes,

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works in me.

Paul explains what it means to make this mystery fully known in verse 28 when he declares that the purpose of his apostolic ministry was to proclaim Christ along with “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Each word used to describe the task of preaching (proclaim,

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<sup>4</sup>Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 159.

warn, and teach) adds depth to the overall purpose of preaching, thus building the purpose of listening to preaching.

Proclamation is the act of formal announcing. When used outside of the New Testament, the word generally referred to official reports. In the religious sphere, but still apart from the New Testament, the word was used to announce official games or festivals. Within the New Testament, the verb is used to announce or proclaim acts achieved by a person rather than ideas.<sup>5</sup> Both James Dunn and Robert Wilson suggest that the use of the word in the New Testament bears nuances of a sacred, or solemn, announcement.<sup>6</sup> Paul demonstrated with his life how serious he considered the task by enduring sufferings and struggles in order to accomplish the job. To proclaim Christ, in Paul's mind, meant to herald and exalt Christ, no matter the cost, as God's revealed purpose for the world, and as superior to any competing rival one might have.

In describing his proclamation, Paul used two adverbial participles that add depth to the goal of preaching and the related purpose of listening. Proclaiming Christ includes "warning" all believers either to stop a particular behavior or to avoid a particular behavior.<sup>7</sup> Teaching is another component to Paul's solemn proclamation and carries the idea of instructing in the practical application of the gospel.<sup>8</sup> Charting a course to follow in life in light of the person and work of Jesus is the task of teaching.

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<sup>5</sup>J. Schniewind, "Angelia," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans., abr. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 12 .

<sup>6</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The New International Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 123; Robert McLachlan Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 180.

<sup>7</sup>Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 679.

<sup>8</sup>Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 124.

Each of these modes of communication serves to make known the riches of Christ's glory. Proclaiming Christ is the exalting of his person and deeds above all others as the ultimate demonstration of God's justice, love, and grace. Warning believers sounds the alarm to the foolishness of straying from such a Savior and urges them back to the Savior. Instruction concerning Christ pertains to all that Christ is for the believer and why He is worthy of following. All three of these communication techniques aid in the exaltation of Christ. Without the proclamation of Christ's deeds, there is no gospel, only legalism. Without the presence of the warning element, no confession or repentance takes place. If there is only warning, then grace is undermined and fear-based, moralistic living and is produced. If teaching is present, but no warning, or a cross-centered framework through which to understand the teaching, then only information transfer is accomplished.

### **Listening for Devotion to Be Deepened**

The goal of exalting Christ through these communicative activities is that the believer may be presented as mature in Christ. But what does this mean? Capturing the true essence of the term "mature" for this context proves difficult. Moo suggests that "mature" is too weak of a translation because of its relative nature. One can always find another Christian at a lower level of maturity with which to compare himself, but when compared with Christ, no one is ever mature. "Perfect" is the translation in the NIV, but this, argues Moo, is too strong because perfect carries the ideas of perfectionism and absolutism.<sup>9</sup> J. B. Lightfoot proposes that the term is a metaphor brought over from the "ancient mysteries" where it was used to delineate between initiates and those fully instructed. So within the first century church, the term was used, suggests Lightfoot, to refer to the baptized as opposed to those who were being catechized prior to their

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<sup>9</sup>Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 161.

baptism.<sup>10</sup> A τέλειον, according to Lightfoot, is one who had been fully instructed.

David G. Peterson offers an interpretation of the term that finds support with Moo. Peterson notes, “In the LXX there is a particular use in the sense of ‘blamelessness’ or ‘wholeheartedness’ in relation to God.”<sup>11</sup> Following this line of thought, Moo observes that “similar to the Hebrew *tamim* (which is translated by τέλειος five times in the LXX), τέλειος connotes the quality of being so wholehearted in one’s devotion to the Lord that one can be said to be blameless in conduct.”<sup>12</sup> This Hebrew perspective of τέλειος makes sense when one considers that Paul also prayed that the Colossian church would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding: “So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10). The idea of τέλειος is that a person is wholly devoted to God in light of all he knows and understands about God. This thought is further demonstrated in the way Paul prayed that the believers in Colossae may be “strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father” (Col 1:11-12). The mature, or perfect, man, is one who lives a gospel-centered life in light of the riches of the glory of Christ, full of perseverance, bearing fruit, and thankfulness, brought about by the means of proclaiming the gospel, warning against straying from Christ, and teaching the excellencies of Christ and the residual outgrowth of abiding in Him.

Now that the purpose of preaching is made clear, light falls on the purpose of

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<sup>10</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1879), 170-71.

<sup>11</sup>David G. Peterson, “Mature in Christ,” in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul’s Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 192.

<sup>12</sup>Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 161.

listening to biblical preaching. The purpose of listening is to have Christ elevated in the listener's life so that he sees the riches of Jesus' glory more clearly, and is thereby induced to hand over his life to Christ, completely, in order to gain joy and live in a manner fully pleasing to him. The exaltation of Christ in the listener's life takes place when a habit is exposed as harmful or sinful (warning), when a better understanding and application of a scriptural truth is achieved (teaching), or when the gospel is simply proclaimed, stirring deeper affections for Christ.

The exaltation of Christ as the means of producing believers mature in Christ because they find their sufficiency in Him is not only the purpose of preaching and listening in the New Testament, but it was also the purpose of preaching and listening in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 40 God prepares the Israelites for a time of bondage, but also promises them a future deliverance. When the promise was fulfilled and the people were making their return to their homeland, God instructs a herald to race to the top of a mountain to proclaim a message for all to hear: "Behold your God!" is the preacher's message. In light of the return from captivity, who is to receive credit and worship? Answer: Behold your God. Isaiah then goes on to exalt the greatness of God over and above any competitor. Closing his sermon he says, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable" (Isa 40:28). What should an Israelite be listening for when a prophet presents God's message? He should be listening for a greater understanding and exaltation of God for his own life.

*Took (5 minutes)*

1. As you consider the purpose of listening, assess whether or not you have had a specific purpose for listening to sermons over the last month.
2. Pick out elements of expository preaching they detect in this Sunday's sermon. Come back to class ready to report.



## **Lesson 2—Connecting Sermon Listening to Discipleship**

### 4 Objectives

- Participants will know that listening is crucial to learning.
- Participants will view the sermon as a major means of discipleship.
- Participants will assess their past listening as a passive listener or passionate listener.
- Participants will decide whether to continue being a passive listener or a passionate listener.

### **Topic: Listening to sermons as a means of discipleship**

### **Learning Objectives:**

1. Participants will know that listening is crucial to learning.
2. Participants will view the sermon as a major means of discipleship.
3. Participants will assess their past listening as a passive listener or passionate listener.
4. Participants will decide whether to continue being a passive listener or a passionate listener.

### **Scripture Passages:**

Matthew 7:24-27; Matthew 16:24-15:5; John 10:27

### **Teaching Plan:**

*Hook* (5 minutes)

Opening Question for class discussion:

1. What elements of expository preaching were you able to pick out of this past week's sermon?
2. How did you assess your listening purpose from weeks/months in the past?

Summary of lesson 1—Biblical preaching begins in the pastor’s study where he discovers a biblical concept through historical, grammatical, and literary study. In the pulpit, the pastor should seek to present the word, explain the word, and exhort based upon the word. The purpose for all of this is to exalt Christ and deepen one’s devotion to Christ.

I want each of you to think about the different types of communication you use daily at your job (speaking, email, smoke signals, reading, writing, listening). Which of those communication avenues do you use the most? Which do you use the least? Now think about the training you received in school regarding each of those types of communication. How much training did you receive in school pertaining to writing?

Reading? Speaking? Listening?

(Write out following graph on marker board or display it on screen)<sup>1</sup>

Mode of Communication	Formal Years of Training	Percentage of Time Used
Writing	12 years	9%
Reading	6-8 years	16%
Speaking	1-2 years	35%
Listening	0-1/2 years	40%

The mode of communication that is used the most, but taught the least is the communication tool of listening. On top of all of this, think about how each of these methods of communication is normally taught. They are taught in an oral way that requires listening skills.

The reason all of this sounds so foreign to us is because we often times view listening as a passive, involuntary action. We think that no effort is required in listening. We can’t *help* but listen and there really is no training that goes into it, right? Either you can listen, or you can’t. But that would be a wrong view to listening. True listening is an

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<sup>1</sup>Madelyn Burley-Allen, *Listening, The Forgotten Skill, A Self-Teaching Guide* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 38, Kindle.



active activity in which we desperately need training. So it could be said that we need to learn to listen in order to learn more.

As a disciple of Christ, we are by nature learners. The core of what it means to be a disciple is to be a learner. One of the primary ways God calls upon us to learn is through listening. So if we want to be a better disciple of Jesus, we need to learn to listen.

### *Book*

Matthew 7:24-27 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

“Matthew 16:24-17:5 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.”

John 10:27 “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

*Look (35 minutes)*

## **Teaching point 1—Disciples are Life-long Learners of Christ**

### *Life-long learner*

At his core, a disciple of Jesus is a life-long learner. God’s infinite being can never be fully known. His wisdom can never be exhausted. Therefore, disciples will be learners of Him forever. In Ephesians 2:6-7 Paul indicates that learning will continue in heaven, expressing his desire that the Ephesians would be seated in the heavenly places “so that in the coming ages [emphasis added] he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

### *Of Christ*

Scott Attebery has done significant work regarding the role of discipleship in the Christian’s life. He writes, “Human discipleship can be compared to training wheels on the first few miles of an infinite journey of learning. But when the training wheels come off, the disciple is not left to continue learning alone. Consider the last line of the Great Commission. Jesus says, ‘I am with you always...’ The Holy Spirit is continuing Christ’s work. Jesus’ promise of “another comforter” has a unique translation in the Greek. Another “is not the word used to compare two objects of dissimilar quality, but rather the word used to compare two things of the same essential quality, there being a difference only in person.

“Therefore, anything the Holy Spirit teaches is a command of Christ that, according to the Great Commission, a disciple must learn to observe. For example, the Holy Spirit ‘guide(s)[them] into all truth,’ (John 16:13), and ‘teach(es) [them] all things’ (John 14:26). To learn from the Holy Spirit is to learn from Christ.

“Jesus was communicating something vital: the Holy Spirit would empower and continue their disciple-making. Therefore, Jesus’ closing words of the Great Commission are not just a “good luck” charm. They are the answer to how discipleship would be successful. In this way, the Great Commission might be paraphrased, “Go and

help men become learners, and I'll continue teaching them through the Holy Spirit for a lifetime."<sup>2</sup>

*In order to observe all things*

Attebery clarifies an oftentimes-misconstrued aspect of the Great Commission and discipleship process by delineating between exhaustive and productive learning:

Jesus does not call believers to “teach them all things” but to “teach them to *observe* all things.” The former requires the discipleship process to continue until the disciple has exhaustive knowledge. The latter requires the disciple to acquire the productive skill of learning.<sup>3</sup>

The amount of information and teaching material to be taught makes exhaustive discipleship nearly impossible. John reports, “Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). If Jesus intends for disciple-makers to perform exhaustive discipleship, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to make one disciple in a lifetime. How could multiple disciples then be expected from each disciplemaker if the goal is so information lofty?

A life-long learner of Jesus knows how to learn from and follow Jesus because someone taught them how to learn from and follow Jesus. Producing life-long learners of Jesus achieves the Great Commission task of making disciples by teaching people to observe all that Jesus commanded.

**Teaching point 2—Life-Long Learners (disciples) are Life-long Listeners**

In this case, biblical preachers play a role in producing life-long learners of Jesus. After all, the pulpit was made for the pew, not the other way around. Preaching is

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<sup>2</sup>Scott Attebery, “Disciples for Life: Maximizing Explicit Discipleship Training to Create Life-Long Learners of Christ” (D.Min project, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2014), 32-33

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 29.

not designed so that pew-sitters can be dazzled by the pulpiteer's excellency of speech, but rather, preaching is designed to be a means of helping and equipping people to grow in Christ-likeness.

Part of the productive skill of learning is learning to listen well. When effective listening is coupled with biblical preaching, the listener receives tools that equip him to be a life-long learner of Christ. Those tools include learning where to find spiritual food and learning how to digest it.

Throughout the Bible, transformational events in the lives of God's people carry a call to listen effectively. As Moses prepared the people for entering the Promised Land, God punctuated Moses' message with exhortations for the Israelites to hear or listen to God's Word (Deut 4:1, 10, 5:1, 6:3-4). Equating their very life with their ability to listen and respond to God's Word in Deuteronomy 8:3, Moses wrote, "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." After the settlement of the Promised Land, God continued to call his people to listen to him, as Psalm 81:8 indicates when it says, "Hear, O my people, while I admonish you! O Israel, if you would but listen to me!"<sup>4</sup>

***Ask the participants to identify the audience that Jesus is speaking to in each of the passages in their notes.*** The target audience Jesus addresses in each of these passages that pertain to listening is disciples. In the case of John 10, Jesus speaks about disciples rather than to disciples.

Both Matthew and Luke place Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as the first major teaching section in their gospels. Both gospel writers emphasize that Jesus preached this sermon to his disciples (Matt 5:1; Luke 6:20), and both conclude with the call for the disciples to hear and obey (Matt 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49).

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<sup>4</sup>John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 111.

The Synoptic Gospels record the transfiguration of Jesus in the presence of his closest disciples (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-35). Standing in the glorious presence of the transfigured Christ, God the Father intensifies the moment by enveloping Jesus, along with Moses and Elijah, in a cloud of his manifest presence and says to the disciples, “This is my Son, my chosen One; listen to him!” (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 10:35).

Many commentators see in this scene an obvious allusion to Deuteronomy 18:15, with Jesus being the eschatological prophet like Moses to whom Israel must listen. However, what makes this scene even more pertinent to discipleship and listening is what precedes it. In each of the Synoptics, just before his transfiguration, Jesus declares what he must suffer at the hands of the religious leaders of Jerusalem. In light of this reality Jesus also defines the task of anyone who wants to be his disciple: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

According to God’s words at the transfiguration, disciples fulfill their task of following Jesus by constantly listening to Jesus. The reason a person would “take up their cross and follow” Jesus is if they have listened to him, understanding and embracing him as their Lord. It is effective listening that leads to learning, which results in discipleship.

Listening as the kickstarting element in discipleship comes across in Jesus’ teaching as well. In John 10:16, Jesus says, “And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” Continuing this picture of the sheep and shepherd, in 10:27 Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

A person cannot begin their journey of faith or continue it in Jesus without “ears to hear.” Listening is paramount to the birth of a disciple. But effective listening is also a necessary element that continues the discipleship process in the church.

### **Teaching point 3—Effective Listening to Biblical Preaching Continues Discipleship**

If a disciple is a life-long learner of Jesus, and life-long learners are meant to be life-long listeners, how does preaching help an effective listener continue their journey of learning so that they can “observe all things”?

Churches usually promote some sort of discipleship program as the means of leading people down the path of spiritual maturity. Whether or not preaching shows up in the brochure of available discipleship options, it is an essential part of the discipleship process in the life of a follower of Christ. The apostle Paul makes clear the need for preaching when he gives Timothy the order to “preach the Word” (2 Tim 4:2). The context surrounding this order connects preaching to discipleship. Paul’s days were numbered. He knew his time for departure was close at hand, and he wanted to communicate some essential encouragement to his son in the faith, Timothy. So Paul tells Timothy the basis of teaching, reproving, correcting, and training in righteousness in order to produce competent and equipped followers of Christ is the Word of God. He then tells Timothy to preach this Word. Preaching shapes the minds, hearts, attitudes, and actions of those who walk with Christ. This is discipleship.

All of discipleship is not bound up in preaching, but preaching holds an essential part in helping create life-long learners of Jesus.

How so?

### **Biblical Preaching Leads Listeners to Green Grass**

The apostle Peter describes the task of the elder as that of a shepherd (1 Pet 5:1). One of the roles of a shepherd of a flock is to lead that flock to places of green pasture so the sheep graze and eat. The same is true of the pastor when he preaches. He is to lead his flock to spiritual pastures where their souls are filled with nourishment. The green grass that biblical preachers should always lead their listeners to is the Word of

God, since this is where listeners encounter God as he has revealed himself.

The biblical preacher does not have anything to offer his listeners except the Word of God, and because of that, effective listeners learn over time that the scriptures suffice to be the diet of the life-long learner of Christ. The charge of the biblical preacher is not to preach his own ideas about life or God, but to faithfully present, explain, and apply what God has said through a grammatical, historical, and literary study of a biblical passage in its context.<sup>5</sup>

Scripture remains the biblical preacher's source of spiritual nourishment for his listeners because it is in the scriptures that they discover the glory of God displayed in Jesus Christ. What listeners need every time the preacher opens his Bible is to see and hear about the glory of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Even though every passage of scripture does not present the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in full color, every complete passage does shed light on an aspect of our fallen nature.<sup>6</sup> As depressing as this may seem, the truth is that man's sinfulness is kept in focus only because it leads to the glorious reality of the gospel.

The effective listener who sits under preaching that always has the meaning of the Word of God as its message, and is biblically faithful in drawing the hearer to Jesus, learns that their spiritual food is Jesus. As Jesus said, "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me" (John 6:57).

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<sup>5</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

<sup>6</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 267. The claim made by Chapell that every passage of scripture highlights some aspect of man's fallen condition is what he calls the "fallen condition focus."

## **Biblical Preaching Teaches Effective Listeners How to Feed Themselves**

When a person is spiritually prepared, week after week, to listen to the Word of God from the man of God, he will begin to identify key characteristics of the preacher's message. Not only does biblical preaching lead effective listeners to the greenest of grass, biblical preaching also teaches the effective listener how to properly feed on the grass. When a biblical preacher discerningly draws out a passage's main point through careful exegesis and also diligently applies that truth, he implicitly teaches those who are paying attention how to feed off of God's Word. Every biblical sermon will contain several of the same characteristics that listeners can learn to use in their own personal study, which equips them to be life-long learners of Jesus.

**The characteristic of discernment.** One characteristic of biblical preaching is the exercise of discernment. In 1 Kings 3:9, Solomon makes the request of an understanding mind so that he can discern between what is good and evil. According to Keil and Delitzsch, the word for "understanding mind" can be translated as a "listening heart."<sup>7</sup> On any given sermon preached, the biblical preacher pleads to God for an understanding mind and uses spiritual discernment, or a listening heart, in deciding on an interpretation and application of a text. However, the preacher knows that his interpretation is not always flawless, and will encourage his listeners to test what he says with their own study. The skill of discernment is one that is critical to the life-long learner of Jesus and one that the preacher should encourage in his listeners.

The exercise of discernment by a congregation is exemplified by the Bereans in Acts 17. They were called "noble" because they eagerly received Paul's teaching, but then did their own follow up study in Scripture to verify the truth of Paul's preaching

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<sup>7</sup>C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *1 and 2 Kings & 1 and 2 Chronicles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1866), 31, quoted in Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 20-21.



(Acts 17:10-12).

Paul instructs the church at Thessalonica to “test everything,” keeping hold of what turns out to be good and shunning what turns out to be evil (1 Thess 5:21). The root word of “test” carries the idea of “examine” or “discern.” Tim Challies in his book on spiritual discernment observes that all things that pertain to the Christian life and faith need to be tested. Since the Christian life is related to all of life, and since no one contains perfect knowledge on any area of life, then the disciple of Christ needs to exercise the skill of discernment in every area of life.<sup>8</sup>

The author of Hebrews connects the use and growth of discernment with effective listening to biblical preaching. In Hebrews 5:11-14, the author writes,

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

The hearers addressed in the book of Hebrews were not spiritually immature because of an inability to learn, but rather their immaturity was a consequence of an unwillingness to listen effectively. The author calls this dull, or sluggish, hearing.

As a result of their dull hearing, they were also unskilled in the “word of righteousness,” which, in this context, refers to the dull hearers’ inability to make righteous and wise decisions on their own.<sup>9</sup> Just like a baby needs someone to feed him milk, so too do the spiritually immature need someone to make decisions for them.

On the other hand, the spiritually mature are those who constantly employ their powers of discernment. The only way he can employ powers of discernment is if he has

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<sup>8</sup>Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, 83.

<sup>9</sup>William Hendricksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 151-52.

first effectively listened to the Word of God preached and extrapolated techniques for learning from God's Word. When this is done, he is enabled to continually feast on the solid food of Christ, which nourishes the soul.

**The characteristic of contextual study.** Another trait of biblical preaching the effective listener will notice is that the sermon is anchored in context. No biblical text for preaching is interpreted or explained apart from an understanding of its historical, grammatical, or literary context. An effective listener picks up on this trait. Undoubtedly this is part of the discernment process that was praised in the Bereans. They examined the scriptures to see if what Paul said concerning the Christ and his necessity to suffer and rise from the dead was contextually accurate.

When an effective, spiritually-prepared listener is consistently exposed to preaching that is rooted in historical, grammatical, and literary contexts, he knows that the authority the preacher derives is not from the preacher himself, but from the text. Thus, the listener is trained to rely upon the authority of Scripture discovered through contextual study in his personal Bible study.

**The characteristic of application.** Not only are biblical sermons preached in context, but biblical sermons also move “from doctrinal exposition to life instruction.”<sup>10</sup> Application answers the question, “so what?” of the biblical truth. God's Word was not delivered to man so that man can simply learn, but rather so that man could be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Constantly having the Word of God applied to their life through preaching teaches effective listeners to be diligent in application, thus fulfilling the command to observe all things that Jesus commands.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 45.

#### **Teaching Point 4—Effective Listeners Make Disciples**

A church never wants to be described like God described Ezekiel's congregation:

As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, "Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD." And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it. (Ezek 33:30-32)

The sad commentary on churches in a highly customized and self-centered culture, however, is that many church members come to be entertained by the music and amused by the stories they hear in the preaching. When a church member approaches a service with this attitude, they can feel that the service is geared towards them to do with what they please, not expecting consequence from the church for living contrary to the message of the gospel. Perhaps just as damaging to the church are those who come to be spiritually uplifted, but have no intention in engaging in the life of the church. As Michael Fabarez writes, "Today, more than ever, people want a church (and a god) that doesn't expect much from them."<sup>11</sup> They believe that their faith is a private matter that they can tinker with and adjust according to what suits them, but the pastor, and especially the church body, has no business meddling in such a personal matter.

To take it a step further, in today's advanced society, one does not even have to go to church to hear biblical preaching. From the comfort of their bedroom, they can pop in ear buds and tune to a favorite preacher via podcast without having to worry about the accountability of a church family.

A privatized faith, however, is nowhere to be found on the pages of the New Testament. When Paul looks for metaphors for the church he rarely describes her as a

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<sup>11</sup>Michael Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 173.

single entity. Rather most of his metaphors are many parts that make up one entity. For example, he describes the local church as one body made up of many parts working together (1 Cor 12:12-30), one building being built up and growing together (Eph 2:20-22), and one flock with a shepherd (1 Pet 5:1). None of these images present a privatized faith that is to be lived out in isolation from other brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, Hebrews says that faithfulness to the church should increase with each passing day (Heb 10:24).

Part of that faithfulness to one another in the church is the aspect of accountability. The church made up of effective listeners realizes that there are other brothers and sisters who have encountered the same Word of God. They are now accountable to one another, to some degree, for its outworking in their lives.

In Romans 15:14, Paul was convinced that such good listening had taken place in the church at Rome that they could instruct one another. He says that they were “filled with all knowledge,” but certainly he was not referring to his letter as that which filled them with knowledge because he is referring to them as already filled. Rather, he must be referring to their hearing and embracing biblical preaching. Additionally, the author of Hebrews fully expected his listeners to teach others, but because of their dullness of hearing, they were still needing to be taught themselves (Heb 5:11-12). Yet the implication is clear—effective listeners are expected to teach and counsel others on how to live the Christian life, which is discipleship.

Hebrews 5:11-14—Passive listeners are spiritually immature while passionate listeners of biblical preaching are equipped to disciple others.

*Took (5 minutes)*

1. How do you know if you are a passive listener or a passionate listener?
2. What will you do in preparation for this Sunday to be a passionate listener?

## **Lesson 3—The Spiritual Discipline of Anticipating the Sermon**

### 2 Objectives

- Participants will be equipped with skills to prepare their hearts before hearing a sermon.
- Participants will create a plan to utilize these skills for preparing their hearts.

### **Topic: Preparing to hear a sermon**

### **Learning Objectives:**

1. Participants will be equipped with skills to prepare their heart before hearing a sermon.
2. Participants will create a plan to utilize these skills for preparing their hearts.

### **Scripture Passages:**

Jeremiah 4:3, Hosea 10:12; Mark 4:13-21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 4:11

### **Teaching Plan:**

Summary of lesson 2—Last week we connected listening to biblical preaching to being a life-long learner of Jesus (a disciple). We said that disciples are life-long learners of Jesus, and we showed how life-long learners were called upon God to be life-long listeners. Then we studied how listening to biblical preaching is a great part of discipleship because when we effectively listen, we pick up skills that help us feed ourselves on the word of God.

*Hook (5 minutes)*

Opening question: What were some things you did to become a passionate listener this past Sunday?

### **Opening Quiz**

T or F I spend more than 30 minutes getting physically ready for Sunday.

T or F I spend at least 30 minutes getting my home ready when I know company is coming over.

T or F Before cooking a meal I prepare the ingredients.

T or F Before going on vacation I book hotel rooms.

This fun little quiz is not really to test your knowledge on any particular subject, but rather it reveals an activity that we commonly engage in. We prepare. Even those who are spontaneous and procrastinators, they cannot get through life without some degree of preparation.

But we often times don't think about preparing to hear a sermon. Listening is easy, right? Well, not really.

What are some common reasons people give for not enjoying preaching? It's boring; it's too long; I don't understand; it's not practical; it's too practical. All of those reasons may have a hint of truth to them, but most of them are a result of a lack of preparation, not on the preacher's part, but on the part of the listener.

*Book*

Jeremiah 4:3 "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns."

Hosea 10:12 "Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you."

Mark 4:13-21, 24 "And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and

takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold...And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you."

*Look (35 minutes)*

**Teaching Point 1—We need to prepare.**

*What are some common themes found in these three passages?*

*What do you think the writers mean when they say, "break up your fallow ground"?*

Breaking up the fallow ground is a call of God mediated through the prophets of God to prepare your heart to receive God's word and instructions. If we do not pay attention to this exhortation, our hearts will grow hardened. The write of Hebrews tells us not to harden our hearts (Hebrews 3:7-13). The hardening of a heart can be done either directly or indirectly. Directly, by outright rebellion. But hardening can take place indirectly by simple carelessness or negligence. In other words, when we are not intentional in softening our hearts, we are indirectly hardening our hearts. When we are constantly exposed to the truth of God's word, but never respond positively to His word, our hearts grow hardened.

*Who is Mark speaking to in the Mark 4 passage and what is Jesus' message?*

(Explain the context and meaning of Mark 4 thoroughly. Jesus is speaking to those who have had the secret of the kingdom revealed to them. He is telling them that having an open, prepared heart is going to be key in being one of his disciples and understanding the word of God.)

The gospel writer Mark describes the importance of this cultivation in his recounting of Jesus' parable and interpretation of the soils in Mark 4. Even though Mark stresses the teaching ministry of Jesus throughout his gospel (1:14-15, 22, 27-28, 38;

2:13; 6:2-3, 34; 10:1), he includes only two extended teaching sections, one of which is Mark 4.<sup>1</sup> No doubt Mark had many teaching stories to choose from to include in his gospel, so the fact that he selected teaching that focused on hearing stresses the importance of hearing.

So far in Mark's gospel, people committed themselves to Jesus such as the twelve apostles, while others accused him of blasphemy (Mark 2:7), while still others responded to Jesus' teaching by saying that he was "possessed by the devil" (Mark 3:22). There were those who were healed by him, those who eagerly gathered around him to receive his teaching, those who were hostile towards him, and then there was his own family who thought he was crazy (Mark 3:21). How can there be so many different responses to the good news brought by Jesus?<sup>2</sup> Most scholars agree that the parable of the soils is included in this section in order to explain how there can be such differing responses to the same teaching.

Scholars differ on the emphasis of the parable and interpretation. The three obvious features of this parable are the sower, the seed, and the soils, each of which are said to be the dominant element and interpretive key, depending upon whom you read. The main thrust of the parable does not fall solely on the seed or its harvest, although they serve as important features of the parable as a means of motivation to hear rightly. The emphasis of the parable focuses attention on the four different types of soil and the corresponding results once the seed falls on them. The parable is a warning to Mark's readers to pay attention to how they go about hearing the Word. The opening and closing of the parable stress the importance of listening. The development of the different types of soil and what happens to the seed once a particular type of soil hears the Word stresses

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<sup>1</sup>The second teaching section is Mark 13.

<sup>2</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 182.



the function of hearing. Ben Witherington brings this particular point to light when he writes, “Notice that the sower, the seed, and the method of sowing are the same in each case. This strongly suggests that the point has to do with the reception of the seed.”<sup>3</sup>

This interpretation also answers the question as to why some rejected the Word and others embraced it. For Mark’s readers, the explanation served as encouragement and motivation to be the good soil. The motivation is two-fold. First, the prospect of the seed being stolen, or the fruit withering, or being choked out served as motivation to be good soil. The second means of motivation relates to the joy of the fruit of the harvest. In the parable that follows, the stress on hearing and the two-fold motivation is repeated when Jesus says, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. For the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away” (Mark 4:24-25).

### **Knowing the Secret Is Not Enough**

Before considering the different types of hearing represented by the differing soils, consideration must be given to the placement and purpose of verses 10-12. What is agreed upon among scholars is that verses 10-12 were inserted, resulting in a passage that does not read chronologically. In the opening of the chapter Jesus is at seaside teaching the crowd from a boat. In verse 10 a transition takes place to Jesus being alone with the twelve apostles and “those around him” (Mark 4:10). Only this group receives the interpretation to the parable of soils. If this were chronologically arranged, it makes little sense why the private group asked Jesus about the parables (plural) when Jesus spoke only one parable up to that point. Additionally, verses 33-36 seem to indicate that Jesus spoke the last three parables from the boat to the seaside crowd. To go from the seaside

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<sup>3</sup>Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 165.

crowd to a private instruction time with just a few disciples, and then back out to the crowd to continue teaching, seems unreasonable. An explanation for the apparent clumsiness of Mark surfaces, however, when one considers that verse 13 states that understanding the interpretation to the parable of the soils is the key to understanding the rest of the parables. Therefore, for the benefit of his readers, Mark uses verses 10-12 as a flashing light so that they will pay attention to crucial interpretive key in verse 13.

Much debate exists, however, as to the intended meaning of verses 10-12. The ones who pursued Jesus, seeking explanation of the parables after he taught the crowds, are the ones to whom the secret of the kingdom of God had been given. What is that secret and does it affect the interpretation of the parable, which emphasizes hearing? Also, who are those “outside” and what is meant by the “so that” clause of verse 12 that introduces Isaiah 6:9, describing the outsiders as those who “may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven” (Mark 4:12)?

The secret spoken of carries the idea of something previously unknown becoming known. This mystery is not some knowledge reserved for spiritual elites who have cracked a code, but rather an unveiling, or revealing of something that was once unknown. Robert H. Stein spells out clearly what this secret is when he writes,

What is revealed about the kingdom of God is not stated in the present verse, but the context of 1:1-4:9 reveals what this is. The perfect tense of “has been given” indicates that the knowledge of the mystery of the kingdom of God has already been given to Jesus’s followers. They know that the kingdom of God has now come (1:14) and that, although its consummation still lies in the future, it is nevertheless now present (1:15). The manifestations of the kingdom are visible for all those with eyes to see. Lepers are being cleansed (1:40-45); paralytics are being raised (2:12); withered hands are being restored (3:1-6); demoniacs are being delivered of their unclean spirits (1:32-34); the prince of demons has met his master (3:22-27); fasting has given away to feasting (2:18-22); outcast sinners and toll collectors are finding forgiveness and life (2:13-17); and the Christ, the Son of God, is present in their midst (1:1). What was once a longed-for hope is now being proclaimed for all to see.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 208-9.

What must be understood about the giving of this secret is not that full knowledge or understanding has been granted, which is seen in the fact that Jesus has to explain the parable to the apostles and the others around him in a private setting, but simply that there is an understanding that the kingdom of God is present among them through Jesus.

In the next verse, Jesus turned his focus from those who have been given the secret of the kingdom of God to those “outside” (Mark 4:11). Verse 12 is spoken, not to those outside, but in reference to them. Disagreement exists as to what Jesus precisely meant when he quoted Isaiah 6:9, saying, “so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”

In shortened form Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9, introducing the quote with “so that.” A debate surrounds the intended meaning of the this clause. Some understand the clause as a statement of result.<sup>5</sup> With this understanding, Jesus communicates that one of the results of his ministry is that people will see but not perceive, and hear but not understand or believe. Others see the clause as stating purpose, making the verse to claim that Jesus spoke in parables in order to keep those outside from perceiving and understanding his true identity and the implications for their lives, thus resulting in repentance and forgiveness. Still another understanding of Jesus’ quote of Isaiah 6:9 views the clause functioning epexegetically, interpreting or characterizing the current situation of insiders and outsiders.<sup>6</sup>

To get to a better understanding of Mark 4:12, a correct understanding of Isaiah 6:9 must be sought. Here, God lays out for Isaiah what he can expect from the

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<sup>5</sup>William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 159. Lane suggests that a proper understanding of *ἵνα* would be “in order that it might be fulfilled.”

<sup>6</sup>Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1:-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 211.

Israelites regarding his prophetic ministry. Verse 9 states, “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” Two faculties are in view with this verse. A physical hearing is spoken of, along with an inner hearing, or understanding. This is paralleled with the use of the sight reference. The first thing Isaiah needed to understand about his prophetic ministry was that people would hear him, but they would not internalize, or embrace his message. The oddity of this verse is explained by John N. Oswalt:

It expresses for the Hebrew the strangeness of the contradiction, for to hear was normally synonymous with acknowledging and doing (Deut 1:43; 63). Here the prophet is saying that the disease of pride and rebellion has gone so deeply that they will simply misperceive the truth of what they hear (cf. 2 Ti 3:7).<sup>7</sup>

The next verse in the Isaiah passage reads, “Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” Understanding this verse, along with verse 9 is not too difficult. Coming to grips with the implication, however, is difficult. Is God commissioning Isaiah to preach in such a way that people do not respond, but are, rather, hardened against God’s Word? J. Alec Motyer sets forth a simple way of discovering what is intended in these verses when he writes,

How did Isaiah obey them? According to the criticism leveled at him in 28:9-10, Isaiah taught with such simplicity and clarity that the sophisticates of his day scorned him as fit only to conduct a kindergarten. The Isaianic literature as it has come to us bears all the marks of a plain, systematic, reasoned approach. It is clear that Isaiah did not understand his commission as one to blind people by obscurity of expression or complexity of message.<sup>8</sup>

If it was not by difficulty of message that dulled the hearts of this people, what was it?

The immediate text does not definitively say, but chapter 1 reveals the deplorable condition of Israel’s heart as seen by God, and his plea to them to “reason together” with

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<sup>7</sup>John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 189.

<sup>8</sup>J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 79.

him (Isa 1:18). Thus, by the time the reader reaches 6:9-10, grace was offered and rejected; rebellion persisted, and now judgment comes in the form of God hardening their hearts.

This understanding of Isaiah 6:9 must be an interpretive guide for Mark 4:10-12. The question is how Mark intended the use of the “so that” clause to influence the shortened quote. Of the three options previously mentioned, the exegetical use of the phrase seems most appropriate. To say that the Jesus is simply speaking of results is a rare usage for *ὥστε*. Seeing the clause as an introductory term bearing on the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy is grammatically plausible, and even seems to be Matthew’s use of it in his account (Mat 13:14). However, according to Craig L. Blomberg, “Verse 14a probably means *the prophecy of Isaiah applies to them.*”<sup>9</sup> Additionally, nowhere else in Mark does the *ὥστε* clause function as an introductory term for scripture.<sup>10</sup>

The exegetical use of the clause remains as the favored interpretation, with the Isaiah quote viewed as material that illustrates, or further explains, how there can be “outsiders.” The exegetical use is also found in Mark 8:18 and 9:12.<sup>11</sup> This support, coupled with Matthew 13:14 seen primarily as application rather than fulfillment, clarifies the use of Isaiah 6:9 in Mark 4:12. Also, with the exegetical use, Jesus’ use of parables can be viewed in the same way as Isaiah’s prophecy—as a response to and a cause of “outsiders” unwillingness to embrace Jesus. Since some were hostile and hard-hearted towards Jesus, the parables serve as judgment on them, but grace to those who have been given the secret. **Those on the outside of the kingdom of God, and remaining on the outside, are those who are not open or willing to understand Jesus**

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<sup>9</sup>Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 217, emphasis original.

<sup>10</sup>Guelich, *Mark 1:-8:26*, 211.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

**or his message. They are hostile and hard-hearted towards him and what they have will be taken from them (Mark 4:25).**

According to verse 13, the interpretation and application of the parable of the soils unlocked the door for understanding the rest of Jesus' parables. Therefore, Mark inserted verses 10-12 to serve as encouragement for a continued pursuit of Jesus. As the interpretation demonstrates, merely hearing about the kingdom of God does not equate to automatic harvest. The right soil is necessary.

### **Prepare your Heart to Hear**

Equipped with this knowledge, the question can now be asked, "What are Mark's readers supposed to know and glean from the parable of the soils and its interpretation?" The focus of the interpretation concerns the four different types of soils. Jesus begins the interpretation in verse 14, by means of allegory, equating the seed with the word. Mark's readers would have associated the sower with Jesus, but also more broadly to include any Christian who proclaimed the gospel. Concerning how one should understand "the word," Stein explains,

What the original expression was that Mark found in the tradition is uncertain. It is possible that Jesus himself used the Hebrew *rbR* (*dábár*, word) as the prophets did. If so, the meaning of the 'word' would have involved the message of Jesus as found in 1:15, but for Mark's readers, the 'word' would have had a more pregnant meaning and included the postresurrection understanding of the life and message of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

With this perspective, one concludes that the sower and the Word are equivalent to a preacher and the gospel.

The four soils differ in their location and surroundings, each representing different types of people and how they hear. One soil is "along the path" (Mark 4:4, 15). This most likely refers to an area surrounding the plot of land that was being worked. The path would be packed down from constant foot traffic of the sower and others, thus

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 217.

making the soil hard-packed and resistant to receiving anything, especially seed. The seed, or Word, since it remains on the surface and left exposed, is quickly snatched away by Satan. This type of soil is representative of a person who is indifferent, or hard-hearted, to the message of Jesus. They hear it, but have no intention of receiving it. No cultivation of the heart takes place in order to make it ready for the seed. The message never penetrates the heart or mind and is left exposed for Satan to quickly come and take it away.

The next type of soil mentioned is labeled, “rocky ground” (Mark 4:5, 16). It is not that this soil has rocks within it, but rather the presence of a layer of limestone sat just beneath a thin covering of topsoil.<sup>13</sup> The interpretation stresses how quickly and joyfully this type of person accepts the Word, but just as quickly, due to shallowness within themselves and pressures from outside of themselves, these people trip and stumble. The Word sown does not take root.

The third type of soil not only has seed sown in it, but also has the seed of thorns sown in it as well. As the seed of the Word grows, so too do the weeds and thorns grow around it. This soil represents the heart of a person who hears the Word, but the comforts, cash, and cares of the world strangle the Word so that it is not productive.

The fourth type of soil is labeled as “good soil.” This can only mean that it is good in comparison to the other three types. It is not hard-packed soil; it is not shallow soil with a rocky layer underneath that prevents roots going deep; nor is it soil where weeds grow. As a result, this type of person “hears the word, accepts it and bears fruit, thirtyfold, and sixtyfold and a hundredfold” (Mark 4:20).

So is this just a parable stating the hard facts of life? Are these simply the different types of hearts there are and it is merely the luck of the draw as to which type a person receives? Of course not. The parable serves to explain why some reject and

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<sup>13</sup>Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 153-54.

others embrace the kingdom of God as revealed in Jesus. The parable demonstrates that the major difference between insiders and outsiders is directly related to how they hear the Word. The parable spurs on Jesus' disciples and Mark's readers to make sure their hearts are continually good soil. How do they do this? They do this by making sure their hearts are open and willing to receive the Word. They do this by understanding that in truly receiving the Word, tribulation and persecution will arise. Having one's heart prepared as good soil does not protect a person from the trials of life, but instead trusts the truth of the Word and uses it as an anchor to steady himself during the storm. Living on the "inside" of the kingdom does not mean weeds and thorns will not attempt to grow, but rather the person living in the kingdom will do the work of weeding out the cares of the world before they overshadow God's Word. Preparing one's heart to be good soil for the reception of the Word means valuing the content of the Word, namely Jesus, as greater than the contents of the world. When a person cultivates their heart to hear from God's Word and accepts the truth from God's Word, fruit will be produced in his life.

To drive home the need for preparing the heart, right after the interpretation of the soils Jesus says, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (Mark 4:24). In other words, what a person brings to a sermon (openness, humbleness, seriousness, willingness) determines what a person will take away from the sermon.

More weight lands on the necessity of preparing to hear the Word of God when one considers the two other seed parables in Mark 4. One parable alludes to the kingdom's indiscernible growth (Mark 4:26-29). The next parable speaks of the kingdom's tiny beginning but substantial maturation. The entire chapter addresses a misconception commonly held in Jesus' day about the kingdom of God. The arrival of the kingdom was anticipated by the people to be with much fanfare and instant conquest. However, in this chapter, Jesus highlights for his disciples the kingdom's small



beginning, seeming vulnerability, and hiddenness, but also the kingdom's ultimate remarkable harvest. Thus the importance of paying attention of how one hears.

### **Teaching Point 2—Prepare Mentally**

The preaching of the word may be a physical exercise for the preacher, but it is a mental exercise for the listener.

- In order to be prepared mentally, begin with reminding yourself about who is speaking when the word of God is preached accurately (1 Thess 2:13; 1 Peter 4:11). These passages emphasize the fact that God himself speaks through biblical preaching.

How do you mentally prepare for a meeting with your boss? What type of mental preparation would you undergo if you landed a meeting with Bill Gates? Why wouldn't we do even greater work in preparing our minds when we are going to meet with God?

- Reduce your media intake throughout the week. Do not watch or participate in anything that could serve as a distraction in your mind. Ken Ramey, in his book *Expository Listening*,<sup>14</sup> uses Timothy Turner's work, *Preaching to Programmed People: Effective Communication in a Media-Saturated Society*,<sup>15</sup> to explain how too much television works against listening to preaching. He explains that one is visual, the other rational; one involves the eyes, the other mainly the ears; television requires passive receivers, preaching requires active receivers. If you are not mindful and discerning, television will turn you into a lazy listener who

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<sup>14</sup>Ken Ramey, *Expository Listening: A Handbook for Hearing and Doing God's Word* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical, 2010), 42.

<sup>15</sup>Timothy A. Turner, *Preaching to Programmed People: Effective Communication in a Media-Saturated Society* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995).

just sits in the pew taking in information but feeling no obligation to do anything with what you have heard. Usually, people tune into television to relax and tune everything else out. That is not to happen in preaching. Preaching is to help us tune in to everything else. Ramey says, “After watching TV and going to the movies and surfing the Internet all week long, you come to church and have to sit and listen to a lengthy sermon that requires a great deal of concentration and exertion you aren’t used to. You’re expected to go from being a passive viewer to an aggressive listener literally overnight.”<sup>16</sup>

Unless we are intentional in our mental preparation, we may become Sunday morning pew potatoes.

### **Teaching Point 3—Prepare Physically.**

Not only is the sermon a mental activity for the listener, it is also a physical activity. You have to physically stay engaged, alert, pen in hand, ready to respond.

- Come rested

One of the most common responses to preaching is not obedience to the word, but rather slumber to the preached word. Most would blame the preacher for this, and there may be some truth to that, but probably most of the blame lies upon the listener. How we prepare physically makes an impact on how we hear. Preparation for Sunday morning involves Saturday night. Your physical preparedness makes an impact on your spiritual receptivity. Consider the account of Jesus and the apostles the night Jesus was betrayed in Matthew 26:31-46. Jesus has told them that they will scatter when he is betrayed. Why would they scatter? A case could be made for their scattering because they were spiritually unprepared. But why were they spiritually unprepared? They were spiritually unprepared because they were physically unprepared. Their spirit was willing,

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<sup>16</sup>Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 42.

but their flesh was weak. The one has an impact on the other.

Many times people like to cite Acts 20:7-9 to say that even the apostle Paul's preaching put people to sleep. And I would be willing to take that into consideration if the common length of a sermon was 5-7 hours, as was Pau's that day. But what kind of excuse can you reasonably make for not being able to stay awake for 30-45 minutes? The only reasonable excuse may be lack of physical preparation.

- Come early

One of my pet peeves is people coming into church late, regularly. Without intending to be, they are distracting others around them when they come in sit down and get settled in. That is not respectful to those who did come prepared.

Come early to give yourself time to engage with other brothers and sisters in Christ. Come early to focus your mind and heart. Come early to make sure you have a front row seat. Come early to take care of all of the pre-game activities (bathroom!). Come early to look through the bulletin so you will not be tempted to look through it during the worship service.

- Come consistently

Being a part of the regular gathering of the church body should not be an option to the Christian. When my family sat down at the dinner table, it was not an option for me to eat in my room (unless I was in trouble). I would have never been able to get away with saying, "I think I will sit this one out. There is a ball game I want to watch." Being together as a family was important not only to my parents, to all of us. Being together communicated that we cared for one another and was interested in one another. It was where we talked through problems or celebrated high points in our lives. We should our corporate worships and group gatherings in the same way.

So what does it mean to come consistently? Coming consistently means that being with our church family is a first priority, rather than one option of several. Too

many times people attend church “when there is nothing else going on.” In other words, it is no priority at all. To come consistently means that we plan our schedules around corporate gatherings: ball schedules, work schedules (when possible), rest schedules.

One reason why coming consistently is so important, especially in a church where the preacher preaches through books, is because missing a sermon interrupts your understanding of the flow of a passage.

#### **Teaching Point 4—Prepare Spiritually.**

Yes, listening is a mental and physical activity, but most of all, it is a spiritual activity. We must be spiritually prepared in order to get the most out of the sermon. Up until now, the tips and advice could be employed for attending a seminar, speech, or play. But since listening to preaching is primarily a spiritual discipline, there must be spiritual preparation if you want to be an effective listener.

- Read scripture throughout the week

Being prepared spiritually is greatly enhanced by daily devotions throughout the week. If you are not serious about God’s word throughout the week, what makes you think you are going to be serious about it on Sunday? We will talk in just a minute about coming to the preaching event hungry to be fed God’s word, but that hunger is not created by starving ourselves from it during the week. Paradoxically, the opposite is true. Our hunger for God’s word on Sunday will increase the more we feed on His word during the week. Likewise, the less we feed on the word of God during the week, the more hardened we will be to it during the preaching event.

- Pray for your church, pastor, and yourself
- Confess sin
- Come expectantly

First Peter 2:2 “Long for the pure milk of the world so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.” What is the command here? The command is to long, yearn,

desire the word of God. As that relates to preaching, we can say that we should come longing to be fed the word of God. We should be expecting to hear from God. How incredible is that!? God instructs us to long and expect to hear from Him! This longing is held in contrast to the way we craved sinful things before we were redeemed (1 Peter 1:14. 2:11). In other words, one of the characteristics of a believer is that she craves and longs for spiritual truth from God's word.

The image Peter uses is that of a baby longing for, crying out to be fed healthy milk. That usually involves crying and tears. But we as Americans do not connect with this idea of longing too much anymore. We are in a consumeristic society where we just usually go get what we want when we want it. We have no need of longing because of comfy credit lines.

Here is why having this attitude of longing is so important. Without this spiritual preparation, preparing physically and preparing mentally profit you little. The reason to prepare physically and mentally is to make way for the spiritual feeding that takes place during the preaching event.

- Worship with all of your heart

Worship is not like a light switch that you can just turn on and off. In order to maximize worship on Sunday, worship will need to have taken place Monday through Saturday.

Most of the time, the design of a worship service is to set the table for the word of God to be preached. Additionally, the design of the worship service includes your participation. So when we sing, sing enthusiastically, thinking about and rejoicing in what we are singing. When we pray, pay attention to what is being said. Personally apply the prayer to yourself. Agree with what is being prayed if it is biblical.

*Took (5 minutes)*

1. Assess the time you spend preparing for sermons. What are some things you can do to be better prepared?
2. Write out a game plan for how you will prepare mentally, physically, and spiritually for the next sermon you will hear.
3. Read Ephesians 6:19-20; Colossians 4:2-4; 2 Thessalonians 3:1. What specific things should you pray for the preacher?

Materials Needed:

- Copies of quiz
- Bible, pen

## Lesson 4—The Spiritual Discipline of Attending to the Sermon, Part 1

### 2 Objectives

- Participants will examine their current state of attending to a sermon.
  - Participants will be able to employ personal strategies in order to actively listen during a sermon.

### **Scripture Passages:**

Matthew 13:14 Luke 18:2ff; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Hebrews 2:1-3, 5:11

### **Teaching Plan:**

*Hook* (5 minutes)

Opening Question: How did you guys prepare for this past Sunday's sermon?

Roleplay a scene of a wife talking to her husband with husband just answering "Uh-huh, yeah" while he is reading the paper or watching TV.

**Wife:** "Honey, can I talk to you for just a minute?"

**Husband** (with newspaper in hand): "Yeah, go ahead."

**Wife:** "Do you remember my friend at work, Cindy, whose husband just got diagnosed with Leukemia? Well, they just found out it's terminal. They have two kids and one on the way. My heart is breaking for them!"

**Husband:** "Uh huh."

**Wife:** "I know she has been struggling lately with depression and fear. She is obviously distracted at work, as I would obviously be. I totally get why she can't focus. But I am afraid it may cost her her job, which would only add to the stress at home."

**Husband:** "Uh-huh"

**Wife:** "I just don't think I can sit by and watch her self-destruct like this. I want to be of help to her and do something for her, or with her. I want to minister to her and her family in some way. But I'm just not sure what to do. What do you think?"

**Husband:** "Yeah, sure."

**Wife:** "No honey. You are not listening to me. How do you think I could minister to her?"

**Husband:** “I’m listening to you. You have a friend who is going through a hard time and you want to help her. See, I am listening.”

**Wife:** “Yes, you hear my words but you are not hearing my heart. You are not listening to me.”

How many of you can relate to the scene we have just witnessed? Which character reflects you? I am sure that all of us, at one time or another, have been on each end of inattentive listening. And there is nothing quite as frustrating as sharing a thought, idea, your day, or your heart, to someone who is supposed to care about you, but they do not attend to you through listening.

So how do you think God reacts when he sees his children come into the corporate setting where his word will be declared, but his kids are not tuned in to listening to the preaching?

Tonight we want to talk about the discipline of attending to a sermon. Let’s get a running start from last week and then take a look at some passages that speak to this area of listening.

So far we have connected biblical preaching to biblical listening and said that our ultimate purpose in listening is to have Jesus exalted in my understanding so that I will grow deeper in devotion to Him. From there we connected biblical discipleship (life-long learner of Jesus) to effectively listening to biblical preaching. When I listen effectively to biblical preaching, that preaching is going to give me tools that help me become a life-long learner of Jesus. Last week we began the process of learning the discipline of preparing to hear a sermon—kind of the pregame warm-up. And we said that there are mental disciplines, physical disciplines, and most importantly spiritual disciplines that we can employ to help us be more effective listeners to biblical preaching.

This week we want to learn what disciplines we need to be engaged in during the sermon. What is to be the attitude of my heart, the focus of my mind, and the position of my body that will aid me most to be an effective listener?



*Book*

Hebrews 5:11 “About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing...But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”

*Look* (35 minutes)

What comes to your mind when you hear the phrase “dull of hearing”? What might the person who is dull of hearing give as a reason for his dullness? He would most likely blame it on the preacher. But here, we see, that not only can preaching be dull, but so too can hearing be dull. According to the end of the passage, what is required of the listener in order to be able to distinguish good from evil?

During this session, we want to learn some techniques for training our power of discernment.

**Effective listening requires the Holy Spirit and sweat**

### **Teaching Point 1—Listen with Sweat**

Hebrews 5:11 “About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become **dull of hearing**...But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”

Last week we discussed this phrase to some degree, but I want us to dive deeper this class session. The idea behind the word is one of laziness. When you actually consider the word itself, it presents the idea of “no push.” A.T. Robertson says that the greek word is made up of two words, one is a negative meaning “no” and the other word means “push.”<sup>1</sup> “Dull of hearing” means there is “no push in the ears.” The word was often times used to describe a comatose state. In one ear and out the other is a good description of this type of hearing. There is no work, no sweat put in by the hearer in understanding the message.

These types of hearers want to be spoon-fed. They do not want to work at all in how they receive the message. They don’t want to think, judge, weigh, consider, discern. They just want to be spoonfed. But the reality is that many times what we get out of a sermon has in large part to do with what we bring to the sermon and what we put into the sermon.

Compare these dull hearers with the mature hearers in the following verses. The writer tells us that they have had their discernment ability strengthened because of “training.” This greek word is where we get our word for “gymnasium.” Now what takes place in a gymnasium? Training takes place there. A gymnasium is an active place where people are working and sweating and exercising discipline. So in this passage you have to types of listeners—those that have “no push” in their hearing, and then you have those who work at understanding and getting the message. So the first discipline I need to have in receiving the sermon is an attitude of work. I am going to have to work at this. I cannot be passive. I must be aggressive, passionate, ready to go to work.

Proverbs 18:15 “An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks

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<sup>1</sup>A. T. Robertson, *The Fourth Gospel and The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Word Pictures in the New Testament, vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman, 1932), 371.

knowledge.”

When we look at the ministry of Jesus, and how he taught, he did not always spoon feed his listeners like he did the disciples in Mark 4. He expected them to work at getting the message he was presenting. He expected them to think and assess. Jesus often times told hard to understand parables, but he expected his audience to work and think about what he said. Jesus told his listeners that they must “hate their fathers and mothers.” He told them “take up their cross” and follow them. He told them many things that He obviously wanted them to think on and roll over in their brain in order to truly understand. He also scolded his disciples when they were slow to understand (Mark 8:17-21).

So what type of listening work is needed?

### **Teaching Point 2—Listen Spiritually**

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually *discerned*. The spiritual person *judges* all things, but is himself to be *judged* by no one. ‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”

Effectively listening to biblical preaching is primarily a spiritual exercise that only believers can truly benefit from, and to take it a step further, only spirit filled believers get the most out of. God does His work through His Spirit, and that being done primarily through the Spirit’s use of the consistent feeding upon God’s word.

So effective listening is done by believers. But just because you are a believer does not mean you are listening effectively. The Bible says not to quench the Spirit and not to grieve the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19, Ep 4:30). In other words, we are not to block or hinder the Spirit’s movement in our lives. Paul gives us a pretty clear picture of what that looks like when he instructs the Ephesian believers not to be drunk on wine but to be

filled with the Spirit. The idea is one of control. Who is in control of your thoughts, your actions, your attitude, your words. Being Spirit-filled is not essentially an emotional experience. Being filled with the Spirit is a cognizant decision you make to surrender yourself and follow the Spirit's leading, which most of the time means specific actions to follow.

For instance, in considering Mark 4 again and the parable of the soils, we said that Jesus is urging His hearers (along with Mark urging his audience) to pay attention to how they hear. Jesus then lists off four types of persons, or hearts, that receive God's word, but only one of them is prepared to receive it.

- **A resistant heart?**

This heart is resistant to receive God's word at all. It wants no part of the truth it brings. This is often times due to a result of living in unrepented sin. So the question for us here is, "Do we come to the preaching event with a heart wide open to receive God's truth? Are we ready and welcoming and craving the pure milk of the word, willing to let the sword of the Spirit cut deep into our hearts?"

- **An unrooted heart?**

This type of heart is a shallow heart. The picture of this type of soil is not a type of soil with rocks in it. Rather, in some places there would be a layer of limestone about an inch or so underneath the dirt. So the seed would fall in this dirt, but would not be able to take root because of the layer of rock. The soil was shallow. So the plant would sprout up quickly, but it would also wither quickly due to its lack of roots. They are rollercoaster hearers. And the reason they rollercoaster so much is because they do not realize the cost of following Jesus. They do not realize that following Jesus brings tribulations, brings the need for repentance and change. And these hearers are not willing to do that, so they wither.

- **A worldly heart?**

This heart dies of a slow death. As the planted seed begins to grow, so too do weeds, right along with it. This heart is distracted, and attracted by worldliness.

And on any given Sunday, you could walk into the preaching event with any of these three hearts! So the first work I must do in receiving the message is a spiritual work. I have to assess whether or not I have done the work to bring into the preaching event a ready heart.

- **A ready heart?**

If I am hearing that parable being explained, and I detect that my heart is one of the first three, am I doomed? Of course not. But I am warned. The Spirit of truth is warning me saying, “We have some work to do here. This stony heart needs some excavating. This shallow heart needs some depth. You had better let go of those worldly things. This weedy heart had better start removing some weeds.”

Or consider James 1:19-21—“Know this, my beloved brothers: let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” James is saying the same thing Mark said in Mark 4. In order to hear effectively, we are going to have to do some spiritual work of confessing and repenting of sin and coming to the preached word with an attitude of humility and meekness and a teachable heart.

This type of heart comes into the sermon event with an open heart to the scripture, to God’s word, to God’s message. This heart comes ready to admit that God knows better than me and I am willing and ready to receive His word into my life.

### **Teaching Point 3—Listen Sharply/ Discern the Truth**

When we look at Hebrews 5:11-14 and also at 1 Co 2:14-16, a particular word

keeps popping up that is essential for us to understand because it is at the heart of what it means to be an effective listener. That word is “discerning.” The idea behind “discerning” is the image of separation—separating truth from error, right from wrong, biblical and unbiblical, fact from fiction. So we need to listen sharply, so as to make clear distinction between what we hear that is right and what we hear that is wrong. Discernment is cutting through something (an idea, a sermon, a thought) with wisdom and spiritual maturity in order to make the differing parts distinct.

How are we able to do this? Both 1 Co 2 and Hebrews 5 give some insight. The first thing to consider comes from 1 Co 2 and that this type of discernment is a spiritual issue. The unbeliever cannot discern the spiritual truths of God. This doesn't mean that an unbeliever cannot logically understand the truths and doctrine of God. But it does mean that he cannot and will not embrace them. They are a roadblock to his personal lifestyle. And if you became a believer later in life, then you probably experienced this resistance to the gospel. Accepting the gospel meant that you could no longer live as you pleased. But you didn't come to accept the gospel on your own intelligence. It was a work of the Holy Spirit in your life. And the continuing work of the Holy Spirit is one of discernment. Now what is key in this continuing of the work of the Spirit goes back to what we discussed earlier, and that is being Spirit-filled and ready to hear from God with an open and willing heart.

The second thing to consider about discernment and its use is that you get better at it the more you work at it. That is what Hebrews 5 is telling us. Those that can handle the meat of the word of God can do so because they have had their powers of discernment trained. They have worked at getting the message.

The most helpful comment I can give to you on listening discerningly is this: your ability to use discernment during biblical preaching is proportionate to your consistency in God's word. In other words, if you are not consistent in God's word during the week, don't expect to be too discerning of a biblical message.

#### **Teaching Point 4—Listen for the System**

Most preachers have some sort of organizational process they use to deliver their sermons. They package it a certain way. They may do this to help them remember their sermon, or they may do this to help you remember their sermon. Whichever it may be, it is organized according to a system.

The reason it would benefit you to listen for the system is because it will help you grasp what the main message and flow of the sermon. For instance, in most sermons, I give you a summary of the sermon. For example, in last Sunday's sermons I said, "Since life is sacred to God, life should be sacred to us." That was the main point I was trying to make. The rest of the sermon fleshed out biblical ways we display that life is sacred: we respect the image of God in people; we inspect the condition of our hearts; we lay down our lives for Christ and others. All three of these ways show that we have embraced a "life is sacred" view.

Sometimes the system may be a question that the text is answering. So for example, in the first sermon in the Song of Solomon series, the main question was "What makes a man great?" The rest of the sermon was spent drawing out characteristics from the text that put on display what made that particular man great.

So let me give you four guidelines for listening systematically:

- Listen for the main thought/sermon in a sentence
- What role do the main divisions play? Application, informative, explanation, fulfillment?
- Is the sermon a story with tension/conflict/climax/ resolution?
- How do the illustrations help?

#### **Teaching Point 5—Listen Strategically**

- Where do you sit?
- How do you sit?
- What are you looking at?

- How are you helping your mind stay engaged? Do you take notes? Do you doodle? Do you ask questions of the sermon or text?

*Took (5 minutes)*

1. When God looks at you during a sermon, what kind of listener does he see?
2. Make a list of all that distracts you during the next sermon you hear.
3. The next sermon you listen to, take note of your body language.
4. Write out a list of questions to be answered through the sermon.

**Materials Needed:**

- Role play script you provide
- Bible, pen



## Lesson 5—The Spiritual Discipline of Attending to the Sermon, Part 2

### 3 Learning Objectives:

- Participants will identify filters that influence their listening.
- Participants will understand how their perception of the one preaching affects how they listen.
- Participants will use a strategy they develop in order to remove unnecessary filters.
- Participants will be able discern the merits of sermons based upon content rather than their perception of the speaker.

### **Scripture Passages:**

Luke 4:21; 1 Thess 1:4-6; 2:5-12

### **Teaching Plan:**

**Opening question:** What were some of the distractions you noticed while listening this past week?

What questions did you ask of the sermon?

*Hook (5 minutes)*

On the morning of September 26, 1960, John F. Kennedy was a relatively unknown senator from Massachusetts. He was young and Catholic — neither of which helped his image — and facing off against an incumbent. But by the end of the evening, he was a star.

It's now common knowledge that without the nation's first televised debate — fifty years ago Sunday — Kennedy would never have been president. But beyond securing his presidential career, the 60-minute duel between the handsome Irish-American senator and Vice President Richard Nixon fundamentally altered political campaigns, television media and America's political history. "It's one of those unusual points on the timeline of history where you can say things changed very dramatically — in this case, in a single

night," says Alan Schroeder, a media historian and associate professor at Northeastern University, who authored the book, *Presidential Debates: Forty Years of High-Risk TV*

Kennedy's aide and speech writer, Ted Sorensen remembers prepping the candidate for the big night. They were on the roof of their Chicago hotel, running through a pile of note cards, quizzing Kennedy on the likely debate topics while he worked on his tan. "We knew the first televised debate was important, but we had no idea how important it was going to turn out," Sorensen told TIME. After hours of practice and a speech before a labor union, the senator went in to take a nap. "The story I like to tell is of when they delegated me to go wake him up," Sorensen said. "I opened the door and peaked in and there he was, lights on, sound asleep, covered in notecards."

What happened after the two candidates took the stage is a familiar tale. Nixon, pale and underweight from a recent hospitalization, appeared sickly and sweaty, while Kennedy appeared calm and confident. As the story goes, those who listened to the debate on the radio thought Nixon had won. But those listeners were in the minority. By 1960, 88% of American households had televisions — up from just 11% the decade before. The number of viewers who tuned in to the debate has been estimated as high as 74 million, by the Nielsen of the day, *Broadcast Magazine*. Those that watched the debate on TV thought Kennedy was the clear winner. Many say Kennedy won the election that night. Sorensen says the Kennedy team didn't realize what a game changer the debate was until the following day at a campaign event in Ohio. "The crowds for his motorcade were much larger than they'd ever been," he says. "That's when we knew that, if nothing else, Kennedy had firmed up support for himself in the Democratic party."

Nixon performed much better in the subsequent debates (and appeared better thanks to the "milkshake diet" his aides put him on to fatten him up). But, as Schroeder says, the damage had been done. "You couldn't wipe away the image people had seared in their brains from the first debate." Even Kennedy acknowledged the medium's role in his victory. On November 12, 1960, four days after winning the election by a narrow margin, he said, "It was the TV more than anything else that turned the tide." Post-debate, candidates could no longer afford to ignore the potential power of television. "With the Nation Watching," a 1979 task force report, notes, "The Nixon-Kennedy debates made televised encounters between candidates the hottest thing in electioneering since the campaign button."

Up to that point, politics had not really been played out on television. "It was very much an entertainment medium," says Schroeder. "It wasn't a place for serious discourse." The next televised presidential debate wouldn't take place for 16 years, largely because candidates became wary of their influence. Lyndon B. Johnson was too intimidated by the medium to take on Barry Goldwater in 1964, and Nixon, having been burned before, refused to debate on TV in both 1968 and 1972. Televised debates reemerged 1976, when incumbent president Gerald Ford agreed to take on his Democratic challenger, Jimmy Carter. They've been standard practice in each campaign season since.

After the debate, how you presented yourself, what you looked like, how you sounded and whether you connected directly with audiences mattered, says Larry Sabato, political analyst at the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia and author of the forthcoming book, *The Kennedy Half-Century*. "Before the television debates most Americans didn't even see the candidates — they read about them, they saw photos of them," he told TIME. "This allowed the public to judge candidates on a completely different basis." It's a reality that continues to influence campaigns today. "When parties are considering their candidates they ask: Who would look better on TV? Who comes across better? Who can debate better?" Sabato says. "This has been taken into the calculus."<sup>41</sup>

What does that debate have to do with you as a listener? What we learn from a debate like that, which changed the way politics used media, is that there is a lot more that goes into receiving a message than what one may think. How a person is perceived affects how you receive their message. This can be a pro or a con and we need to learn to be aware of the obstacles that come along with it.

### *Book*

Luke 4:16-20 "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Mark 6:1-6 "He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. **2** And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the

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<sup>41</sup>Kayla Webley, How the Nixon-Kennedy Debate Changed the World," *Time*, September 26, 2010, accessed on July 9, 2014, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2021078,00.html>.

wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? **3** Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. **4** And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." **5** And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. **6** And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching.

1 Thess 1:4-7 "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, **5** because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. **6** And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

The crowd around Jesus was fiercely engaged at this point. They had heard about this man from their own hometown. All Jesus had done was unravel a scroll and read from the Bible. They were ready to attend to the sermon Jesus was about to deliver. But it wouldn't take long for their eagerness to hear to turn into anger. There were some obstacles in place that hindered them from hearing and understanding Jesus' message. One obstacle was their relationship with Jesus. He was simply, in their minds, the son of a carpenter. He had no credentials to speak with such authority. Another obstacle that kept the crowd from hearing the message was how Jesus' message made them feel. They felt disrespected, condemned.

We, too, must be aware of obstacles that potentially could hinder us from hearing God's message. This session will expose some obstacles that you may not be aware are in front of you. We will address these obstacles and ways to remove them.

When we read Paul's writings, we see that he was aware of these obstacles and sought to remove them as obstacles. He lived among the people, was passionate about how he lived, and as a result, the people received the word of God as God's message, with conviction and it changed the way they lived.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-7

*Look* (35 minutes)

### **Teaching Point 1—Be Aware of Your Listening Filters**

(Show a short clip of a public figure giving a speech. Before showing the clip, ask the participants to jot down their opinions and feelings regarding the public figure. Show the clip. Ask the participants to take note of what they liked/disliked about the clip. Ask them if it was possible that their personal opinions/feelings affected how they filtered the message.)

- **Ethos**—character—how you perceive the speaker’s character/ how you relate to the speaker

Bill Clinton-- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ta\\_SFvgbrlY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ta_SFvgbrlY), accessed on July 9, 2014.

Ronald Regan-- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do0x-Egc6oA>, accessed on July 9, 2014.

What affects your perception of the speaker? Dress, integrity, personality, does he live consistently with the message he preaches, credentials/intelligence, use of language/vernacular

Believe it or not, these types of things can alter how you receive the content (logos) of the message. So for instance, if I show a clip of Jimmy Swaggert preaching, but you may be turned off by his personal character, you may never hear what he says.

How can letting ethos as your major listening filter be dangerous?

What can you do to temper the role of ethos in your listening?

But there is not just the speaker’s ethos to consider. There is also a congregational ethos that needs to be thought about. You see, not only are you affected by the speaker’s ethos,

but our community is affected by our church's ethos. Visitors are affected by our ethos, our character. How do visitors perceive us? How does the community perceive us?

- Pathos—emotions—how the speaker, and the speaker's content, make you feel. People who listen primarily through the filter of pathos deem sermons truthful/successful when they are moved emotionally.

Show the following videos and discuss how the class felt while they were watching the videos.

Jimmy Swaggart--<http://abcnews.go.com/US/video/jimmy-swaggart-affair-apology-9876022>, July 9, 2014.

Martin Luther King, Jr.-- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oehry1JC9Rk>, accessed July 9, 2014.

Why is using pathos as a primary filter dangerous?

- Logos—word—the content of the sermon, the thoughts, ideas, truths, illustrations, arguments, proofs, evidence the preacher uses to urge the audience to accept the message.

Some use logos as a primary filter for listening, which is ideal, but this does not mean that the other two can be discarded by the preacher or the church. If this were the case, there wouldn't be any moral qualifications placed on the office of pastor.

What is dangerous about using *only* logos as a filter?

- Bias, prejudice—The sermon being preached may be over a section of scripture that you are acutely familiar with such as Noah's ark, or even the crucifixion. Unintentionally, we can assume that we know what the passage is all about and turn off our ears.
- Lack of interest—The message being preached may be targeted at a specific audience. For instance, you may be a widow and the sermon is targeted to married couples. When this takes place, we may automatically think, "This has nothing to do with me."
- Disorganization—those who receive sermons primarily on a logos setting like for the ideas presented in a sermon to be delivered in an organized

way. So when the presentation is scattered, or disorderly, they have a hard time accepting the message.

Where all three come together:

John Piper-- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJLfnuwEjUo>, accessed on July 9, 2014

Benjamin Zander-- [http://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin\\_zander\\_on\\_music\\_and\\_passion](http://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin_zander_on_music_and_passion), accessed July 9, 2014

### **Teaching Point 2—Environmental Obstacles**

- Temperature
- People (children)
- Position in audience

*Took (5 minutes)*

1. Which of the internal obstacles do you wrestle with the most?
2. Recall a time when your view of the pathos or ethos of the speaker affected you. How did it affect your listening?
3. Of the environmental obstacles, are there any that you have control over?
4. Through what you have learned in this lesson, develop a strategy for combating internal and environmental factors.

### **Materials Needed:**

- Short clip of public figure giving speech
- TV
- Bible, pen

## Lesson 6—The Spiritual Discipline of Applying the Sermon

### Objectives:

- Participants will know that listening involves the follow through of obedience.
  - Participants will discover ways to think through application.
  - Participants will develop a process for doing the heart work of applying the sermon into their lives.

### **Topic: Applying the sermonScripture Passages:**

Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 6:3; Deut. 32:44-47; 1 Samuel 15:22-23; James 1:22-25

### **Teaching Plan:**

*Hook* (5 minutes)

Opening Discussion: Tell me how you did combating distractions this past Sunday? What internal and environmental filters did you realize? How did you address them?

*Book*

Exodus 15:26

Deuteronomy 6:3

Luke 11:28

1 Samuel 15:22-23 And Samuel said,

“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,  
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to listen than the fat of rams.

For rebellion is as the sin of divination,  
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,  
he has also rejected you from being king.”



James 1:19-25 “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”

*Look* (35 minutes)

### **Teaching Point 1—The Necessity of Application**

The application of the sermon is the conclusion of listening. Application requires intentionality and thoughtfulness. Often times, well meaning Christians shirk intentional application of scripture because they **wrongly** believe that if they have understood the message cognitively, then it will automatically be applied into their lives. Jesus tells us that we must build our lives upon his word. Building implies intentional work on our lives, not passive living (Matthew 7:24-27). “There is no biblical listening to preaching if we do not live the preaching of God’s word.”<sup>1</sup>

Ken Ramey writes “there is a direct lexical link between the words ‘hear’ and ‘obey’ in both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament word for ‘hear’ is *sama*. This is the same Hebrew word used for ‘obey.’ There is no separate word for ‘obey’ in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for ‘hear’ is *akouw*. The word for ‘obey’ is *hupakouo*, which literally means ‘to hear under,’ is a derivative of the word for ‘hear.’”<sup>2</sup> To “hear under” means to listen submissively with the attitude of willful

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<sup>1</sup>Thad Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny Listen: Taking Full Advantage of the Sermons We Hear* (Eugene, OR: WIPF & STOCK, 2010), 101.

<sup>2</sup>Ken Ramey, *Expositional Listening*, 95.

obedience. So to clarify, just because a person has listened to a sermon does not mean they have biblically listened. Biblical listening is completed when it results in obedience.

When we take a look at our two major texts of scripture (1 Samuel 15:22-23), James 1:19-25, we can see the equating of listening with obedience. When you consider the good soil of Mark 4:20, those seeds that were sown in the good soil hear the word, accept the word, and the word bears fruit. The idea of bearing fruit means that the seed produced something of value and sustainability. Bearing fruit is the application of the word in the believer's life.

Hebrews 2:1 and 4:7-11 are passages that warn us to be sure that when we come underneath the preaching of the word of God, that we do not neglect the discipline of application. To "pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" indicates a continual process of self-examination and discernment to make sure we are living according to God's word. Without this type of intentionality, the threat is that we might drift away from living the truth of God's word. In chapter four, the exhortation is that if you hear God's voice through preaching, do not harden your heart. Verse eleven goes on to say that if a person does not do the work of striving to enter the rest of God, then he will fall into disobedience. Once again, if there is no application of the word, letting the truth of the message bear on the life of the believer, then true listening has not taken place, and disobedience ensues. To say it another way, the one who does not do the work of application, then sin is crouching at the door. James 4:17 says, "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it sin sin."

Another passage that bears this out is Matthew 7:24-27. The wise man in this text is not just the person who hears the words of Jesus, but the wise man is the one who hears the words of Jesus and obeys.

All the work a person puts into getting spiritually prepared, and all the concentration a person exerts in listening while the sermon is being preached is vain if that work does not lead that person to the process of application. A person can take great

notes or be able to discuss the finer points of the sermon’s theological accuracy, but if that person does not seek life change, they have not listened biblically.

### **Teaching Point 2—A Process for Application**

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13-14, we can detect a general process for application in how the church at Thessalonica dealt with Paul’s preaching.

1 Thessalonians 2:13-14 “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you *received* the word of God, which you heard from us, you *accepted* it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea.”

The two words that need attention are “received” and “accepted.” At first glance, they may appear to refer to the same thing. But on closer examination, they point to a process. The word “received” indicates a taking over of ownership of something.<sup>3</sup> For example, if someone gives a gift to a friend, when that friend receives the gift, they take ownership of it. At that point, they can do what they want to with it. They can throw the gift away, use it as a doorstep, or use it for its intended purpose. In the case of 1 Thess 2:13, the church at Thessalonica took ownership of the message that Paul gave to them. They received it. They examined it. They studied it. They understood it.

As a result of that type of receiving, they then “accepted” it. This means that they came to the understanding that what they had received from Paul was truly from God, and they were convicted by the truth so that it changed the way they lived.<sup>4</sup>

You see this same process in Mark 4—hearing, accepting, bearing fruit.

You see this same process with a little different wording in Luke 8:15 (the idea

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<sup>3</sup>Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 221.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 768.

of holding something fast is that a person holds tightly to it and keeps it close). Holding fast to the word preached, which results in life change can also be seen in Philippians 2:14-16.

So what is a simple way to think of how to apply the word?

**Receive**—this is what made the believers in Berea noble. They took ownership of the message with eagerness to verify its truthfulness. The eagerness with which they received the word speaks to their preparation. They were anticipating the word; they were open to the word; they had expectant hearts. This is the attitude in which they “received,” or took ownership of the message, once it was delivered to them. They received the message with thankful hearts. But then the real work began. Then they examined the scriptures to verify the truthfulness of Paul’s message.

So in this reception phase, the work we do after the hearing the sermon is to ask the question, “What main truths were presented in the message? What main truths about Jesus? What main truths about myself? What main truths about the world?” In this reception phase a person wants to understand accurately the truth(s) presented.

Hopefully, a person comes to the conclusion that whatever truth has been presented is accurate and biblical, a person moves to the next step of the process in application.

**Accept**—once you understand the message, then you embrace the message, believe, and be convicted by it. You accept it for what it is—a word/truth/ message from God to you. Sometimes this is easy; sometimes it is difficult and takes two or three days to wrestle it down into your heart. Sometimes it takes months.

This, in reality, is a Lordship principle. Accepting the word of God from God to you is about who is going to be the boss of your life. Someone can receive the message. They can understand the message. They can explain the truth inside and out, but they may still choose to rebel against the message. But accepting the message is getting your heart and will underneath the truth, in step with the truth. So this will require prayer.

**Inspect**—investigate your heart and other areas of your life to see where the truth might need to be implemented. Is there a truth to believe, a command to follow, a warning to heed, a cost to consider (Luke 14:28-31), a promise to trust. This also requires prayer. “Father, I heard your truth. I believe and trust your truth. Now will you help me examine and inspect my heart so that I can heed your truth? Have I not lived in the reality of a promise? Have I harmed a relationship through lying? Is there a habit that is not good for me? Am I holding out on putting my yes on the table?” All of these could be asked and prayed in relation to specific messages preached, and they need to be asked. Listeners want God to expose areas that need to be transformed.

**Do it in faith/Depend**—depend on Christ to live out the truth through you.

The next logical step after the inspection phase would be to do whatever is deemed necessary to fulfill the truth that we have recently embraced. But that would be wrong. It would be wrong to say, “I am going to start doing that, or I am going to stop doing this.” We can’t, but God can. The next step is to respond in faith. We need to depend upon Christ, believing that he will live out the truth through me. When you do this, when you abide, Christ/Spirit bears His fruit through you.

John 15:4-5

Galatians 5:22

Romans 1:5; 16:25-27—The Lord is not trying to bring about behavior, primarily. He is producing faith that leads to obedience. Christian obedience is to always involve faith, and faith is always to involve obedience.

When we look at a passage of scripture like Hebrews 11, known as the hall of faith, we realize that these peoples’ faith was not just something they exercised at the beginning of their lives, but rather faith is what allowed them to do all that they did for

the Lord throughout their lives.<sup>5</sup>

**Teaching Point 3—A Plan  
for Application**

- When will you think through sermon application?
- Where will you think through sermon application?
- What process will you use?

*Took (5 minutes)*

1. What is one area of biblical truth that you know and understand, but are not practicing? (Generosity? Seeking or giving forgiveness? Faithfulness? Etc)
2. Read the conclusion to Jesus' sermon on the mount in Matthew 7:24-27. What message immediately precedes the parable of the wise and foolish builder? What is the connection between the two? What distinguishes a person as one who enters the kingdom of heaven and one that does not?
3. What can you learn about application from how your preacher uses application?
4. Develop a strategy for the when and where of sermon application.

**Materials Needed:**

- \* Bible, pen

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<sup>5</sup>Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny Listen*, 104.

## APPENDIX 8

### AVERAGE RESPONSES: SURVEY FOR THOSE WHO LISTEN TO PREACHING

The average responses for each statement in the Survey for Those Who Listen to Preaching are listed in Table A1. The results are based on the following scale:

1—Strongly Disagree, 2—Disagree, 3—Somewhat disagree, 4—Somewhat agree, 5—Agree, 6—Strongly Agree.

Table A1. Average responses: Survey for Those Who Listen to Preaching

2. Being present at church to hear sermons from my pastor is important to me.		
Pre-Test Average		5.5
Post-Test Average		5.5
3. Biblical preaching is a major form of communication between God and His people.		
Pre-Test Average		5.5
Post-Test Average		5.7
4. I expect to hear from God in a biblical sermon.		
Pre-Test Average		5.4
Post-Test Average		5.5
5. When presented with a truth of scripture during a sermon with which my life is not aligned, I confess it as sin and repent		
Pre-Test Average		5.1
Post-Test Average		4.7
6. I come to church mentally prepared to hear a sermon.		
Pre-Test Average		4.7
7. Getting plenty of rest before I hear a sermon is important to me.		
Pre-Test Average		4.1
Post-Test Average		4.2
8. I spend more than five minutes praying that I would be receptive to the Sunday morning sermon.		
Pre-Test Average		3.8
Post-Test Average		4.2

Table A1 continued

9. Being consistently present at my church to hear biblical preaching is a major part of my spiritual life.		
	Pre-Test Average	5.4
	Post-Test Average	5.4
10. When presented with a truth of scripture during a sermon with which my life is not aligned, I take time after the sermon to think about how I can conform my life to that truth.		
	Pre-Test Average	4.8
	Post-Test Average	4.9
11. My mind usually drifts during a sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	3.5
	Post-Test Average	3.6
12. It is important to me to get my heart ready on Saturday night for preaching on Sunday morning.		
	Pre-Test Average	3.7
	Post-Test Average	4.3
13. The purpose of preaching is to help me have an easier life.		
	Pre-Test Average	2.5
	Post-Test Average	2.1
14. I can't wait to go to church to hear biblical preaching.		
	Pre-Test Average	5
	Post-Test Average	5.2
15. I don't have to be consistent in hearing biblical preaching because God uses other means to speak to me		
	Pre-Test Average	2.7
	Post-Test Average	2.4
16. I am responsible for my attentiveness during a sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	5.4
	Post-Test Average	5.5
17. God does not speak to me through every biblical sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	3.1
	Post-Test Average	2.8
18. God will hold my preacher primarily responsible if I do not understand something in the sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	1.6
	Post-Test Average	1.6
19. I have a plan for becoming spiritually prepared before I hear a sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	3.3
	Post-Test Average	4
20. God himself speaks through biblical preaching.		
	Pre-Test Average	5.4
	Post-Test Average	5.6



*Table A1 continued*

21. I have a good understanding of my responsibility as a listener of sermons.		
	Pre-Test Average	5
	Post-Test Average	5
22. It is the preacher's job to keep me interested in the sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	2.7
	Post-Test Average	2.6
23. I am responsible for what I hear during a sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	4.9
	Post-Test Average	5.5
24. The majority of the responsibility for understanding a sermon lies upon the one preaching the sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	2.7
	Post-Test Average	2.4
25. The majority of the responsibility for applying a sermon lies upon the one preaching the sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	2
	Post-Test Average	2.3
26. God expects the preacher to get the congregation spiritually ready to hear the sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	2.2
	Post-Test Average	2.1
27. Listening to sermons includes obedience to the biblical truth presented in a sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	5.2
	Post-Test Average	5.3
28. I carefully consider what the preacher says to make sure it is in accordance with scripture.		
	Pre-Test Average	5
	Post-Test Average	5.1

## APPENDIX 9

### AVERAGE RESPONSES: LISTENING SKILLS SURVEY

The average responses for each statement in the Listening Skills Survey are listed in Table A2. The results are based on the following scale: 1—Strongly Disagree, 2—Disagree, 3—Somewhat disagree, 4—Somewhat agree, 5—Agree, 6—Strongly Agree.

Table A2. Average responses: Listening Skills Survey

1. I fill in the sermon outline in the church bulletin.		
Pre-Test Average		4.9
Post-Test Average		4.9
2. I take notes during the sermon.		
Pre-Test Average		4.7
Post-Test Average		4.9
3. I study my Bible at least three times a week.		
Pre-Test Average		4.6
Post-Test Average		4.9
4. Sitting close to the front of the auditorium is important to me.		
Pre-Test Average		3.7
Post-Test Average		4.5
5. I jot down questions I have about the sermon to study later.		
Pre-Test Average		3.7
Post-Test Average		3.8
6. I follow along with the outline provided by the preacher.		
Pre-Test Average		5.7
Post-Test Average		5.4
7. I keep eye contact with the preacher.		
Pre-Test Average		5.5
Post-Test Average		5.6
8. I am convicted by the sermons.		
Pre-Test Average		5.3
Post-Test Average		5.5

Table A2 continued

9. I get plenty of rest on Saturday night when I know I will be attending a preaching service on Sunday morning.		
	Pre-Test Average	4.2
	Post-Test Average	4.8
10. I eat breakfast before church on Sunday morning.		
	Pre-Test Average	3.3
	Post-Test Average	4.1
11. I meditate over the passage to be preached before Sunday morning.		
	Pre-Test Average	2.5
	Post-Test Average	3.5
12. I am usually unsure of how what is preached is relevant for my life.		
	Pre-Test Average	2.4
	Post-Test Average	1.9
13. I stay out later on Saturday night than on other nights.		
	Pre-Test Average	1.7
	Post-Test Average	1.6
14. I study Scripture at least three times a week.		
	Pre-Test Average	4.5
	Post-Test Average	4.6
15. I spend concentrated time before the sermon praying that I will hear from God during the sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	3.5
	Post-Test Average	4.3
16. I have a daily quiet time with God through His word.		
	Pre-Test Average	4.6
	Post-Test Average	4.7
17. I know what God calls me to through His Word after most sermons.		
	Pre-Test Average	4.3
	Post-Test Average	4.8
18. I am dependent upon the Holy Spirit to illuminate God's truth to me during a sermon.		
	Pre-Test Average	5.3
	Post-Test Average	5.6
19. Praying for the preacher's preparation is an important part of my prayer time.		
	Pre-Test Average	4.3
	Post-Test Average	5.1
20. I have a plan for applying the truths of the sermon to my life.		
	Pre-Test Average	3.8
	Post-Test Average	4.7

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## ABSTRACT

### DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH PREACHING AT GARRETT MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH, HOPE, ARKANSAS

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This thesis-project details the biblical role of the listener in the preaching event along with the role listening plays in the discipleship of the church.

Chapter 1 exposes the need for the development of effective listening in the specific context of Garrett Memorial Baptist Church. In the realm of practical theology, much is written concerning the practice of preaching. Preaching, however, like all forms of communication, is a two-party process of communicating. A preacher is needed as well as hearers.

Chapter 2 focuses on four aspects of listening as emphasized in the Bible: the priority, the purpose, the power and preparation, and the proof of listening. In this chapter a theology of effective listening is built.

Connecting preaching to discipleship by means of effective listening is the theme of chapter 3. When biblical preaching and effective listening connect, discipleship takes place. Additionally, when effective listening takes place within the church, discipleship within the church is increased in various ways.

Chapter 4 details how this thesis-project was implemented at Garrett Memorial Baptist Church. Through a two-part sermon series, followed by an eight-week class, church members were equipped with effective listening skills. Surveys and interviews were used to measure growth in the knowledge and use of effective listening skills.

Evaluating the success of the project is the focal point of chapter 5. Along with

assessing survey results, theological and personal reflections about the project are also given.

Presenting the role of listening as a spiritual discipline to be cultivated, this thesis-project offers spiritual and practical disciplines for the disciple of Christ to utilize before, during, and after hearing a sermon in order to get the most of out of sermons.

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