

Copyright © 2024 Jason Nathaniel Odom

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including without limitation, preservation, or instruction.

TRAINING MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF
ROCKMART, GEORGIA, TO LISTEN TO A SERMON

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

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

by
Jason Nathaniel Odom

May 2024

APPROVAL SHEET

TRAINING MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF
ROCKMART, GEORGIA, TO LISTEN TO A SERMON

Jason Nathaniel Odom

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Michael E. Pohlman

Second Reader: Joseph C. Harrod

Defense Date: March 7, 2024

Pro Ecclesia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
PREFACE.....	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Context.....	1
Rationale	4
Purpose	6
Goals	6
Research Methodology	7
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	8
Conclusion	10
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT.....	11
Exegesis of Nehemiah 8:1–12	11
Exegesis of Matthew 13:13–23	20
Exegesis of Romans 10:14–17.....	28
Conclusion	35
3. PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT	37
Attitude of Expectancy	37
Analysis of Content	45
Application of the Lesson	54
Conclusion	60
4. DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT	61

Chapter	Page
Preparation Period	61
Implementation Period.....	69
Follow-Up Period	74
Conclusion	75
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	76
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose.....	76
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals	78
Strengths of the Project.....	85
Weaknesses of the Project	87
What I Would Do Differently	90
Theological Reflections	92
Personal Reflections	94
Conclusion	96
Appendix	
1. SERMON-LISTENING INVENTORY.....	98
2. EVALUATION RUBRIC	104
3. SERMON-LISTENING CURRICULUM	106
4. EXPERT PANEL FEEDBACK.....	242
5. LESSON OUTLINES	247
6. SUMMARY SHEETS	255
7. T-TEST RESULTS	263
8. DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS.....	265
9. PRE-COURSE SLI RESULTS	270
10. POST-COURSE SLI RESULTS.....	280
11. REVISED SERMON-LISTENING INVENTORY.....	290
BIBLIOGRAPHY	295

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
A1. T-test results	264
A2. Pre-course SLI results	271
A3. Post-course SLI results.....	281

PREFACE

A great many people deserve recognition for contributing in some way to this project. To those immediately involved, I thank the faculty and staff of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for their instruction and encouragement. I am so grateful to continue my education and grow in my calling specifically through Southern Seminary.

To my supervisor for my DMin project at Southern Seminary, I thank Dr. Michael Pohlman. What at first seemed a random meeting with you during my Preview Day tour at SBTS years before has, of course, turned out to be God's providence at work. Your encouragement throughout the project has meant as much to me as your expertise.

To my second reader for my DMin project, I thank Dr. Joseph C. Harrod. To my defense draft style reader, I thank Jennifer Stec. Your feedback has strengthened the project and helped ensure that its final form meets the high standard of work for SBTS.

To those who enabled and then encouraged this opportunity, I thank my church family in First Baptist Church of Rockmart, Georgia. You had the wisdom to provide for your pastor's continued growth in his calling and the kindness to permit him to pursue it. This project benefits you, that you may continue proclaiming the gospel from Rockmart and the surrounding area to the ends of the earth. I specially thank the church's personnel committee for all your cooperation with me and the encouragement you have shown.

To those who taught me theology and ministry prior, I thank my teachers at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. You laid the groundwork for this present achievement. I specially thank the Rev. Dr. Timothy George, Beeson's founding dean, for the opportunity to work as his research associate. I also specially thank the Rev. Dr. Robert Smith Jr., my preaching professor at Beeson, for helping me to clarify my calling to preach and cheering me on.

To my mentor in ministry early on, I thank the Rev. Dr. Daven Watkins. Your knowledge, wisdom, and friendship impacted me deeply in my formative ministry years. I am indebted to you for allowing me to “cut my teeth” on your pulpit way back when.

To my longest-serving support system, I thank my family, the one I was born into and the one I married into. First the Odoms and then the Bundons have continually rooted for me in pastoring, preaching, and studying. At the cost of time otherwise spent together, you gave me space and solitude to study—because you, to your credit, likewise saw God’s calling in my life. I could not accomplish this without your understanding.

To my nearest and dearest loves, my most indispensable partners in this long project, I thank my wife and children. Michaela, I could not and would not have done this without your agreement. For that matter, I could not and would not have accomplished much of anything in ministry (or life) without you. James and Lucy, you helped me by being your wonderful selves, making me smile, and missing me while I was away for classes. I hope that I have given you a good example of pursuing your goals in life.

Of course, by thanking all these people, I ultimately thank God. I aim to serve you, Lord, and to pursue my calling as a form of worship. This project is the latest result of your salvation at work in me. To you, your gospel, and your glory this is dedicated.

Jason Odom

Rockmart, Georgia

May 2024

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Preaching is part of God's plan to spread the gospel, make disciples, and grow the church. From a human standpoint, effective preaching lies not just with the preacher but also with the hearers. Hearers are responsible for paying attention and processing the sermon's content. Typically, though, hearers are at a disadvantage, lacking knowledge of the principles of preaching by which the preacher labors. When acquired, this knowledge serves to sharpen their sermon-listening skills and, ultimately, enables faithful application of the message. The following ministry project, carried out and completed within First Baptist Church of Rockmart, Georgia, was proposed with this issue and goal in mind.

Context

This ministry project took place in First Baptist Church of Rockmart, Georgia, in which preaching has been a mainstay of church life. Every pastor in the church's near-150-year history has been called out of consideration of their preaching ability, among other proficiencies. Once called and installed, the pastor's responsibilities have included the primary preaching duties within the church. Historically, from week to week the pastor has preached on Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday evening, and at other special church events (such as weddings and funerals). So closely is the pastor identified with the task of preaching that he is sometimes referred to as "Preacher."

The church appreciates an expository approach to preaching, including going verse by verse. People listen attentively and respond affirmatively during the preaching event. Some of their more substantive feedback includes gratitude for proclaiming God's Word, for explaining plainly and clearly, and for teaching the people a new truth. The

church gladly receives preaching series of various lengths so long as it is Bible-based. In recent years, the church maintained interest and enthusiasm for two relatively long series from Matthew (covering more than two years) and Leviticus (covering nine months).

Expositing entire books of the Bible is the regular course of preaching in First Baptist Church. In addition to preaching through the books of Matthew and Leviticus, I have also expounded Philippians and James, likewise in their entirety. Exposition of a book of the Bible is often followed with a relatively short topical series. Such series take their cue from a contemporary, urgent topic (such as “New Creation” and “What is a Healthy Church?”). While being prompted by an issue or a question, these topical series still rely exclusively on biblical exposition, albeit from relevant texts located throughout the Bible. They are usually followed by the exposition of another book of the Bible.

Preaching occupies a significant place in the regular worship service. Unless the order is altered by a special occasion, preaching is always scheduled. Moreover, preaching occupies a central, climactic place. This reflects the primacy of preaching in church life. Preaching is also a relatively lengthy part of the service, typically taking up forty to fifty percent of the time. (The sermon usually takes thirty to thirty-five minutes.) Other elements of the service are supposed to revolve around, reflect, and reinforce the sermon’s theme. This arrangement, with preaching as the climactic point of the weekly worship service, has been a constant in the history of First Baptist Church of Rockmart.

The church supports me in my preaching ministry. As a condition of my hiring, and as an ongoing expectation, I devote significant time from week to week preparing to preach. To the church’s credit, people generally respect my study time; they wait to call on me at other times of the day. On most Sunday mornings, prior to the Bible study hour, several of the church’s deacons meet with me to pray for me for when I will be preaching later. Several members regularly affirm me in my preaching responsibility. They often share with me when a sermon has specially resonated with them or when they have felt deeply impressed by the lesson they have recently learned. All this support is gratifying.

While there are many positive aspects of preaching in First Baptist Church, some other aspects are decidedly mixed or possibly negative. Application, applying the lesson of the sermon, remains a challenge. Part of application's challenge lies with the hearers, specifically their follow-through in changing and living according to the lesson. Life-change reflecting follow-through in application is not always apparent. The other part of application's challenge lies squarely with me, the preacher, specifically whether I am applying the text correctly, as precisely and clearly as it warrants and hearers need.

The application portion of the sermon, applying the text to foster life-change, highlights the pastor's shepherding role through preaching. Preaching is a significant and recurring way that the pastor attempts to pastor people. The sermon signifies shepherding his flock in the largest, most concentrated setting possible. A number of congregants in First Baptist Church, though, currently separates preaching from pastoring, as if these are mutually exclusive duties. Feedback suggests that they do not recognize preaching as a major part of pastoring. This specious understanding of pastoring could be explained, at least in part, by the need for a theology of preaching and an orientation to its principles.

Some people take notes during the sermon, but not many. For some members of First Baptist Church, note-taking denotes their attentiveness and their interest in later recalling the text and the lesson. Beyond that, note-taking points toward their desire to apply what they have learned from the sermon. A few years ago, the church's Sunday morning bulletin containing the order of service featured note-taking space on the back. There was little response to this feature, suggesting minimal use, so it was discontinued soon after. Encouraging more note-taking among hearers is still a concern. The concern, moreover, raises the question of whether to provide special training in note-taking.

I, the preacher, have received much seminary-level instruction in preaching, specifically expository preaching, but the hearers have not—on any level. Essentially, the messenger knows how to deliver the message, but the recipients do not necessarily know how to receive it save for simply hearing the message. Their discipleship in various facets

of Christian living does not include any formal instruction in how to listen to preaching; the church offers no such discipleship class. Therefore, hearers are left to gradually intuit how to listen to a sermon, to say nothing of discerning and knowing the principles of expository preaching that undergird the sermon. The lack of application and life-change could, at least partly, be laid at the feet of a lack of knowing how to listen to a sermon.

As part of knowing how to listen to and apply the sermon, hearers specifically need to know how to evaluate the sermon to begin with. Formal instruction in listening to a sermon could accomplish this objective too. In the meantime, the absence of any such instruction like this leaves hearers to evaluate a sermon by various criteria, including its entertainment value. However large the congregation is, there could be several different standards at play for judging the sermon, some less helpful than others—and possibly none resembling the principles employed by the preacher for composing the sermon.

Rationale

The strongest rationale for any project on preaching is its indispensability to church life. Luke describes the early church thus: “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus” (Acts 5:42).¹ Paul commends preaching in his letters to churches and church leaders, such as when he tells Timothy to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2). Preaching is integral to God’s purpose for the church, and so it must be studied, sustained, and strengthened—no matter the church and how well the preaching there has been received. This naturally and necessarily includes First Baptist Church of Rockmart.

As a portion of the church’s worship service, preaching is a form of worship. Certainly, and most obviously, the one preaching worships by expositing Scripture and its implications. At the same time, the one sitting and listening likewise worships, in their

¹ All Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version unless noted otherwise.

case by paying attention to the message, processing it, asking questions of it, reflecting on it, affirming it, and resolving to apply it. Moreover, the central and climactic place of preaching in worship heightens the church's responsibility for it. This responsibility falls upon the preacher, but it also falls upon the hearers. To listen well is to worship well.

It redounds to a church's health and joy for the church to welcome expository preaching. Therein lies not cause for contentment but, rather, to question what might sustain and deepen this receptivity. Receiving God's Word and rejoicing over it reflect openness and understanding but not necessarily optimal listening practices. How much more, then, might said church receive God's Word and rejoice over it when hearers are better equipped to reflect on it, having been instructed and disciplined in this area? With understanding comes rejoicing. David declares in Psalm 19:8 that "the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart" at least in part because he understands God's Word.

Preaching has the exciting potential to foster spiritual growth. Success here lies not just with the preacher but with the hearer. Paul says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). Hearing, especially the hearing that happens during the preaching event, is crucial to a person coming to saving faith. In addition, it is not simply hearing but understanding what they are hearing that makes a difference. The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, for example, could read Scripture, but he did not immediately understand; understanding was a separate matter requiring Philip's help. Because "faith comes from hearing," and because understanding differs from hearing, attention ought not be given entirely to preparing the message but also to hearing it.

Application, in particular, is catalytic for spiritual growth. John Broadus says that application "is the main thing to be done" in a sermon.² Ultimately, it is not just the "main thing" for the preacher but for hearers as well; a preacher preaches application so

² John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed., ed. Vernon L. Stanfield (New York: HarperCollins, 1979), 165.

that hearers will go and apply the application. Instinctively, and even more so after they listen to so many sermons, hearers have some sense of the sermon's application. The real test of their listening (not to mention their overall profession of faith) is their subsequent obedience. Put another way: Their obedience demonstrates whether they have listened.

For many hearers, note-taking is part of their sermon-listening experience. By writing down the more salient points of the sermon, the message makes a more indelible impression on their mind and heart. Most who take notes intend to save them to review sometime later, but some will go so far as to revisit and rewrite their notes for greater order and clarity. This raises a question of what can encourage and enhance their note-taking experience, especially the order and clarity they seek. Some might be glad for a guide, shaped and informed by basic preaching principles, for note-taking as they listen.

To their credit, members of First Baptist Church are typically positive when they respond to the preaching. Some, however, express themselves in generic ways, such as "Good job" or "I enjoyed that." Besides the desire to leave campus quickly, this kind of superficial remark might be credited to shyness. Having never been trained to listen to and think and talk about a sermon like the preacher has been trained, hearers might be reluctant to say much, despite wanting to learn more. For lack of confidence, then, they deny themselves an opportunity to continue learning. With some know-how on listening, though, they might be comfortable dialoguing more deeply with me after the sermon.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train members of First Baptist Church of Rockmart, Georgia, in sermon-listening based on principles of expository preaching.

Goals

This ministry project was carried out by striving for certain relevant goals. The following enumerated goals constituted benchmarks in the plan to train members of First Baptist Church to listen to a sermon according to principles of expository preaching.

1. The first goal was to assess perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening among members of First Baptist Church.
2. The second goal was to develop curriculum on sermon-listening that is based on principles of expository preaching.
3. The third goal was to train members in sermon-listening by teaching the developed curriculum.

Successful completion of the overall project depended upon completion of these constituent goals. Moreover, achieving these goals entailed defining the means of measuring their progress and setting a standard to confirm their success. An appropriate research methodology was designed to facilitate the achievement of these goals.³ This methodology, including relevant instrumentation, is outlined in the following section.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening among members of First Baptist Church. This goal was measured by administering the Sermon-Listening Inventory (SLI) to at least fifteen members.⁴ As the title indicates, this instrument seeks information about church members' present views on preaching as well as their views on sermon-listening strategies. The inventory was scheduled to take place prior to the start of the lessons from the curriculum on sermon-listening. This first goal was considered successfully met when at least fifteen members completed the SLI and the results were tabulated using some simple descriptive statistics. The statistics helped generate a picture of members' present perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening.

The second project goal was to develop curriculum on sermon-listening based on principles of expository preaching. The curriculum thus included lessons on biblical and theological foundations of preaching, the definition and distinctives of expository

³ All research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

⁴ See appendix 1 for a sample form of the Sermon-Listening Inventory (SLI).

preaching, Christ-centered preaching, sermon structure, sermon preparation and delivery, optimal listening practices, sermon note-taking, and other topics that served this project's purpose of training members in sermon-listening. This second goal was measured by an expert panel utilizing a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁵ The goal was considered met when at least 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the benchmark of 90 percent was not initially met, the curriculum was then revised to meet the standard.

The third goal was to train members in sermon-listening by teaching the developed curriculum. Following its approval by the expert panel, the curriculum was then presented to volunteer participants meeting as a group over the course of several consecutive weeks. Once the curriculum was presented, this third goal was measured by administering a post-course survey to measure change in perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening. To expedite the comparison and the charting of any change, the same SLI administered at the start of the course served as the post-course survey. Post-course survey results were then compared to pre-course survey results using a t-test. The goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically significant difference between the pre-course and post-course survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

This project featured and relied on a key term. To facilitate understanding, and to establish a point of reference, the following definition of the key term is provided.

Expository preaching. For the purpose of this project, expository preaching was defined as “that mode of Christian preaching which takes as its central purpose the

⁵ See appendix 2 for a sample form of the curriculum evaluation rubric.

presentation and application of the text of the Bible. All other issues and concerns are subordinated to the central task of presenting the biblical text.”⁶

Three limitations, inhibiting factors beyond the facilitator’s control, applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the results of the SLI (both versions) depended upon church members’ willingness to answer forthrightly when they were asked about their present perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening. To help mitigate this limitation, members were also asked to complete the SLI anonymously. Second, the curriculum’s pedagogical success in enhancing sermon-listening depended on the members’ regular attendance for the lessons. To help mitigate this limitation, members were asked to be consistent unless providentially hindered, and the number of lessons was reasonably capped. Third, this project was limited to tracking immediate gains in perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening and thus did not register long-term improvement that comes with practice and reflection. To help mitigate this limitation, I stressed both the virtue and necessity of continuing to practice and learn more about sermon-listening.

Two delimitations, inhibiting factors intentionally applied by the facilitator, were placed on this project. First, members’ participation in the project was limited to seven weeks’ worth of lessons from the developed curriculum. This delimitation aimed to hold participants’ interest while still covering enough content to measurably enhance their sermon-listening. It also took into consideration the time needed for other phases of the project. Second, participation in the project was restricted to members of First Baptist Church of Rockmart. Members, as opposed to non-members, most regularly listen to the preaching in this church. Furthermore, this delimitation reflected the central, specific, stated purpose of the project: to train, specifically, church members to listen to sermons.

⁶ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 65.

Conclusion

A church's wellbeing and witness invariably depend on effective preaching. Contrary to conventional thinking, this calls not only for the preacher's best but also the people's best. In preaching, people give their best as they listen attentively as well as reflectively to the sermon. This project aimed, with God's help, to bring about better sermon-listening. With that purpose in view, the next chapters present the bases for the project, first the biblical and theological basis in chapter 2 and then the theoretical and practical basis in chapter 3. Atop that foundation, the project itself will be described in chapter 4 and, having now been implemented, evaluated for any success in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT

The Bible teaches that listening (or hearing) is instrumental for salvation and spiritual growth. Exegesis of multiple and diverse biblical texts supports this thesis. First, an exegesis of Nehemiah 8:1–12 supports this thesis by explaining that listening to God’s Word, attentively so, leads to understanding, repentance, rejoicing, and also life-change. Second, an exegesis of Matthew 13:13–23 supports this thesis by explaining that hearing with understanding results in spiritual fruitfulness and that hearing without understanding results in spiritual barrenness. Third, an exegesis of Romans 10:14–17 supports this thesis by explaining that listening to preaching is how people hear the gospel and come to faith.

Exegesis of Nehemiah 8:1–12

The book of Nehemiah recounts the story of the Jews’ return from exile to their homeland. With King Artaxerxes’s permission, Nehemiah makes the journey from Persia to Jerusalem. He organizes the people to begin rebuilding the city’s walls. Despite furious opposition to the effort, including personal threats against Nehemiah, the wall is finished in a surprisingly short amount of time. Still under God’s prompting, Nehemiah compiles a list of all Jews who have returned from exile. The list is divided into ordinary Jews and those who help facilitate worship, that is, Levites, priests, and Temple servants. After the census, the inhabitants of Jerusalem come together for worship and covenant renewal.

This holy convocation is the context of Nehemiah 8:1–12, in which the people listen to the proclamation of God’s Word. The opening verses set the immediate scene:

And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both

men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. (Neh 8:1–2)

The Jews of Jerusalem assemble in such large number that it gives a sense of national unity—and national longing. As indicated by their instructions to Ezra the priest, they collectively long for the law, God’s Word originally conveyed through Moses. Ezra obliges by bringing a copy of God’s Word. The people do not congregate in the Temple courts, for only men are permitted there.¹ Instead, so that all may participate they gather in the square at the Water Gate, which is located on the east side of the city.² The date is significant, for it marks the start of the Feast of Trumpets. H. G. M. Williamson says, “But more particularly it was the month in which, according to Deut 31:10–13, there should be every seventh year, during the Feast of Tabernacles, a proclamation of the Law [of Moses], which many have seen as the basis for a covenant renewal ceremony.”³

With God’s people and God’s Word both present, the narrative continues:

And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. (Neh 8:3–4)

Having retrieved God’s Word at the people’s request, Ezra begins reading it in their presence. In the span of time that is noted, Ezra can read through much of but not all

¹ F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 216.

² H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 16 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2015), 287.

³ Williamson, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, 287.

the law.⁴ The priest's "prime concern was to give the people a grasp of the message."⁵ Ezra is reading, as is mentioned for the second time in as many verses, for the benefit of all who can grasp the meaning and significance of God's Word. For their part, the people "give full attention to listening to God's word as it is read."⁶ Their listening is aided by Ezra's elevated position on a specially constructed stage, "the prototype pulpit."⁷ Joining Ezra on the platform are thirteen individuals named but otherwise unidentifiable.⁸ Their presence lends support to Ezra's public proclamation and the people's careful listening.

Besides being attentive to God's Word, the people welcome it in other ways:

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. (Neh 8:5–6)

Ezra opens God's Word by unrolling a scroll.⁹ Since he is elevated, the people can see his movements. The timing of when they stand, therefore, appears deliberate. T. J. Betts says, "In that culture, standing up was a sign of extreme respect."¹⁰ Ezra speaks a blessing on God, whose Word he now holds, "presumably a brief and simple expression

⁴ "He read it' is literally he read 'in it.' It must have been a large scroll, for it was read for some six hours. Some argue that it could not have been the whole Pentateuch because that would have taken much longer than six hours. But if he read 'in' it, we should conclude that he read selected parts." Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New American Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1993), 224.

⁵ Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 105.

⁶ T. J. Betts, *Nehemiah: A Pastoral and Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 131.

⁷ Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 225.

⁸ "All we can accept is that the persons mentioned here in v. 4 were important, quite probably leaders of the community." Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 217.

⁹ "Ezra opened the book,' which, of course, was a scroll; the codex or book form was not yet used." Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 225.

¹⁰ Betts, *Nehemiah*, 133.

of praise.”¹¹ The people’s “Amen” indicates their agreement and willingness to submit to the Word’s authority.¹² Their lifted hands indicate their need for the Word and dependence upon it.¹³ Their bowed heads and bent bodies express worship and “self-abasement.”¹⁴

Once the people are ready, the public reading of God’s Word commences:

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. (Neh 8:7–8)

This second listing of thirteen individuals differs from the listing in verse 4. These men are Levites, members of the priestly class. As such, they assist the people in understanding what is being read from God’s Word.¹⁵ Since the people are stationary on ground level, it is most likely that the Levites move among them. F. Charles Fensham says, “Every one of them might have taken a group of the congregation to explain the law.”¹⁶ Their explanation is characterized by clarity. This might be due to their division of the text “paragraph by paragraph,” or into “sensible units.”¹⁷ Given the people’s lengthy stay in a foreign land, where they acclimatized to another language, the Levites might also need to translate the Hebrew text into Aramaic.¹⁸ Ultimately, the Levites convey the

¹¹ Williamson, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, 289.

¹² Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 225.

¹³ Williamson, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, 289.

¹⁴ Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 106.

¹⁵ “In this, they were fulfilling a function that the OT recognizes as peculiarly theirs (cf. Deut 33:10; 2 Chr 17:7–9; 35:3).” Williamson, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, 290.

¹⁶ Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 217.

¹⁷ Williamson, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, 291.

¹⁸ Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 217. On the other hand, Kidner says that “Nehemiah’s indignation at finding families which ‘could not speak the language of Judah,’ on his second visit to Jerusalem about twelve years later, suggests that in his first term of office he could expect Hebrew to be generally understood.” Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 106.

meaning of what the people hear from God's Word "along with its implications."¹⁹ They serve a critical role in bridging the people's hearing and the people's understanding.

The people's understanding of God's Word leads to the following response:

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them. (Neh 8:9–12)

Upon hearing and understanding God's Word, the people are saddened. Their weeping indicates "remorse for failure adequately to observe the demands of the Law."²⁰ Though this is a noble response, it is improper. The Feast of Trumpets is supposed to be a joyful time (cf. Lev 23:23–25; Deut 16:15).²¹ Accordingly, Nehemiah instructs the people to celebrate. He promises that the joy they experience will strengthen them.²² The Levites similarly encourage the people. The people obey and disperse, eating, drinking, practicing charity, and rejoicing as instructed. Their rejoicing develops from their understanding of God's Word as it has been read, heard, explained, and interpreted to them. Derek Kidner says, "To have *understood* what God was saying was what made the occasion."²³

The text concludes with the Jews rejoicing because of their understanding of God's Word. As the same text indicates multiple times, hearing is part of the process that culminates in their understanding and rejoicing. Verse 2, for example, refers to "all who

¹⁹ Betts, *Nehemiah*, 135.

²⁰ Williamson, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, 291.

²¹ Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 219.

²² "The joy of the Lord' was the joy each Israelite felt at these festivals as he identified himself afresh with the community of God's people and so appropriated in his own generation the salvation once bestowed upon his ancestors." Williamson, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, 292.

²³ Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 107, emphasis original.

could understand what they heard.” Verse 3 mentions “the ears of all the people,” which denotes their hearing. Verse 9 explains that the people wept “as they heard.” In addition, verse 8 implies their hearing when it says that they understood “the reading.” Similarly, verse 12 hints at their hearing when it refers to what had been “declared to them.” These multiple mentions suggest that hearing is both natural and necessary to understanding.

Listening to God’s Word is part of the process of the Jews’ covenant renewal as it transpires at the Water Gate. The text describes two distinctive listening experiences: First, the people listen to the public reading of God’s Word. Afterward, they listen to the Levites’ explanation and interpretation. Since the text registers the people’s response after both the reading and the explanation of God’s Word, it stands to reason that both listening experiences, the latter building upon the former, contribute to their response. When verse 12 credits the people’s rejoicing to their understanding of the “words that were declared to them,” the term *declared* may reasonably refer to both the reading and the explanation.

Listening plays a relatively understated role in the text. The writer does not dwell on it, and none of the principal characters (Ezra, the Levites, Nehemiah) mention it during the gathering at the Water Gate. It is not the theological point of the pericope. The clue to its significance is how many times it is noted (thrice explicitly, twice implicitly) that the people “heard” God’s Word. This being so, if the Jews do not listen to God’s Word there will be no basis for the Levites’ explanation, for the people’s understanding, and for their climactic response. Hearing God’s Word, while understated, is nonetheless instrumental to the people’s experience. Before anything else, they must hear and listen.

The people’s hearing and listening is part of an overall attentiveness depicted in the text. “The attentive listening of the people is an important element in the theme of the chapter as a whole.”²⁴ The narrative continually and variously provides signs of the people’s attentive posture. Verse 1 suggests this when it says that they “gathered as one

²⁴ Williamson, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, 288.

man.” Verse 3 explicitly says that the people, via their listening, “were attentive.” The platform’s position, described in verse 5, “in the sight of all the people” intimates their attentiveness to the reading taking place there.²⁵ It is likewise intimated when verse 6 says that “all the people stood” as Ezra opens the scroll. The people’s threefold response to Ezra’s blessing—they “answered,” “lifted up their hands,” and “bowed their heads and worshiped”—reported in verse 6 offers further evidence of their attentiveness. So does the detail in verse 7 that they “remained in their places.” All this textual data surrounds and contextualizes the listening that takes place. The people listen as a form and function of being attentive. Being attentive to God’s Word involves listening to God’s Word.

The kind of listening that is vital to this Nehemiah narrative is not simply an involuntary auditory exercise but, rather, an intentional, holistic discipline. “Nehemiah 8 demonstrates what happens when the people of God get serious about listening to and obeying the word of God.”²⁶ As the people “get serious” about listening to God’s Word, they practice attentive listening. In Nehemiah 8, the people indicate attentive listening as they assemble, call for God’s Word, comprehensively respond to the blessing, and stay in place for the Levites’ explanation. Besides their ears, their voices and bodies are engaged too, all of which strongly suggests that their minds and hearts within are engaged. Their earnest response results not from mere listening but from “serious,” attentive listening.

In the narrative, “all the people gathered as one man” to listen. The corporate setting ought to be accounted for in studying the people’s attentive listening. Betts says, “We must not undervalue the importance of hearing God’s word together. Among other things, it helps us all remember the breadth of God’s work of salvation and how we are all members of one another in Christ.”²⁷ In the Jews’ case, the congregational hearing of

²⁵ “Furthermore, it serves as a focal point for the people as they listen.” Betts, *Nehemiah*, 132.

²⁶ Betts, *Nehemiah*, 142.

²⁷ Betts, *Nehemiah*, 131.

God's Word reminds them of their salvation from slavery and exile. It also reminds them that they are members of the faith in the one, true, living God. These profound reminders, stirred up by their congregational listening, may reinforce and amplify their attentiveness. Such reminders aside, the congregational setting also offers a layer of accountability.

Ultimately, the people show that they have been listening attentively to God's Word by their understanding and responsiveness. The text mentions their understanding multiple times. Verses 2 and 3 make clear that those who assembled to listen were those "who could understand" what they were hearing. Verse 7 states that the Levites helped them "to understand." Verses 8 and 12 respectively confirm that "the people understood" and that "they had understood." While much credit for the people's understanding goes to the Levites on hand who "gave the sense" (v. 8), the Levites' work is based on what the people hear prior. Their understanding is the positive consequence of their listening.

The same can be said for their subsequent contrition, rejoicing, and display of charity. As reported in verses 9, 10, and 11, the people's initial reaction upon hearing, getting "the sense," and understanding God's Word is to "mourn" and "weep" (v. 9). In verse 10, the leadership corrects them and instructs them to celebrate instead. Verse 12 confirms that the people started "rejoicing." Furthermore, their joy overflows in a show of charity as they "send portions [of food and drink] to anyone who has nothing ready" (v. 10). Verse 12 also notes their charity. These various, God-honoring responses are the outcome of a process that begins with their attentive listening to God's Word. Along with their understanding, the people's life-change is a positive consequence of their listening.

The narrative reports several signs of spiritual growth from the people as they hear God's Word. First, they understand God's Word, up to and including the implications for their personal lives. Next, they mourn and weep, ostensibly for how far short they all have fallen in their faithfulness to keep God's law. With their leaders redirecting them to a response befitting the holiday, they begin to rejoice instead. They also distribute some food and drink as an act of charity. Mervin Breneman says, "What a difference it makes

when God's people 'understand' God's Word and apply it to their particular situations."²⁸ These reactions and responses signify change happening within the people. Specifically, they are signs of spiritual growth. Their relationship with God, which is a spiritual one in nature, has markedly changed, deepened, and improved over the course of the narrative.²⁹

The change and growth may be attributed to the people's hearing and listening, among other critical factors. Listening does not entirely account for spiritual growth that occurs, but it plays a preparatory and contributory role. If, according to God's original design, listening is integral to routine human activity, it makes sense that listening would also be integral to such profound human activity as relating to God and going deeper in devotion to him. The Nehemiah text, with its factual-yet-repeated mention of the people's hearing and listening, serves to put it in perspective. Hearing and listening is not the core of spiritual growth, nor is it tangential. It is, however, instrumental to spiritual growth.

Along with showing the people's spiritual growth and reporting on listening's instrumental role, the Nehemiah text also clarifies the kind of listening that leads to such spiritual growth. Listening that leads to spiritual growth is, to be more precise, attentive listening. As indicated by the text, this may entail planning to listen, assuming a posture conducive to listening, vocally indicating willingness to hear and listen, receiving follow-up explanation and interpretation, and responding in ways reflecting and consistent with what is heard. These various signs shape and define attentive listening to God's Word. At the same time, these signs underscore listening's instrumental role in spiritual growth.

Nehemiah 8:1–12 shows that listening (or hearing) is instrumental for spiritual growth. The text shows this as the people attentively listen to God's Word, which leads to understanding, repentance, rejoicing, and life-change. "The people gathered at the Water

²⁸ Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 228.

²⁹ "The general quickening of religious consciousness on the previous day may have roused both the lay readers . . . and the religious leaders . . . to a renewed determination to carry out their responsibilities more faithfully." Williamson, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, 293.

Gate hang on every word they hear from God's word because they realize that their lives depend on it."³⁰ The people's hope in God's Word is rewarded. God's Word invigorates and impacts the lives of those attentively listening to it. There is a discernible, positive difference in their spirituality and character after hearing and understanding God's Word.

Exegesis of Matthew 13:13–23

The book of Matthew tells the story of Jesus. In this account, Matthew shows that Jesus is the Christ, the long awaited and divinely appointed deliverer. Starting with the Sermon on the Mount and ending with the Olivet Discourse, the story is periodically interrupted by five extended sections of Jesus speaking and teaching. In the third of these five teaching sections, located in Matthew 13, Jesus tells several parables. A parable is a short story that relates a moral or spiritual lesson. By this point in Matthew's account, "there is a growing polarization of response to his ministry. Matthew 13:1–52 explains this polarization through a series of parables and indicates Jesus' reaction to it."³¹

The first and longest parable in Matthew 13 is, as Jesus himself titles it, "the parable of the sower" (v. 18). The total pericope, Matthew 13:1–23, contains three parts. The first part includes the actual parable. As a sower scatters seeds, the seeds fall among four different kinds of ground. Some seeds fall on a pathway and are subsequently eaten by birds (v. 4). Other seeds fall on rocky terrain, but due to shallow soil, a scorching sun, and the inability to take root the emerging plant soon withers (vv. 5–6). Still other seeds end up among thorns, which envelop and choke the seeds (v. 7). The last seeds fall on good ground, where they eventually yield grain in varying and great amounts (v. 8).

Jesus concludes the parable proper by charging, "He who has ears, let him hear" (v. 9). This leads to the second part of the pericope, which begins with a question:

³⁰ Betts, *Nehemiah*, 132.

³¹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 211.

Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.’” For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” (Matt 13:10–17)

Jesus, as he closes the parable, charges his hearers not to simply listen but “to discern the meaning.”³² When the disciples reply, they ask why Jesus speaks in parables. For the disciples, “the parable of the sower itself, as a parable about varied hearing of the message, already raises the wider question of why Jesus uses a method which produces such variation in response.”³³ Jesus explains that the disciples have been elected to learn more about God’s kingdom.³⁴ This same knowledge, however, remains veiled to those “not part of the new family to which one gains entry by belonging to Jesus.”³⁵ Whether they learn more depends on possessing “the true insight that leads one to embrace Jesus and his kingdom.”³⁶ Jesus, therefore, speaks in parables “to harden and reject those who are hard of heart and to enlighten—often with further explanation—his disciples.”³⁷

This phenomenon, Jesus continues, fulfills the word of the prophet Isaiah (see

³² “In relation to parables it constitutes a challenge to discern the meaning of a cryptic utterance, and its wording echoes the theology of revelation which will be spelled out in 13:10–17: not everyone does have ‘ears to hear,’ and it is only to those who do and who exercise them that revelation will be successful.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 432.

³³ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 510.

³⁴ The “secrets” are “divine plans or decrees, often passed in veiled language, known only to the elect, and usually relating to eschatological events.” D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 2:307.

³⁵ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 511.

³⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 216.

³⁷ Carson, *Matthew*, 2:309.

6:9–10). Isaiah declared that people can hear but fail to understand. Jesus is claiming that “the pattern of behavior in Isaiah’s time is repeating itself and being completed in Jesus’ day among those who reject him.”³⁸ As it was with Isaiah, many in Jesus’s audience are hardened in their hearts, resulting in failure to understand what they hear and repent and receive spiritual healing.³⁹ By contrast, Jesus’s disciples are privileged and confirmed in their status as kingdom insiders because they hear with understanding. So privileged are they that prophets and believers of old desired to live in this present period, which is the time when a great many Old Testament prophecies and motifs are being fulfilled.⁴⁰

Having answered the disciples’ question about his use of parables, Jesus then adds to their privileged understanding of God’s kingdom as he interprets the parable:

Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. (Matt 13:18–23)

As Jesus begins to interpret the parable, he bids his disciples not to just listen but to understand what they are hearing.⁴¹ Jesus then explicates the symbolism of each batch of seeds and their fate in the order that they were distributed by the sower. (Even

³⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 217.

³⁹ Per France, “their failure to repent and find healing follows from that self-hardening rather than from a divine refusal to allow them scope to return.” France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 515.

⁴⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 217.

⁴¹ “The English ‘hear’ or ‘listen to’ does not in itself convey the sense of ‘really hear,’ i.e., grasp the meaning of, which is implicit in ἀκούω here (especially after the focus on true ‘hearing’ in vv. 13–17). They have already ‘heard’ the parable in vv. 3–9; what they must do now is understand it.” France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 516n1.

though the parable is named after the sower, Jesus does not explicitly identify him.)⁴² In each of the four scenes depicted, someone listens to the message about God's kingdom. The soils represent different outcomes once the message has been heard. R. T. France says, "The story is about the sowing of seed (the 'message of the kingdom'), but its moral is found in the different fates which await that (same) seed in different types of soil."⁴³

Jesus explains the parable as follows: The first scenario, seeds scattered on the path, represents those who "hear the message about the kingdom, but like hardened paths, they do not let the truth penetrate; before they really understand it the devil has snatched it away."⁴⁴ Regarding the rocky ground in the second scenario, "like seed in a place that lacks depth of soil, this superficial hearer lacks depth," so "the test shows the person up straightaway; he is no more than a fair-weather adherent."⁴⁵ The explanation of the third scenario, seeds scattered among thorns, is that "worries about worldly things or devotion to wealth (cf. 1 Tim 6:9) snuff out spiritual life."⁴⁶ Finally, in the fourth scenario someone "receives the word with intelligent appreciation and acts on it. The result is that he indeed *bears fruit and produces*."⁴⁷ Varied harvests suggest that "equally genuine disciples may produce different levels of crops, depending on their different gifts and circumstances."⁴⁸

Through the parable of the sower, Jesus explains that the message about God's

⁴² Hendricksen says that "the sower is the Son of man, and, by a legitimate extension of the figure (see Matt. 10:40; Mark 4:14), is anyone—whether minister, missionary, evangelist, any believer whoever he may be—who faithfully proclaims the Son of man's message." William Hendricksen, *Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 558.

⁴³ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 519.

⁴⁴ Carson, *Matthew*, 2:360.

⁴⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 346.

⁴⁶ Carson, *Matthew*, 2:361.

⁴⁷ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 347–48, emphasis original.

⁴⁸ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 522. But Hendricksen explains it thus: "Not all are equally penitent, trustful, loyal, courageous, meek, etc., hence also not all are equally productive in bringing other lives to Christ." Hendricksen, *Matthew*, 562.

kingdom (“seeds”) receives various responses. Hearing, or listening, figures prominently in this passage. In verse 18, Jesus bids his disciples to “hear” the ensuing interpretation of the parable. Then, as the interpretation unfolds Jesus reveals that each of the four types of soil stands for someone who “hears the word” (vv. 19, 20, 22, 23). Prior to each person’s response, and despite the difference in their responses, they all hear the message to begin. Naturally and necessarily, hearing is what leads to their responses. For the message to be snatched away, received with joy, choked, and rooted in good soil, it must first be heard.

Parables in general, not just the message of the kingdom in the parable of the sower, must first be heard in order to elicit a response. As Jesus explains to the disciples his purpose for speaking in parables, he makes many mentions of hearing, or listening. In verse 9, Jesus segues from the parable proper by saying, “He who has ears, let him hear.” He explicitly tells his disciples that he talks in parables “because . . . hearing they do not hear” (v. 13). The Isaiah passage that Jesus cites contains references to those who “indeed hear” (v. 14), “barely hear” (v. 15), and “hear with their ears” (v. 15). Jesus pronounces a blessing specifically on his disciples’ “ears, for they hear” (v. 16). The reason, says Jesus, is that God’s people of old “longed to . . . hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (v. 17). Hearing is a notable part of the process leading to people’s enlightening or hardening.

Hearing is noticeable for its many mentions in Matthew 13:9–23. At the same time, like in Nehemiah 8:1–12 its role is relatively understated. Hearing is not the focal point of the pericope. Jesus talks about hearing as part of a process that leads to people’s response, to parables in general and then to the message of God’s kingdom in particular. The combination of multiple mentions and minimal description helps to put hearing in clearer perspective. Hearing is important to conveying a message about God’s kingdom to people and getting a response from them. Fundamentally, hearing is instrumental to responding. It facilitates someone’s faith in God, or it facilitates their rejection of God.

This being so, there is more to hearing and its instrumentality than registering words in the ear. When Jesus states in verse 13 that some people “do not see” and “do not

hear” by parables, he clarifies: “nor do they understand.” The Isaiah text that Jesus quotes declares, “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive” (v. 14; cf. Isa 6:9). Isaiah, as quoted by Jesus, also laments that “they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn” (v. 15; cf. Isa 6:10). During Jesus’s interpretation of the parable, he describes the persons in the first and fourth scenarios not just in terms of hearing but also understanding what they hear (vv. 19, 23). To Jesus, “hearing” really means hearing plus understanding, or, put succinctly, understanding. Hearing the message presumes understanding the message.

The concept of understanding is at the heart of Matthew 13:9–23. Jesus speaks in parables not simply for people’s hearing but, beyond hearing, for their understanding—or lack of understanding. Understanding is the dividing line between kingdom insiders and kingdom outsiders.⁴⁹ Similarly, Jesus’s interpretation of the parable reveals that the message of the kingdom is not just for people’s hearing, for people in all four scenarios hear the message, but for their understanding. “It is a parable about ‘understanding.’”⁵⁰ The term *understanding* is “the determinative word” in the negative outcome of the first scenario and also the positive outcome of the fourth scenario.⁵¹ Hearing serves the greater purpose of understanding. Listening’s fulfillment lies in understanding the proclamation.

As to the nature of understanding, how a person understands, Jesus’s *apologia* for speaking in parables offers some insight. Jesus tells his disciples, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (v. 11). Their status as disciples, as Jesus’s dedicated followers, prepares them to understand the message. Moreover, Jesus declares that “to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance” (v.

⁴⁹ “The disciples will not grasp everything Jesus says; the contrast with outsiders is relative rather than absolute. But they will be privy to Jesus’ explanations to move them on to greater understanding than most in the crowds have (vv. 18–23, 36–43).” Blomberg, *Matthew*, 217.

⁵⁰ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 519.

⁵¹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2015), 380.

12). This indicates that those who possess prior kingdom insight are favored with further insight. In addition, if a “dull” heart prevents understanding (v. 15; cf. Isa 6:10), then it follows that an energized heart, energized by devotion, contributes to understanding.

Jesus’s interpretation of the parable implies some conditions for understanding too. If, per the first scenario, the devil’s thievery closes the door to understanding, this suggests that safeguarding oneself from the devil’s influence fosters understanding. If, per the second scenario, the message fails to take root due to shallowness, this suggests that deeper spirituality fosters understanding. If, per the third scenario, the message is choked out by worries and wealth, this suggests that freedom from these entanglements fosters understanding. All these implications help explain the nature of understanding.

Donald Hagner says, “Understanding, furthermore, must result in the response of proper conduct.”⁵² In the parable of the sower, the person who hears and understands changes. They develop and produce in keeping with enhanced understanding. The “fruit” and yields of verse 23 stand for faithfulness and spiritual fruitfulness. France says, “The bearing of a crop indicates that this ‘understanding’ is not to be interpreted as a purely intellectual grasp of truth; it is rather the lifestyle commitment which the ‘message of the kingdom’ demands.”⁵³ This is the result of a process that starts with hearing and leads to their understanding: “an unqualified, constant, and abundantly fruitful discipleship.”⁵⁴

On the other hand, the person who hears but does not understand does not change. Jesus indicates this in verse 15 when he quotes Isaiah promising that those who hear and understand will be healed. By implication, those who do not understand will not be healed. “The problem of failing to understand . . . results from the hardheartedness and

⁵² Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 380.

⁵³ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 521.

⁵⁴ Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 381.

unreceptive attitude of the hearers.”⁵⁵ Failing to understand also reinforces their hardened condition.⁵⁶ As Jesus teaches with his explanation of the parable, they do not develop and produce. Whether the devil takes the message away, or it does not take root, or worries of this world choke it, the result is the same: There is no fruit, no yield of any amount. D. A. Carson says, “But without real root, there is no fruit.”⁵⁷ Instead of displaying faithfulness and spiritual fruitfulness, what they display is rebelliousness and spiritual barrenness.

Whether the result is understanding and spiritual fruitfulness or hardening and spiritual barrenness, both possibilities begin with hearing. To receive the message about the kingdom and to refuse that message, a person first listens to it. On one level, this is a mere function of the human body. At the same time, Jesus recognizes hearing’s import as the gateway to understanding and spiritual growth. Jesus could have spoken just in terms of understanding rather than both hearing and understanding; the hearing function would have been implied and understood as such. But Jesus explicitly remarks on the role that hearing plays in the process that, it is hoped, culminates with spiritual fruitfulness. This invites readers, exegetes, theologians, and preachers to reflect on hearing and listening.

Like with the Nehemiah passage, this Matthew passage offers clues as to the kind of hearing and listening that garners positive results. Hearing that leads to spiritual fruitfulness entails understanding. Several factors, as Jesus indicates, may contribute to one’s understanding. Among them: an active and ongoing commitment to God, previous kingdom insight to build upon, a spiritually invigorated heart, a guarded heart (vis-à-vis the devil’s influence), a deeper spirituality that is resistant to trouble and persecution, and freedom from entanglements with worry and wealth. Hearing that involves some or, still better, all these factors is more likely to lead to understanding and spiritual fruitfulness.

⁵⁵ Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 379.

⁵⁶ “God confirms such people in their hard-heartedness in response to their freely chosen disobedience.” Blomberg, *Matthew*, 217.

⁵⁷ Carson, *Matthew*, 2:360.

Based on the exegetical evidence, Matthew 13:9–23 shows that listening (or hearing) is instrumental for spiritual growth. The text shows this as parables, according to Jesus’s purpose for them, bestow greater understanding upon hearers. The text also shows this as the parable of the sower depicts “the one who hears and understands” and “bears fruit” (v. 23). Furthermore, the positive and negative responses to parables in general and in the parable of the sower reveal several factors that promote understanding and spiritual growth. Clearly, the message of the kingdom transforms those who hear it and listen to it with understanding. Their understanding is confirmed by their subsequent fruitfulness.

Exegesis of Romans 10:14–17

The book of Romans is Paul’s letter to Christians in Rome, the capital of the great Roman Empire. Paul writes in anticipation of traveling to Rome for the first time (15:23–24). As Paul introduces himself to the Roman Christians, he presents them with a robust theological treatise. His main subject is the saving righteousness that comes by way of the gospel. This righteousness, Paul argues, is for Jews, God’s specially chosen people, as well as non-Jews, or Gentiles, those outside God’s chosen people. As Paul recounts, God’s promises thereof were given to ancient Israel, the Jews’ forebears, first. Much of Israel, though, sought to gain this righteousness by obedience to the religious law code instead of by faith. Paul insists that this righteousness comes only by faith.

From Romans 9:30 through chapter 10, Paul strives “to show that unbelieving Israel is culpable for rejecting the gospel.”⁵⁸ He makes his case in three steps, claiming (1) that Israel failed to obey the law (9:30–10:4), (2) that Scripture renounces the law as the means to righteousness (10:5–13), and (3) that Israel is accountable for not accepting the gospel (10:14–21).⁵⁹ In his third step, Paul employs some rhetorical questions plus

⁵⁸ Frank S. Thielman, *Romans*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 476.

⁵⁹ Thielman, *Romans*, 476.

further proofs from Scripture to confirm Israel’s lost opportunity to believe and receive the gospel. Douglas Moo says, “His point, then, is that Israel cannot plead ignorance.”⁶⁰

As he presses on with confirming Israel’s culpability, Paul asks four questions in Romans 10:14–15a: “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?”

These four questions constitute a series.⁶¹ Collectively, they describe a process of preaching, hearing, and believing the gospel. “By repeating the verb from the end of one question at the beginning of the next, Paul creates a connected chain of steps that must be followed if a person is to be saved.”⁶² The questions are in reverse temporal order. William Hendricksen says, “It proceeds from effect to cause, and is comparable to the series 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.”⁶³ The effect, believing the gospel, is mentioned first. The cause, sending someone to preach the gospel, is mentioned fourth and last. As to the reason for the reverse order, it is possible that Paul wants to draw attention to God for sending the preacher and thereby admonish those, especially Jews, who have rejected the gospel.⁶⁴

In their forward temporal order, the questions indicate how the gospel gets into a person’s heart. First, according to the fourth (temporally first) question, a preacher is sent to preach the gospel. Second, according to the third (temporally second) question,

⁶⁰ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 663.

⁶¹ “The logical progression of thought is sketched in with a series of rhetorical questions.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 564.

⁶² Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 663.

⁶³ William Hendricksen, *Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 349.

⁶⁴ “For the audience, then, and for every person in that audience, the apostle has so arranged the series that the reference to God—or, if one prefers, to Jesus Christ—who commissioned the preacher, would be mentioned last of all, in order that all the emphasis might fall on him! Every person in the audience must be made aware of the fact that when he rejects the preacher . . . *then he is rejecting Jesus Christ himself!*” Hendricksen, *Romans*, 349–50, emphasis original.

those to whom he preaches hear the gospel. Third, according to the second (temporally third) question, those who hear the gospel subsequently believe it. Fourth, according to the first (temporally fourth) question, those who believe the gospel call upon God to save them.⁶⁵ When these steps in gospel diffusion are cast as rhetorical questions, “each . . . anticipates a negative answer.”⁶⁶ This rhetorical tack underscores the fact that “the steps of the chain must be realized if people are going to call on the Lord and be saved.”⁶⁷

After the questions, Paul invokes Scripture in Romans 10:15b–17: “As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

The first quote is from Isaiah 52:7. This text is part of Isaiah’s pronouncement to God’s chosen people that their exile in Babylon is ending; they will be going home. Paul cites this text to confirm that preachers bearing the good news of the gospel have likewise gone out.⁶⁸ What is more, “Paul understood his own proclamation of the gospel, and that of the other apostles, to be the fulfillment of this prophecy.”⁶⁹ Unfortunately, however good the good news is, not everyone who heard the gospel has received it and believed in it. Paul turns to Isaiah again, this time in 53:1, to confirm. Frank Thielman says, “Very few within Israel have submitted to the gospel, but this is consistent with

⁶⁵ “The temporal sequence is as follows: (1) one must be sent; (2) the one sent must preach the good news; (3) those to whom he is sent and preaches must hear the message proclaimed; (4) the message heard must be believed; and (5) those who believe must call on the Lord for salvation.” Schreiner, *Romans*, 564.

⁶⁶ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 417.

⁶⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 567.

⁶⁸ “The quotation of Isa. 52:7 at the end of v. 15 serves two functions. First, it provides scriptural confirmation of the necessary role of preaching. Second, however, it implicitly suggests that the last condition for salvation listed by Paul in vv. 14–15a has been met: God has sent preachers.” Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 663–64.

⁶⁹ Thielman, *Romans*, 500.

Isaiah's experience and message."⁷⁰ The problem is not the message but its hearers.⁷¹

The people's tragic rejection after hearing underscores the point that "faith in God arises from hearing and believing an account of that redemption that someone has preached."⁷² This is the first part of Paul's summary in verse 17 of his argument starting back in verse 14.⁷³ To help make the point that preachers have been sent and people have heard, Paul explains that faith comes from hearing. Hearing that brings about faith, says Paul, involves hearing "the word of Christ." Paul is referring to the gospel, "the message whose content is the lordship and resurrection of Christ."⁷⁴ This point about hearing is an effective step in Paul making his overall case for culpability in rejecting the gospel.

Paul's concern about people hearing is reflected in how often the term appears in this relatively short text. In verse 14, the second and third rhetorical questions mention hearing: "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" In verse 16, Paul quotes Isaiah querying, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" Last, in verse 17, Paul declares, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." In all, there are five references to hearing in Romans 10:14–17. This tabulation suggests significance.

The nature of hearing's significance in this text is shaped and formed by the context. Of the five times hearing is mentioned, three times it is linked with believing or having faith: "believe in him of whom they have never heard" (v. 14), "believed what he has heard" (v. 16), "faith comes from hearing" (v. 17). Of the other two times hearing is mentioned, both times it is linked with preaching: "hear without someone preaching" (v.

⁷⁰ Thielman, *Romans*, 500.

⁷¹ "If this happened in Isaiah's day, it is not surprising that it should recur in Paul's day, the corollary being that there is nothing wrong with the gospel message or its messenger. The problem lies with the hearers." Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 417.

⁷² Thielman, *Romans*, 501.

⁷³ "Verse 17 summarizes the flow of thought of the paragraph." Schreiner, *Romans*, 564.

⁷⁴ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 666.

14), “hearing through the word of Christ” (v. 17). Therefore, as to hearing’s significance in this text Paul indicates (1) that hearing is the target of preaching and (2) that hearing is the antecedent of belief, or faith. Hearing is the link between preaching and believing.

Specifically, in Romans 10:14–17 hearing is the link between preaching and believing the gospel of salvation (v. 16, “the word of Christ” in v. 17). At this point in the letter, Paul is addressing people’s rejection of the offer of salvation in the gospel. Those who hear and believe experience salvation from sin’s penalty. Those who hear but do not believe reject salvation. Hearing is the foreordained way by which they accept or reject salvation. It is like the preaching that precedes it and also like the belief that follows it: Hearing is an intermediate step in the chain of steps culminating in salvation. Thomas Schreiner says, “Those who call on the Lord in a saving way must believe in him, but this belief is not possible apart from the *hearing* of a message that someone preaches.”⁷⁵

Preaching the gospel ultimately aims for salvation. This happens in the heart, the seat of belief. Even so, preaching does not head directly to the heart, as if the message immediately and mystically manifests there. Paul, in Romans 10, explains the process: “Once a preacher is sent who heralds the gospel, then it follows that unbelievers will hear the gospel.”⁷⁶ The gospel goes through the ear on its way to the heart. Paul does not delve into this step; he presumes it as a matter of due course. Preachers preach the gospel to be heard. John Stott says, “Christ sends heralds; heralds preach; people hear.”⁷⁷ The fact that a human, as a preacher, bears the gospel to other humans implies that hearing is involved.

Along with its role as preaching’s target, hearing is significant to Paul for the role it plays in fostering faith too. When Paul asks in verse 14 how people can believe in someone of whom they have not yet heard, he is implying that this cannot happen. Robert

⁷⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 586, emphasis original.

⁷⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 586.

⁷⁷ John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), 286.

Mounce says, “People do not believe in one of whom they have never heard.”⁷⁸ Isaiah, too, as quoted by Paul, affirms the natural and indispensable part that hearing plays in belief (v. 16; cf. Isa 53:1).⁷⁹ For someone to believe the gospel and put faith in Jesus as the gospel’s saving subject, they must hear and listen to a presentation of the gospel first. Like preaching presumes hearing, “faith in Christ presupposes having heard the word.”⁸⁰

As Paul demonstrates the link between hearing and believing, he indicates an equivalence between believing and obeying. In verse 16, Paul declares that not all have “obeyed the gospel.” He then quotes Isaiah asking about who has believed what he has heard (Isa 53:1). If “gospel” corresponds with “what he has heard from us,” as seems to be Paul’s point in utilizing this Isaiah text, then “obeyed” corresponds with “believed.” Believing, therefore, entails obeying. Moo says, “Paul considers Israel’s disobedience and unbelief as two sides of the same coin, as the quotation from Isa. 53:1 in v. 16b makes clear.”⁸¹ When Paul speaks of obeying the gospel, he means submitting to the gospel.⁸² This “inseparable relationship between faith and obedience” further illuminates the link between hearing and believing.⁸³ Hearing leads not to mere faith but also to obedience.

This implies that hearers, as they listen to the gospel message, might also hear an explicit appeal to submit and obey. Paul does not get this detailed when he talks about preaching in this Romans text. Still, if preaching the gospel is a targeted effort, then it stands to reason that such targeting may include an appeal to obey. This would accord

⁷⁸ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1995), 211.

⁷⁹ “Isaiah’s testimony supports the principle that one has to hear the good news of God’s deliverance before one believes it.” Thielman, *Romans*, 501.

⁸⁰ Hendricksen, *Romans*, 351.

⁸¹ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 665.

⁸² “Believing the gospel nevertheless involves submission to God, and this comes out clearly here when Paul speaks of obeying the gospel.” Thielman, *Romans*, 500.

⁸³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 570.

with explicit appeals accompanying a gospel message noted elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38; 2 Cor 5:20). While the gospel's content, concerning humanity's sinfulness and Jesus's saving power, inherently invites people to respond, preachers may include an explicit appeal as they present. For some hearers, this is a more exact version of what they hear: the gospel plus an appeal to believe, submit to, and obey the gospel.

According to Paul's chain of rhetorical questions, temporally reversed so that the last step is mentioned first, those who hear and believe subsequently "call on him" (v. 14). Per verse 13, a quotation of Joel 2:32, which says that "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved," they are calling on the Lord Jesus, identifying with him as their savior. "That quotation asserts that salvation is a matter of calling on the Lord."⁸⁴ This kind of calling signifies a profession of faith. Calling upon Jesus for salvation is the ultimate outcome of the process, a process that invariably includes hearing, outlined by Paul in this Romans text. Ideally, the one who hears also believes and asks to be saved.

Realistically, not all who hear subsequently believe and call on Jesus to save them. While Paul's chain of rhetorical questions reflects a process resulting in salvation, right after these questions he also admits, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel" (v. 16). For that matter, Romans 10:14–17 is part of Paul's greater argument that many have spurned the gospel despite hearing the gospel (and are thus culpable). Evidently, hearing leads to believing but does not ensure it. Some people hear and yet decline to believe. Together, these divergent outcomes demonstrate hearing's usefulness and limitation.

Regarding its usefulness, hearing serves the highest purpose: salvation. On the other hand, regarding its limitation hearing does not necessarily result in salvation. This observation mirrors that of Matthew 13:13–23: Many hear the message concerning God's kingdom, but not all who hear understand and bear fruit attesting to their understanding. Similarly, Paul in Romans 10:14–17 indicates that many hear the preaching of the gospel,

⁸⁴ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 662.

but not all who hear the preaching believe, obey, and submit to the gospel. Interpretation of Romans 10:14–17 supports the notion that hearing’s role is instrumental, as opposed to optional or total. It is the pathway by which people call out for salvation and are saved.

Paul, in this Romans text, offers one hint to enhance the possibility of someone hearing and then coming to faith. According to verse 17, hearing that leads to faith comes “through the word of Christ.” It must be the gospel, the gospel and no other message, that people hear if they are going to believe and call out for salvation. Paul prescribes nothing else; rather, “hearing, the kind of hearing that can lead to faith, can only happen if there is a definite salvific word from God that is proclaimed.”⁸⁵ Hearers will see their need to be saved and call out to Jesus as they listen to a message based exclusively on the gospel.

Upon its interpretation, Romans 10:14–17 shows that listening (or hearing) is instrumental for salvation. The text shows this as Paul mentions hearing as a step in the chain of events culminating in salvation. Hearing, as Paul recounts, is the link between preaching and believing. Paul sums up hearing’s role when he says, “So faith comes from hearing” (v. 17). Schreiner says, “Faith would not exist without hearing the gospel, and the word proclaimed is nothing other than the gospel of the crucified and resurrected Lord.”⁸⁶ Listening to the proclamation of the gospel is an intermediate but integral step. The final step, in which believers call upon Jesus, depends on hearing the gospel prior.

Conclusion

The foregoing exegesis of Nehemiah 8:1–12, Matthew 13:13–23, and Romans 10:14–17 offers a biblical basis for the claim that listening (or hearing) is instrumental for salvation and spiritual growth. Romans 10:14–17 addresses the role that listening plays in salvation, which is the starting point of spiritual growth. Matthew 13:13–23 addresses the role that listening plays in spiritual fruitfulness. Nehemiah 8:1–12 addresses the role of

⁸⁵ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 666.

⁸⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 564.

listening in repentance and life-change. Each of the three texts indicates that listening is an intermediate step, a humble human function underscored and blessed by the nature of the message and the spiritual results at stake. In addition, each text indicates one or more factors that enhance attentiveness, receptivity, and understanding as part of the listening event. Listening with understanding and faith is evidenced by various visible responses.

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

Sermon-listening involves more than just hearing the message with auditory faculties. It is a discipline that requires an attitude of expectancy, analysis of the content, and application of the lesson. This chapter aims to explicate these facets as follows: First, an attitude of expectancy believes that God speaks through the preaching of his Word and so prepares listeners to be attentive to the sermon. Second, analysis of the content attunes listeners to the sermon's progress and organizes what they hear to understand the lesson and its application. Third, application of the lesson puts the preached Word into practice, thus completing the sermon-listening process and confirming that listening has occurred.

Attitude of Expectancy

An attitude of expectancy believes that God speaks through the preaching of his Word and so prepares listeners to be attentive to the sermon. Expectancy defines this preliminary stage of sermon-listening, which is prior to the actual listening.¹ Listeners do more here than merely expect; expectancy is not a passive posture for productive sermon listeners. They have “the understanding that ultimately it is not a preacher’s responsibility to create a positive listening experience for them. If they expect to receive from a sermon, they need to invest in it.”² They are compelled by the conviction that God will shortly be

¹ “A holy expectation was one of the dominant characteristics of the people of the Bible.” Thadeus L. Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny Listen: Taking Full Advantage of the Sermons We Hear* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 58.

² Enoh Šeba, *Sermon Listening: A New Approach Based on Congregational Studies and Rhetoric* (Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2021), 202.

addressing them through the preached Word.³ Consequently, sermon listeners perform a number of exercises leading up to when they listen to the sermon. Their goal with these measures is to render themselves highly receptive when it is time to listen.⁴ The slate of suitable exercises might include praying, reading, scheduling, focusing, and worshiping.

Praying is a prevalent pre-sermon exercise. As it pertains to the approaching sermon-listening experience, listeners might pray with at least three different persons in mind. First, they pray for the preacher, the person presenting the sermon and to whom they will listen. There are at least three particular and pertinent ways for listeners to pray for the preacher leading up to the sermon: his study during the week, his delivery during the sermon, and his integrity throughout his life. Thadeus Bergmeier mentions all three:

How many times have we committed to praying throughout the week for our preachers that God will open their eyes as they are studying so that they will be able to apply their sermons to their own lives, that they will know how best to communicate the messages to us, and that they will not get in the way of what God wants to communicate during the sermon? We can go to our preachers and ask them for a list of prayer requests so we can pray for our preachers during the week in regard to their personal lives and . . . preparation for their sermons.⁵

Regarding all three points but especially delivery, thoughtful listeners pray for the Holy Spirit's anointing upon the preacher.⁶ Such anointing will redound to listeners' sermon-listening experience as the preacher proclaims with a heightened clarity and conviction characteristic of this unction. Praying for the preacher thusly impacts sermon-listening.

³ "Why is listening to preaching so important? Because God speaks by His Word." Jay Adams, *Be Careful How You Listen: How to Get the Most Out of a Sermon* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 14.

⁴ Several authors offer lists of pre-sermon exercises explicitly to heighten people's receptivity to the upcoming sermon. See, for example, Christopher Ash, *Listen Up! A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2009), 6; Joel R. Beeke, *The Family at Church: Listening to Sermons and Attending Prayer Meetings* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 9–13; Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 47–65; John Piper, *Take Care How You Listen: Sermons by John Piper on Receiving the Word* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2012), 20–26; Ken Ramey, *Expository Listening: A Handbook for Hearing and Doing God's Word* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress, 2010), 37–48, 111–13; David Strain, *Expository Preaching* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021), 95–98; Will Willimon, *Listeners Dare: Hearing God in the Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2022), 98–117.

⁵ Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 58.

⁶ "Pray that your minister will receive the unction of the Holy Spirit, so that he will open his mouth boldly to make known the mysteries of the gospel (cf. Eph. 6:19)." Beeke, *Family*, 10.

Along with the preacher, a second person that sermon listeners pray for as they prepare to listen is themselves. Much of what listeners pray for themselves concerns the attitude of their heart, namely a heart that is ready to receive the sermon and learn from it.⁷ Ken Ramey says for listeners to ask God for “an honest and good heart” as well as a heart that “would delight in the truth of His Word more than in riches and food.”⁸ Along with a receptive heart, listeners also pray for both cognitive and affective illumination in order to understand the sermon as it is being delivered.⁹ Following and building upon this, they pray concerning their submissiveness to God’s Word and life-change from it.¹⁰ They are looking and praying to “grow to become more like Him.”¹¹ Like when they pray for the preacher, listeners implore the Spirit for his help to accomplish all these items.¹²

A third person that listeners pray for as they prepare to listen is other listeners, their fellow congregants sitting in on the sermon. If it is likely that the assembly includes both believers and nonbelievers, listeners should pray “for the conversion of sinners” as well as “the edification of saints.”¹³ In general, the points of prayer that listeners pray for themselves may apply in prayer for their fellow listeners: receptiveness, understanding, submissiveness, life-change, the Spirit’s aid, etc. Praying for other listeners demonstrates mindfulness of the local church community in which believers typically listen to sermons

⁷ “Pray for a receptive and teachable heart.” Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 96, emphasis original.

⁸ Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 39.

⁹ “Pray the Prayer for Illumination, ‘Open our hearts and minds . . .’ with particular fervor.” Willimon, *Listeners Dare*, 98.

¹⁰ “Pray for the work of God’s Spirit to enable you to submit to what the Bible clearly says, and to help you to change.” Ash, *Listen Up!*, 10.

¹¹ Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 39.

¹² “Pray for an outpouring of the Spirit’s convicting, quickening, humbling, and comforting power to work through God’s ordinances in the fulfillment of His promises.” Beeke, *Family*, 10.

¹³ Beeke, *Family*, 9.

and live out their salvation together.¹⁴ As members of the same body, they are responsible for praying for each other's sermon-listening experience in order to build each other up.

While praying in preparation for the sermon, expectant listeners also read the sermon text. This is the Bible passage that the preacher plans to exposit in the upcoming message. For some listeners, the text might be published in some form of church media, such as the church bulletin.¹⁵ If not, listeners may approach the preacher and ask him for the text.¹⁶ At the very least, if the preacher is currently preaching through an entire book of the Bible or a long passage then the listener may infer the next selection of Scripture. However listeners procure the text, they ought to then read the text prior to the sermon.¹⁷ Listeners who are familiar with the sermon text prior to listening to the sermon stand to orient themselves to the sermon sooner once it begins and follow it with greater clarity.¹⁸

In addition to reading it, expectant listeners ask questions of the text they have just read. The answers will shape their preliminary understanding. Ramey suggests four questions: "What did I learn? . . . Where do I fall short? . . . What do I need to do about it? . . . How can I make this a consistent part of my life?"¹⁹ David Schlafer offers six:

With respect to each reading, ask and note down, preferably in writing:

¹⁴ "The normal place for preaching is the gathering of the local church. We are to hear sermons as a people gathered together; they are not preached so that we can listen to them solo later." Ash, *Listen Up!*, 13.

¹⁵ "You can always find the Collect and the Lessons for any day identified in the Prayer Book. They are also regularly announced a week ahead in the Sunday worship bulletin." Donald L. Berry, *How to Listen to a Sermon: With "Honoring the Gospel" and Other Homilies for the Sake of Heaven* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011), 10.

¹⁶ "Several days before the sermon is preached, ask the pastor what passage of Scripture he plans to preach the following Sunday." Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 22.

¹⁷ "Read the passage in advance." Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 96, emphasis original. Likewise, Willimon says, "Read the biblical text for the sermon beforehand, even if it's just scanning it briefly." Willimon, *Listeners Dare*, 98.

¹⁸ Bergmeier hints at the benefit of reading the text in advance by asking, "What if we know what the preacher is going to preach on and have looked at it already? . . . How will that impact how we listen to the sermon the next morning?" Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 58.

¹⁹ Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 38–39.

- (1) What are the primary images which these Scriptures depict? How do the Scriptures appeal directly to the senses of the hearing community?
- (2) What actions are going on in the texts? Who is doing what, for or to whom? How do these actions pick up from verses prior to the reading? How are the actions picked up in verses that follow it?
- (3) What messages are being delivered? What concepts are explained? What complex issues are struggled with?
- (4) How do the readings carry forward or contrast with ideas that have been the subject of lessons in previous weeks? . . .
- (5) What echoes do you hear of issues and questions that are alive in your parish, in the news, in your own personal experience?
- (6) What hard questions, infuriating pronouncements do the texts present—the sorts of things that make you say: “I’ll bet the preacher won’t touch that with a ten-foot pole, but I sure would like to hear *someone* take that on in a sermon someday!”²⁰

David Strain likewise offers six questions to help listeners analyze the text prior: “(1) What in it is difficult to understand? (2) How does it fit with what precedes and follows it? (3) What is its central idea? (4) What does it say about God the Father, Son, or Spirit? (5) What about sin and grace? (6) How does it challenge or comfort or encourage you?”²¹ During the sermon, the answers to listeners’ preliminary questions might be confirmed or corrected by the exposition. Aside from what they learn in their advance reading, reading in advance shows and stokes their anticipation to hear the text expounded in the sermon.

A third factor in listeners’ expectancy is scheduling. Specifically, listeners set their schedule around the upcoming worship service and the sermon-listening experience as part of the service. They prioritize and safeguard the service and the sermon. To begin, they arrange their weekly schedule accordingly.²² Within their weekly schedule, they give special attention to Saturday evening. Jay Adams laments those who “show more concern on Saturday night about what to wear to church than they do about preparing their hearts

²⁰ David J. Schlafer, *Surviving the Sermon: A Guide to Preaching for Those Who Have to Listen* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1992), 99–100, emphasis original.

²¹ Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 96.

²² Under the section heading, “Plan ahead, and schedule your week around the ministry of the Word,” Ramey says, “For Christians, however, Sunday should be the most important day of the week. You should try to schedule your work, activities, get-togethers, and vacations around church.” Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 43.

to receive God’s message.”²³ Strain says, “*Take steps to put your house in order at least by Saturday night.*”²⁴ Joel Beeke says that Puritans prepared for Sunday on Saturday.²⁵

John Piper also insists on getting “a good night’s rest on Saturday night.”²⁶ As part of a restful Saturday night, Piper prescribes turning off any worldly entertainment, such as television, and reading Scripture instead.²⁷ He also prescribes calculating what time to go to sleep—ideally, listeners will go to sleep right after reading their Bible—in order to get enough rest.²⁸ Adequate sleep, says Piper, renders listeners’ minds alert, not dull.²⁹ Piper underscores the import thus: “Don’t play into the hands of Satan by staying up so late Saturday night that you can’t stay awake in worship or in Sunday School. He constantly lies to you telling you that what you’re doing at 10:00 Saturday night is more important than being rested to give your best ear to God’s Word on Sunday morning.”³⁰

A fourth factor contributing to listeners’ expectancy is focusing. Listeners, as they prepare to hear the sermon, are concentrating on God’s voice speaking to them; this is the sense in which they focus. They are mindful and thereby moved that the “high and holy triune God of heaven and earth is meeting with you to speak directly to you.”³¹ As a function of focusing on God, they are also focused on his Word. In so many words, they

²³ Adams, *Be Careful*, 122.

²⁴ Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 96, emphasis original.

²⁵ “The Puritans said preparation for worship should start on Saturday evening.” Beeke, *Family*, 10.

²⁶ Piper, *Take Care*, 20.

²⁷ Piper, *Take Care*, 23. Piper does not explicitly prescribe reading the text for the upcoming sermon.

²⁸ “My counsel is: decide when you must get up to have time to eat, get dressed, pray and meditate on the Word, prepare the family, and travel to church; and then compute backward eight hours (or whatever you know you need) and be sure that you are in bed 15 minutes before that. Read your Bible in bed and fall asleep with the Word of God on your lips and in your mind.” Piper, *Take Care*, 23.

²⁹ “Without sufficient sleep, we are not alert; our minds are dull, our emotions are flat and unenergetic, our proneness to depression is higher, and our fuses are short.” Piper, *Take Care*, 24.

³⁰ Piper, *Take Care*, 36.

³¹ Beeke, *Family*, 11.

remind and thus alert themselves: “*This morning God has a message for me that should change my life.*”³² Understanding that the preacher is an intermediary, and excited about the prospect of life-change, they are solely concerned about what God will be saying to them.³³ Focusing is a conscious, voluntary, sustained exertion on the part of listeners.

Of course, the aforesaid disciplines of praying, reading the sermon text, and scheduling, by steering attention to the upcoming sermon, serve to encourage listeners’ focus. Closer to the moment when the sermon is delivered, such as when they go into the sanctuary for the worship service, listeners focus by becoming physically still, curtailing any extraneous movement.³⁴ The physical stillness helps to likewise still their minds and turn their attention to the preached Word. Quieting their minds is an intentional move by listeners that is enabled by reminding themselves that this is the time when God speaks to them and also praying for God to speak to them.³⁵ Furthermore, listeners may achieve the desired quiet and focus by reducing or, if possible, eliminating distractions. Ramey warns that distractions are a tool in the devil’s strategy to prevent people’s intake of the Word.³⁶ To help put distractions behind them, Ramey advises listeners to sit close to the front.³⁷

Stilling their bodies and quieting their minds in order to focus on the sermon does not preclude listeners from participating in the rest of the worship service. Rather,

³² Adams, *Be Careful*, 41, emphasis original.

³³ “The whole point is this: when you go to hear a sermon, you must be concerned about one thing: what does God have to say to me? Focus on God. See preaching as a transaction not merely between yourself and the preacher, but between yourself and God. The preacher is a means to that end. Go expecting to hear a Word from God that, when obeyed, will change your life.” Adams, *Be Careful*, 42.

³⁴ “Be still as you enter the room and focus your mind’s attention and heart’s affection on God.” Piper, *Take Care*, 25.

³⁵ “Deliberately quieten your mind and heart before the sermon and say to yourself: ‘This is when God speaks to me.’ Pray again: ‘Lord, speak to me. I am listening.’” Ash, *Listen Up!*, 6.

³⁶ “Whenever the Word is preached, there is a spiritual battle going on. The last thing Satan wants is for you to hear the Word. So he does everything in his power to distract you and snatch away the Word from your heart and mind so it can’t take root and grow and produce fruit in your life.” Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 46.

³⁷ “One of the easiest ways to remove a lot of the distractions is to sit up front, which puts most of the distractions behind you.” Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 47.

worshiping before the sermon helps foster focus for when the preaching gets underway. Bergmeier links worshiping prior to the sermon with successful sermon-listening later in the service.³⁸ “Good, rich, theological songs are those songs that, when we sing them, we forget about ourselves. Our full focus and attention are directed toward God.”³⁹ This is the condition that listeners need to be in to listen well to the sermon: with their focus and attention on God. Similarly, Piper, in the context of listeners preparing to hear the Bible proclaimed, urges them to “think earnestly about what is sung” during the service.⁴⁰ The implication is that thinking about the songs prepares listeners to think about the sermon.

Along with the singing, the other elements of the liturgy can facilitate listeners’ focus and stoke their expectancy for the sermon too. These other elements might include prayers, Scripture readings, the collection of tithes and offerings, and instrumental music. Supposing that these elements aim to direct listeners’ attention to God and help them set their affections on God, they likewise prepare listeners for an optimal sermon-listening experience. Piper advises, “Focus on the content of the worship folder during the prelude. Focus on the words of the call to worship and the prayers and the hymns. Focus on God during the organ praise and the moment for meditation. Pray to God whenever there is a non-directed moment. Go hard after God. Don’t coast in worship.”⁴¹ Whatever invites listeners to focus on God is beneficial for when they listen to the sermon. Such an order of service, when it generates worship, predisposes listeners to give attention and receive God’s Word preached unto them.⁴² Theocentric worship produces expectant listeners.

³⁸ In the chapter titled “Receive the Preaching of God’s Word,” Bergmeier lists five principal ways that listeners prepare to listen to the sermon: “Come Hungry,” “Come Worshiping,” “Come Praying,” “Come Expecting,” “Come Forgiving.” Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 47–65.

³⁹ Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 54.

⁴⁰ Piper, *Take Care*, 25.

⁴¹ Piper, *Take Care*, 37.

⁴² To prepare to listen to the sermon, Ramey says, “Worship with all your heart.” Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 45.

Worshiping, along with focusing, scheduling, reading, and praying, forms and reveals expectant listeners. What is more, these disciplines reflect listeners' personal and ongoing responsibility to prepare to listen to the sermon. Enoh Šeba states, "It is up to the listener to enter the church building and to lend an ear to the sermon with an expectation of an encounter with the Divine."⁴³ Prayer, for example, recalls listeners' dependence on God as well as God's sovereign prerogative to bless listeners in their listening. Even so, it is still listeners' responsibility to engage in prayer and put forth the appeal to God. The same goes for other preparatory measures. While working out their grace-based salvation, listeners are enabled and compelled by this same grace to prepare to listen to sermons.

Analysis of Content

Analysis of the content attunes listeners to the sermon's progress and organizes what they hear to understand the lesson and application. Analysis defines this subsequent stage of sermon-listening. It builds on and begins to fulfill the attitude of expectancy that was cultivated during the previous, preliminary stage. This stage, which corresponds with the preacher's sermon delivery, is when actual sermon-listening happens. Will Willimon says that "nothing solves the problem of hearing a sermon like actively listening to one," thus indicating the centrality of this particular stage to the overall listening process.⁴⁴ Practically speaking, active and productive sermon analysis involves hard work, note-taking, identifying main sections, querying, reviewing, and summarizing the sermon.

Rather than assuming that analysis involves hard work, multiple sources state this point. Donald Berry says, "Realize that as 'audience' to a sermon, you are expected to work with the preacher to grasp the sermon's central message. This is often hard work,

⁴³ Šeba, *Sermon Listening*, 202.

⁴⁴ Willimon, *Listeners Dare*, 92. Similarly, Adams says that "the whole point of listening is to get the message." Adams, *Be Careful*, 47.

and it requires serious attention.”⁴⁵ Bergmeier explains sermon analysis in terms of “holy sweat”⁴⁶ and listening “energetically.”⁴⁷ Ramey states that listeners must “think critically about what you are hearing. Don’t just accept it because the preacher said it.”⁴⁸ Attending the sermon, says Beeke, as indicated by the etymology of the word *attend*, implies active listening.⁴⁹ All such emphasis on the exertion required for analysis possibly reflects alarm at the prevalence of passive listening and lack of results among congregations currently. What was once assumed must now be stated up front, before more pragmatic issues.

However great the need to stress listeners’ effort during the sermon, they are ultimately relying on the Holy Spirit to help them analyze and learn. Essentially, says Bergmeier, sermon-listening requires the Spirit because it is “a spiritual exercise”:

Examining the preaching of God’s Word at its core is a spiritual exercise. . . . It is looking at things claimed to be of God to know for certain whether they truly are from him. Because it is spiritual, there is a close connection between the person who is a believer and the Holy Spirit, who is given as the ignition of the heart to understand that which is true and that which is false.⁵⁰

Since sermons deal with theology (“things claimed to be of God”), God himself, through the Spirit, must assist listeners in their sermon analysis. Moreover, the Spirit grants them understanding from his habitation inside their hearts. His illumination compensates for listeners’ sin-impaired human nature so that “we listen clearly, think clearly, and discern

⁴⁵ Berry, *How to Listen*, 9.

⁴⁶ “Discernment is not easy and takes some hard work. If we really desire to develop the ability to examine and distinguish truth from error, it is going to take some holy sweat.” Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 80.

⁴⁷ “To be persons who listen effectively takes energy. If we desire to be discerning, we must listen energetically.” Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 81–82.

⁴⁸ Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 48.

⁴⁹ “The word *attend* is derived from two Latin words—the first means ‘to’ and the second, ‘tendo,’ which means ‘to stretch or bend.’ From this we get the word *tendon*, or a sinew that stretches. Thus, the word *attend* literally means we must stretch our minds by listening. This implies reaching out with all our mental and spiritual powers to grasp the meaning of a message.” Beeke, *Family*, 20.

⁵⁰ Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 77.

clearly.”⁵¹ However much effort listeners must give, they still depend on the Spirit.

To facilitate their analysis of the sermon, some listeners take notes while it is being preached. The benefits of note-taking during the sermon are multiple. Note-taking enables listeners to concentrate on the message.⁵² They must listen intently so as to make an accurate record for themselves; if their focus falters, they will be left with incomplete and/or inaccurate content. In addition, note-taking helps listeners to review and remember what was said and, moreover, organize the content in a way that enhances their recall and application.⁵³ With notes, listeners possess a thorough, accurate record that remains such after memory of the sermon fades. They might even improve upon the message itself as they organize their notes, cutting out extraneous content and clarifying main points.

Note-taking is not synonymous with transcribing. Listeners are not striving to record the message verbatim but to set down the salient features such as main expository points, illustrations, and applications.⁵⁴ While Adams endorses note-taking, he cautions: “Prolific note-taking can become an end in itself which, in its own way, also becomes a distraction.”⁵⁵ The distraction lies in missing the lesson for trying to write down every word of the message. Worse, in listeners’ frenetic attempt to record all that is said by the preacher, they are not experiencing God in the sermon; their attention has been diverted and their affection inhibited. When note-taking is the “end in itself,” listeners miss out on

⁵¹ “It is the work of God, by His Spirit, to open our minds so that we listen clearly, think clearly, and discern clearly whether a sermon is true to the Bible. By nature we cannot think straight. So again we need to pray for His work in us.” Ash, *Listen Up!*, 12.

⁵² “Taking notes is an excellent way to maintain concentration and ‘readiness of mind.’” Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 102.

⁵³ “One way to listen is to *take notes*. . . . If we fail to pay attention, how will we know what the preacher says? If we fail to remember, how will we know what the preacher has said? If we fail to organize our ideas, how will we gain a flow of what was said? Take notes!” Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 93, emphasis original.

⁵⁴ “Record the date and time and text and title of the sermon. Write out the main headings and subpoints. Note any illustrations, phrases, questions, or applications that you found especially helpful. Try to capture not necessarily every word but the gist of each part of the sermon.” Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 102.

⁵⁵ Adams, *Be Careful*, 88.

truly listening to the sermon. They are better off just sitting still and listening that way.⁵⁶

Whether taking notes or sitting and listening, listeners will track the sermon's progress by some method. Rather than merely, instinctively, and perhaps unconsciously listening for what seem to be the noteworthy ideas, familiarity with the sermon's main sections offers a more precise and dependable guide for listeners to follow the sermon, take thoughtful notes (if they intend to take notes), and begin analyzing the content. A sampling of still-popular and contemporary expository preaching textbooks indicates a general consensus about the sermon's main sections.⁵⁷ While the labels for these sections as well as their partitioning vary among volumes, this consensus essentially identifies five main sections: introduction, exposition, illustration, application, and conclusion.

Among these five sections, exposition is foundational to all else.⁵⁸ Exposition is the explanation of the biblical text at hand; listeners will recognize that the preacher is trying to help them understand what the text says and what it means by what it says. At appropriate junctures, illustration either clarifies aspects of the text, convinces listeners of the explanation, makes the text's meaning more vivid, or captivates listeners' attention.⁵⁹ Types of illustration include stories, personal testimonies, statistics, quotes, definitions,

⁵⁶ "Others find note-taking a distraction and prefer to devote their energies to listening." Ash, *Listen Up!*, 11.

⁵⁷ See, for example, John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed., ed. Vernon L. Stanfield (New York: HarperCollins, 1979); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018); Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching: The Journey from Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019); Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014); John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017); Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 2017); Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003).

⁵⁸ "The preacher rises in the pulpit to accomplish one central purpose—to set forth the message and meaning of the biblical text." R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 66. Likewise, Lloyd-Jones says, "Nothing is more important than that we should be sure that we have got at the main thrust of the text, and let that come out." D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 203.

⁵⁹ "Illustrations have four essential functions: to clarify, convince, concretize, and captivate." Kuruvilla, *Manual*, 147.

and visuals.⁶⁰ With or without the assistance of illustrations, exposition of the text leads to its application. Application relates the “personal consequence of scriptural truth” that was expounded and maybe illustrated earlier in the sermon.⁶¹ This section is characterized by the preacher’s instructions and exhortations to implement the lesson from the text.

The other two main sections of the sermon are the introduction and conclusion. As the introduction and conclusion, these sections bracket the sermon at both ends. Their obligatory placement at the start and finish of the sermon automatically helps listeners to identify these sections. Other features differentiate these sections from adjacent sections for listeners to identify and follow along with them. The introduction is characterized by two principal features: introducing the sermon’s subject and garnering listeners’ interest in it.⁶² The conclusion, then, is characterized by a summary of the sermon’s message, one last challenge for listeners to apply the message, a sense of having reached the summit of thought and emotion, and a clear impression of closing.⁶³ When listeners recognize these features, they can reasonably surmise that they are in the corresponding sermon section.

Upon distinguishing the main sections of the sermon, listeners may delve even deeper in their analysis by asking various questions. With these questions, they aim to identify some details of the message that will clarify their comprehension of the whole. Strain suggests one such line of “good questions” to ask while listening to the sermon:

What is the main point of the sermon, and is it the same as the main point of the text? Has the preacher made his case and established his argument? What are his

⁶⁰ Kuruvilla, *Manual*, 152–61.

⁶¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered*, 188. Chapell adds that “exposition of Scripture remains incomplete until a preacher explains the duty God requires of us.”

⁶² “The introduction has two chief objectives: to interest the hearers in the subject and to prepare them for understanding it.” Broadus, *On the Preparation*, 98. Likewise, Stott says: “A good introduction serves two purposes. First, it arouses interests, stimulates curiosity, and whets the appetite for more. Secondly, it genuinely ‘introduces’ the theme by leading the hearers into it.” Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 190.

⁶³ Chapell states these characteristics as “*recapitulation* (i.e., concise summary),” “*exhortation* (i.e., final application),” “*elevation* (i.e., climax),” and “*termination* (i.e., a definite end).” Chapell, *Christ-Centered*, 234–36, emphasis original.

subpoints, and do they contribute to his main point? Can you see both the main points and the subpoints from this passage? What unanswered theological or practical questions did the sermon raise for you? Were the illustrations helpful in illuminating the text or the truth proclaimed, or were they mainly there for rhetorical effect and emotional appeal? How did he apply the passage? What difference should this message make in your life, in your marriage, in your parenting, in your business dealings?⁶⁴

Strain's analytical questions address the three primary sections of the sermon: exposition, illustration, and application. First, analysis of exposition entails discerning any subpoints and the main point to which they contribute. Second, analysis of the illustration focuses on clarifying the main point from the exposition. Third, analysis of the application aims to expound the particulars of putting the main point into practice. Overall, listeners use these questions to get at the main point of the message and its application to their lives.

Listeners can query the sermon in different ways to get at the main point and its application. Bergmeier prompts listeners to search for “the principle thought” (of the exposition), the “purpose of the illustrations,” and the “practice of application.”⁶⁵ Beeke says to identify the truths God wants listeners to believe, how God wants listeners to be different after hearing the sermon, and how God wants them to put the truths they have newly learned into practice.⁶⁶ Roger Van Harn recommends completing four statements related to the sermon: “1. The sermon was about . . . 2. The sermon enabled me to believe that . . . 3. The sermon asked that I . . . 4. The sermon made me feel . . .”⁶⁷ As all these prompts indicate, listeners can analyze the sermon differently to get to the same end. The actual questions they use might reflect personal preferences and approaches to thinking.

Besides querying the sermon, listeners can also listen and look for clues within

⁶⁴ Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 101.

⁶⁵ Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 92–93.

⁶⁶ “As you listen to the Word of God, ask yourself, *how does God want me to be different on account of this sermon?* Ask what God wants you to know what you did not know before. Ask what truths you are learning that He wants you to believe. And ask how He wants you to put those truths into practice. In every sermon you hear—even those on the most basic gospel themes—God offers you truths to believe and put into practice.” Beeke, *Family*, 20–21, emphasis original.

⁶⁷ Roger E. Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 138.

the sermon. The clues they listen for include content and verbal clues from the preacher's delivery. Content clues include repeated words or phrases, the punchline to a story, or a recurring theme.⁶⁸ The sermon's opening sentences usually provide hints about the main ideas to come.⁶⁹ The closing sentences might simply state the overall point.⁷⁰ Verbal clues include the preacher's tone of voice.⁷¹ A firm tone, for example, underscores the thrust of the argument the preacher is making. As for the clues listeners look for, these are visual cues consisting of the preacher's facial expressions, hand gestures, and other motions.⁷² The preacher's general posture and eye contact are other potentially helpful visual cues.⁷³

As already indicated, much analysis takes place during sermon delivery. This being so, Adams insists that "proper listening does not end with the closing words of the sermon but extends to work done after the preaching event."⁷⁴ Adams has in mind here the Bereans of Acts 17, who were called "noble" for listening to Paul and Silas's message and then "examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The Bereans were noted for "not making a snap judgment about Paul's preaching. They didn't think of accepting his message uncritically—on the spot. The Bible holds them forth as an example of people who worked hard to evaluate the message according to biblical

⁶⁸ "What do you think is the main point of the passage? This may be signaled by repetition of something important, or by being in the punchline (for example, of a parable), or by being the theme that runs through the passage." Ash, *Listen Up!*, 12.

⁶⁹ "When the sermon begins, listen closely to the first sentence or two. The 'bait' for the ideas to be emphasized in the sermon is often hinted at here. Remember the first ideas may be the ones that are set up as a contrast with the major ideas the preacher wants to emphasize." Berry, *How to Listen*, 10.

⁷⁰ "Listen closely to the way the sermon ends, to the last one or two sentences. . . . The overall point will undoubtedly be stated here." Berry, *How to Listen*, 10.

⁷¹ "Note the preacher's . . . tone of voice." Willimon, *Listeners Dare*, 98.

⁷² "Focus your attention on the preacher's face, not just the preacher's gestures or motions. This may help you identify sentences or ideas the preacher feels strongly about. These may be clues to what the preacher wants to stress." Berry, *How to Listen*, 10.

⁷³ "Note the preacher's posture, eye contact, and gestures." Willimon, *Listeners Dare*, 98.

⁷⁴ Adams, *Be Careful*, 76.

standards. *That* is listening—biblical listening—*par excellence*.”⁷⁵ This post-sermon analysis is what convinced many amongst the Bereans to believe (see Acts 17:12).

There are multiple ways of continuing analysis of the sermon’s content after it has been preached. For one, listeners can review their sermon notes, reorganize them as needed, and ask any analytical questions. Like Adams when he talks about the Bereans, Strain urges listeners to examine what they hear by checking it against the biblical text.⁷⁶ In addition to checking Scripture, listeners can approach the preacher or other leaders in the church to clarify or speak further on some part of the sermon.⁷⁷ A good relationship with the preacher, says Bergmeier, should help listeners feel at ease in approaching them with questions.⁷⁸ Listeners also have each other, their fellow listeners, to follow up with about the sermon.⁷⁹ Even a casual discussion helps listeners to continue their analysis.

Listeners can be confident of their analysis of the sermon when they are able to restate the sermon’s message in a clear, concise form. Once they have heard the sermon, Adams recommends summarizing its message in a single sentence and writing it down.⁸⁰ Berry advises encapsulating the message in one or two sentences “while the experience of the sermon is still fresh in your mind.”⁸¹ Any notes that listeners have taken during the

⁷⁵ Adams, *Be Careful*, 76–77, emphasis original.

⁷⁶ “The [Westminster Larger] catechism says we should ‘examine’ the message we are listening to by comparing it to other places in Scripture. We must learn to compare Scripture with Scripture.” Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 100.

⁷⁷ Anyabwile exhorts listeners to “follow up with your pastor, elders, or other teachers in the church about questions triggered by the text.” Anyabwile, *Healthy Church Member*, 25.

⁷⁸ “The more we know about our preachers, the easier it will be for us to discern what they are teaching and preaching. . . . We will feel greater freedom to ask them questions after sermons about what they said.” Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 87.

⁷⁹ “Instead of rushing off after the service is over . . . develop the habit of talking about the sermon with people after church. Start spiritual conversations by asking, ‘How did the Scripture challenge or speak to you today?’ Or, ‘What about God’s character most surprised or encouraged you?’” Anyabwile, *Healthy Church Member*, 23.

⁸⁰ “Let me suggest, therefore, that during every message you should constantly seek to discover God’s message in the verse or verses from which it was preached, going so far as to summarize it in one sentence (which you might even determine to write out).” Adams, *Be Careful*, 47.

⁸¹ Berry, *How to Listen*, 10.

sermon can aid them in composing this summary, especially if they edit and reorganize their notes afterward. Whatever analytical questions they employ, while note-taking or strictly listening, can also further facilitate a one- or two-sentence summarization. After composing their summary, listeners can check it against their notes and/or questions.

By constraining their summary to one or two sentences, listeners are leaving themselves with “a short, portable form that you can readily recall for use.”⁸² A portable sermon summary is one that listeners can write and memorize quickly and recall easily at some point in the future, away from the sermon’s original setting, with minimal mental effort. Such recall is more likely when listeners use clear, concise, creative, memorable wording. Šeba suggests rephrasing the sermon’s main point with the intent to relate it to someone who was not on hand to hear the sermon.⁸³ While rephrasing for their friends’ benefit, listeners will likely, firstly, wisely, and necessarily do so for their own benefit too; the search for different wording helps the message sink deeper into their psyches.

Listeners who do the hard work of analysis, up to and including taking notes, tracking the sermon’s main sections, asking questions of the sermon, following up with others, and composing a portable summary demonstrate “teachability.”⁸⁴ They implicitly admit, by their striving, that they are not yet “mature and complete, not lacking anything” (Jas 1:4). Bergmeier lauds listeners’ teachability, for it signifies the absence or, at least, diminishing of pride plus the prevalence or, at least, presence of humility.⁸⁵ What is more, it indicates listeners’ longing to make progress, and it shows their willingness to work at

⁸² Adams, *Be Careful*, 48.

⁸³ “Or the purpose of listening could be to identify the preacher’s main idea of argument and later to rephrase it to someone who has not heard the sermon.” Šeba, *Sermon Listening*, 248.

⁸⁴ “Teachability is one of the keys to being a discerning person. . . . We are naturally showing we are humble and in need of help. We are showing we are teachable.” Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 82.

⁸⁵ “All of us need to be teachable. If we are not, we greatly affect our abilities to discern truth from error. We all have pride problems. Some have even said it is the greatest problem—not our upbringing, not Satan, but pride. We need to fight our pride by being humble and by growing in humility.” Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 84.

it. Being teachable thus primes listeners to apply what they learn from their analysis.

Application of the Lesson

Application of the sermon's lesson puts the proclaimed Word into practice, thereby completing the sermon-listening process and confirming that sermon-listening has occurred. Application defines this concluding stage of sermon-listening. It follows and fulfills both the attitude of expectancy at the beginning of the listening process and then the subsequent analysis of content. It is the logical and requisite endpoint of the listening process. "It is wonderful to know *what* to do, but if you never get around to doing what God says, what good will your knowledge do you? This is precisely what James meant when he said, 'Faith without works is dead' (James 2:17)."⁸⁶ Application involves praying, repenting, asking questions, planning, and demonstrating urgency.

Prayer, which fuels listeners' anticipation of the sermon, likewise facilitates their application of the sermon. The reason for praying remains the same: accessing the Holy Spirit. Bergmeier says, "We need to pray and beg for the help of the Holy Spirit in this step of living the preached word of God as well. We will never be great at living the truth of sermons if we are not leaving sermons with reliance upon the Holy Spirit in our lives."⁸⁷ Through prayer, listeners approach the Spirit, who, as their source of power for faithful living in general, enables them to apply what they learned from the sermon. To clarify how much help that listeners need from the Spirit, Bergmeier says that they are "dependent" on him.⁸⁸ Only by the Spirit can listeners succeed in applying the sermon.

There are specific requests listeners can submit when praying about applying the sermon. One such request is for God to instill obedience in them so they can live the

⁸⁶ Adams, *Be Careful*, 97.

⁸⁷ Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 124.

⁸⁸ "We must be dependent upon him to help us walk differently based upon the truth that he has taught us." Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 124.

preached Word.⁸⁹ At the same time, listeners are wise to ask for grace to repent of the sin and shortcoming the sermon has brought to their attention.⁹⁰ The sermon's main points, maybe gleaned from listeners' notes, can serve as prompts for praising God and praying about what they mean for application.⁹¹ Along with thanking God for what he has taught them from his Word, listeners ought to ask God to help them know how to live out what they learned.⁹² In essence, they are still praying for insight as well as power to apply.

As indicated by the aforesaid prayer points, application includes repentance. Jim Shaddix says that it follows from hearing God's voice in preaching.⁹³ Christopher Ash declares that repentance should be part of the response to every sermon: "Every time the Bible is preached, we ought to repent."⁹⁴ As listeners determine proper application of the sermon, this helps them to also understand the way they have fallen short in faithful living. Turning to a new and obedient behavior entails turning away from a deliberately disobedient behavior or, at least, the absence of the new behavior. The way listeners have fallen short is the point at which they are to repent. Their proof of repentance is found in demonstrating the new behavior prescribed to them by the application of the sermon.

Depending on the steps prescribed in the application, demonstrating some new behavior might take time. Repentance, however, because it involves a change in listeners' attitude about their prior behavior, is a step they can undertake at once. Bergmeier says:

⁸⁹ "Pray, pray, and pray again for God to work obedience in you to His word." Ash, *Listen Up!*, 20.

⁹⁰ Ash suggests "praying for grace to enable you to repent." Ash, *Listen Up!*, 24.

⁹¹ "Turn each main point into praise and prayer. . . . Pray through its implications. Rest in its comforts. Rejoice in its promises." Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 103.

⁹² While outlining how listeners can apply the sermon the same day it is preached, Ramey says, "Thank God for what He taught you from His Word" (number four), and, "Ask God to help you to live out what you learned" (number five). Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 114–15.

⁹³ "Another thing about which the Corinthian assembly reminds us is that preaching is God's primary means of sounding His voice, bringing conviction on listeners, and granting them repentance." Jim Shaddix, *The Passion-Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 141.

⁹⁴ Ash, *Listen Up!*, 22.

Our responses to the words of Jesus need to be carefully thought out because we are looking for real life changes, not just quick fixes. . . . Sometimes deep-rooted sins and issues in our lives will be hard to deal with in a minute, a day, or even a week. However, repentance can and should happen immediately, even though the fruit of the repentance may take a long time to appear.⁹⁵

Bergmeier distinguishes repentance and its fruit. The fruit might take some time to grow depending on how deeply the old way of living was ingrained inside them and how much work the new way of living requires. The seed of that fruit, by contrast, is the immediate decision by listeners, as immediate as the end of the sermon, to change accordingly. An immediate decision to repent is itself the fruit of earnest anticipation and analysis prior.

As for the fruit of repentance, listeners are aiming to adopt new behavior that reflects the sermon's message. Adopting this new behavior presupposes first identifying it. To identify and confirm the proper course of application, listeners can ask a number of questions of the sermon like they did for the preceding analysis phase. Adams proposes the following set: "1. How does God want me to change (beliefs/actions)? 2. How must I bring about the change? 3. What is the first step? 4. Where and when should I begin?"⁹⁶ These questions assist listeners in ascertaining the change, how to get from their present condition to a changed condition, what they should do to begin realizing the change, and suitable circumstances for doing so. Therefore, if listeners utilize a set of questions like these they will cover several aspects of application, giving it thorough consideration.

Listeners may incorporate additional applicational questions into their sermon review, questions pertaining to their self-control, compassion, and purity. Bergmeier asks, "*First, how does this truth help me control that which controls me? . . . Second, how does this truth help me show compassion to the helpless? . . . Third, how does this truth help me keep myself unstained by the world?*"⁹⁷ In reply to the first question, listeners consider

⁹⁵ Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 110.

⁹⁶ Adams, *Be Careful*, 104. Ramey poses an almost identical set of questions: "How does God want me to change (a specific belief, behavior, or attitude)? What must I do to change? What is the first step I must take to change? Where and when will I begin?" Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 115.

⁹⁷ Bergmeier, 115–22, *Helping Johnny*, emphasis original.

how the sermon applies to any besetting sin that presently and frequently gets the better of them. In response to the second question, listeners consider how the sermon leads them to minister to the poor, outcast, and downtrodden around them. In response to the third question, listeners consider how the sermon enables them to safeguard themselves and remain holy against perverse and polluting influences from the nonbelieving world.

Ideally, while delivering the sermon the preacher will present and explain, up to and including the practical steps, the application. This will save listeners both time and effort to determine the application for themselves, especially if listeners took notes. Still, listeners may utilize applicational questions to confirm their understanding of what the preacher has proffered for application. “We are to receive the preaching of God’s word, examine it, accept it, and then live it.”⁹⁸ This examination pertains to application as well as the exposition from which it stems, for the whole sermon must agree with Scripture. Application that holds up under this review and scrutiny is ready to be implemented.

The applicational questions that listeners pose to the sermon serve a collective goal: enabling listeners to plan the application. Reflecting on application is for the sake of planning application, which leads to purposeful application. Ramey says, “I think some people attend church every Sunday like they are auditing a class. They take notes on the sermon and tell the preacher what a good sermon it was on the way out, but they never do anything with what they learn after they leave church.”⁹⁹ Note-taking is a commendable exercise, for it suggests that listeners intend to reflect on what they have heard. Still, this is not application proper but its precursor. Purposeful application entails “an action plan” that enables listeners to “implement what we have learned from God in the Scriptures.”¹⁰⁰

Forming an action plan for application calls for specificity. Again, this is what

⁹⁸ Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 126.

⁹⁹ Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 97.

¹⁰⁰ Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 105.

many of the applicational questions are manifestly getting at; they are helping listeners to reflect with specificity so they will plan and then, ultimately, act with specificity. As part of the practical steps he recommends for application, Ash says, “Write down as definitely and precisely as you can some action you need to take to obey this Bible passage.”¹⁰¹ To get more specific about being specific, listeners must plan for what, where, and when to put the sermon’s message into practice.¹⁰² As Strain puts it, they must ask, “How can I put this into practice today, tomorrow, and next week?”¹⁰³ Then, as specifics materialize, listeners will have the makings of the action plan required for purposeful application.

As listeners plan for application, they might identify several options depending on the biblical text and its exposition. This does not necessarily obligate listeners to apply them all. Rather than attempting each one, Bergmeier says to “ponder one thing after the sermon about their lives and work just on that one thing.”¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Thabiti Anyabwile says, “Choose one or two particular applications from the Scripture and prayerfully put them into practice over the coming week.”¹⁰⁵ There are many advantages to this strategy: According to Bergmeier, it unburdens listeners of pressure to undertake wholesale life-change, it enhances their focus, and it presents realistic goals for them to reach and then build upon.¹⁰⁶ In addition, listeners avoid becoming overwhelmed as well as paralyzed by having several options. As they follow through with the option that they believe is right for them, they can trust that God, because he is sovereign, will cover the other options.

Whichever option listeners are led to choose, application must happen as soon

¹⁰¹ Ash, *Listen Up!*, 20.

¹⁰² “Plan what to do, where, and when (i.e., schedule it).” Adams, *Be Careful*, 102.

¹⁰³ Strain, *Expository Preaching*, 105.

¹⁰⁴ Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 114.

¹⁰⁵ Anyabwile, *Healthy Church Member*, 24.

¹⁰⁶ “We should not try to change everything about our lives but focus on just one thing at a time. Take a baby step. Then next week, take another baby step, then one more, and so on.” Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 114.

as possible. “Every sermon is urgent,” including the application.¹⁰⁷ This urgency derives from the nature of preaching, for preaching bears God’s “living and active” Word (Heb 4:12). As a pronouncement of the king to his subjects, the sermon necessitates a response. The only response appropriate to listeners’ relationship with God is a prompt response; a slow response suggests half-hearted commitment on their part.¹⁰⁸ A prompt response also indicates close, attentive, thoughtful listening during actual sermon delivery. There might be several ways that God’s Word, through the sermon, calls listeners to turn and submit to him, but regardless “the turning must be done today.”¹⁰⁹ This is not to say that listeners act without reflection and planning but that they do so as a matter of the utmost priority.

Responding with urgency is further freighted from the spiritual conflict taking place around preaching. Ash, warning that listeners’ unhurried application plays into the devil’s hands, says, “Every time we listen to a sermon, the devil will whisper in our ear: ‘That was good stuff. Why not do something about it tomorrow?’ And we instinctively want to agree, because tomorrow never comes.”¹¹⁰ The devil’s proximity to preaching is established in Jesus’s parable of the sower (Matt 13:1–9, 18–23). Concerning application, the devil would only be too delighted in listeners who put off until the next day (or, even better, some unscheduled future date) what they can and should be implementing at once. In this unfortunate scenario, listening has been for naught because it fails to yield fruit.

While actual listening happens during the sermon delivery, complete listening requires application. “A sermon is not over when the minister says ‘Amen.’ Rather that is when the true sermon begins.”¹¹¹ By praying, repenting, asking questions, planning, and

¹⁰⁷ Ash, *Listen Up!*, 21.

¹⁰⁸ “Do not be half-hearted. Good intentions will not do at this point. Hell is filled with people with good intentions. It does not mean that we pick and choose what to obey from the sermon, but that we are quick to obey and follow all that we possibly can.” Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny*, 125.

¹⁰⁹ Ash, *Listen Up!*, 22.

¹¹⁰ Ash, *Listen Up!*, 22–23.

¹¹¹ Beeke, *Family*, 28.

demonstrating urgency, listeners tactically prepare to attain “the whole point of looking into God’s Word in the first place,” that is, the application of what they heard to how they live.¹¹² What remains is for them to act. Should they follow through, they will experience and confirm continued transformation into the likeness of Christ.¹¹³ Because listening is for life-change, only by this point can it be confirmed that listeners have truly listened.

Conclusion

This chapter delves into practical issues related to sermon-listening. From a practical standpoint, sermon-listening involves multiple stages and various tasks within those stages. The preliminary stage of sermon-listening, defined by listeners’ expectancy, features praying, reading, scheduling, focusing, and worshiping. The intermediate stage, defined by listeners’ analysis, involves hard work, note-taking, identifying main sections, querying the sermon, reviewing, and summarizing the sermon. The closing stage, defined by listeners’ application, includes praying, repenting, asking questions, planning, and demonstrating urgency. Progressing through these stages by practicing the associated tasks results in a more comprehensive and complete sermon-listening experience. As listeners follow through, they set themselves up to be “doers of the word” (Jas 1:22).

¹¹² Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 98.

¹¹³ Ramey says that “preaching is simply a means to an end. The goal of preaching God’s Word is transformation—people’s lives changing and becoming more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.” Ramey, *Expository Listening*, 87.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The project was divided into three main periods. The first period consisted of preparing the project. Preparation steps included drafting the pre- and post-course survey, designing and editing the curriculum, recruiting members of the expert panel, presenting the curriculum to the expert panel for their evaluation and reaction, and recruiting church members for the implementation. The second period consisted of presenting the project to a group of church members. Implementation steps included conducting the pre- and post-course survey to the group and teaching them the curriculum. The third period consisted of assessing the project. Assessment steps included running a t-test on responses from the pre- and post-course surveys and reviewing results to measure participants' perceptions. Altogether, from preparation to assessment the project lasted for twenty-two weeks.

Preparation Period

Week 1 occurred during the week beginning May 28, 2023. During week 1, I deliberated and then drafted the general outline of the curriculum that would constitute the project. Several factors guided the drafting process, topmost being the project's main purpose of training church members in sermon-listening. Additional factors included the number of lessons required to present a sufficient amount of sermon-listening instruction, the need that participants might have to know more about preaching to better grasp and appreciate any teaching about listening to preaching, the church's calendar of activities at the time of year when the curriculum would be presented, and the number of weeks for which participants would be willing to attend and remain enthusiastic about attending.

Ultimately, the following outline resulted: The curriculum would entail seven

lessons. The first and opening lesson was designed to introduce participants to the course. As part of this introduction, they would be presented with the rationalization for a course on sermon-listening. The ensuing lessons, lessons 2 and 3, would then aim to familiarize participants about the basics of preaching. The underlying belief here was that knowledge of principles of preaching, particularly expository preaching, would furnish participants a foundation for ensuing instruction. The fourth and middle lesson was envisioned to pivot participants toward sermon-listening training by providing a biblical-theological basis for sermon-listening. This would involve exposition of relevant biblical texts. The rest of the lessons, lessons 5, 6, and 7, would present the sermon-listening instruction across three distinct stages of sermon-listening. This triad of lessons would complete the course.

Week 2 occurred during the week beginning June 4, 2023. During week 2, I produced the pre- and post-course survey.¹ This survey is what church members received and responded to at the first meeting, prior to presentation of the first lesson, and then at the final meeting, following presentation of the seventh lesson. The survey's intention was to gauge church members' present perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening. The survey was divided into two main sections of questions, the first seeking to collect members' demographic data, the second seeking to collect data about their perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening. To reflect the curriculum's relevance and usefulness, questions in the second section were derived from content in all seven lessons of the sermon-listening curriculum. The survey was edited for both grammar and length.

Week 3 occurred during the week beginning June 11, 2023. During week 3, I developed the first lesson of the curriculum for the project.² This lesson was titled "The Project: Sermon-Listening in FBC Rockmart." The purpose of this lesson was to review the current state of preaching in First Baptist Church of Rockmart, to reaffirm church

¹ See appendix 1 for a sample form of the Sermon-Listening Inventory (SLI).

² See appendix 3 for the PowerPoint slides used to present this lesson and subsequent lessons in the sermon-listening curriculum.

members' obligation to listen well to sermons, and to establish the need for training in sermon-listening. To preface the lesson, I provided participants with an overview of my program of study in expository preaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the culmination of which was this project. I also outlined the remainder of the curriculum.

Week 4 occurred during the week beginning June 18, 2023. During week 4, I developed the second lesson of the curriculum for the project. This lesson was titled "Introduction to Expository Preaching." The purpose of this lesson was to familiarize participants with the basics of expository preaching. To that end, in this lesson I defined expository preaching; outlined the essential components of an expository sermon; and offered a combination of biblical, theological, and practical justification for expository preaching. While helping participants to better understand and appreciate expository preaching, this lesson laid the foundation for upcoming sermon-listening strategies.

Week 5 occurred during the week beginning June 25, 2023. During week 5, I developed the third lesson of the curriculum for the project. This lesson was titled "The Preacher's Role and the Spirit's Role in Preaching." The purpose of this lesson was to familiarize participants with the preacher's and the Spirit's respective, distinctive, and complementary duties during sermon development and sermon delivery. To accomplish this purpose, I named and explicated five duties of the preacher and three duties of the Spirit. Like with the previous lesson, while helping participants to better understand and appreciate the preacher's and the Spirit's roles this lesson laid additional foundation for upcoming sermon-listening strategies predicated on certain basic preaching principles.

Week 6 occurred during the week beginning July 2, 2023. During week 6, I developed the fourth lesson of the curriculum for the project. This lesson was titled "Biblical-Theological Basis for Sermon-Listening." The purpose of this lesson was to present participants with biblical evidence and theological rationale for the instrumental role that listening plays in a person's salvation and subsequent spiritual growth. Within this lesson, I presented a lay-level exposition of three biblical texts that show listening's

instrumentality: Nehemiah 8:1–12, Matthew 13:13–23, and Romans 10:14–17. Also, I pointed out several factors that enhance attentiveness, receptivity, and understanding.

Week 7 occurred during the week beginning July 9, 2023. During week 7, I developed the fifth lesson of the curriculum for the project. This lesson was titled “Before Listening: Attitude of Expectancy.” The purpose of this lesson was to instruct participants in knowledge about an attitude that anticipates God speaking through the preaching of his Word and so prepares listeners to be attentive to it. To instruct participants accordingly, I discussed five exercises, the practice of which before the sermon would help listeners to be receptive to the sermon: praying, reading, scheduling, focusing, and worshiping. This lesson focused on the first stage of sermon-listening, the period prior to the preaching.

Week 8 occurred during the week beginning July 16, 2023. During week 8, I developed the sixth lesson of the curriculum for the project. This lesson was titled “While Listening: Analysis of Content.” The purpose of this lesson was to instruct participants in knowledge about analyzing sermon content in a way that attunes listeners to the sermon’s progress and organizes what they hear to understand the message. To instruct participants accordingly, I explained six exercises, the usage of which during the sermon would help listeners to analyze the sermon: hard work, note-taking, identifying main sections, asking questions, reviewing, and summarizing. Overall, this lesson focused on the second stage of sermon-listening, the period containing the preaching and its analysis afterward.

During this same week, I also began reaching out and recruiting members for the expert panel that would review the curriculum upon its completion. For a panel tasked with reviewing, bolstering, and approving a preaching project, I looked for individuals, first and foremost, with extensive preaching experience. Since preaching is a common and core aspect of the pastor’s role and responsibility, these would be individuals with established pastoring credentials as well. I was especially interested in obtaining the help of any retired pastors, given their lengthy tenure in the pastorate in general and the pulpit in particular. My goal was to secure at least three individuals who satisfied these criteria.

I managed to secure panel members who were also genuinely enthused to participate.

Panel member 1 was a retired pastor. Before retiring from a full-time pastorate, he had served as a senior pastor for thirty-two years in four Southern Baptist churches in three states. His longest span of service in a single church was eighteen years at a First Baptist Church in Alabama. During his career, he also served as an army reserve chaplain as well as a sheriff's office chaplain. Today, he is still supply-preaching upon request and ministering to multiple local law enforcement organizations as a chaplain. His academic credentials include a master of divinity degree as well as a doctor of ministry degree.

Panel member 2 was also retired from full-time vocational pastoring. Upon retirement, he had served in multiple pastoral positions (minister of music, minister to youth, director of adult ministries, and senior pastor) for almost four decades in nine churches (seven Baptist and two Methodist) in three states. For a two-year period in the last decade, he was serving two churches simultaneously. His ministry career culminated in three senior pastor positions spread out across a fourteen-year period. His academic credentials include a master's level seminary degree from a Southern Baptist school.

Panel member 3 is the associate dean at an evangelical divinity school. While serving as associate dean, and prior to assuming this leadership role, he taught courses in pastoral leadership and practical theology. He also administrated a doctor of ministry degree program. In the area of theological field education, he is a recognized leader with several publications to his credit. Prior to becoming a teacher and administrator, he was a pastor of Baptist churches for thirteen years. He continues supply preaching, ministering as an interim pastor, and consulting with churches. His academic credentials include a master of divinity degree, doctor of ministry degree, and doctor of philosophy degree.

Week 9 occurred during the week beginning July 23, 2023. During week 9, I developed the seventh and last lesson of the curriculum for the project. This lesson was titled "After Listening: Application of the Lesson." The purpose of this lesson was to instruct participants in knowledge about applying the sermon's message, which confirms

that sermon-listening has taken place. For this stage, I listed and explained five exercises meant to help listeners put what they listened to into practice: praying, repenting, asking questions, planning, and demonstrating urgency. This lesson focused on the third and crowning stage of sermon-listening, the period of application evidencing life-change.

Week 10 occurred during the week beginning July 30, 2023. During week 10, I reviewed and refined all seven lessons of the sermon-listening curriculum as needed. In particular, I edited the lessons for content and grammar as well as style. With all seven lessons before me, I evaluated the curriculum for its overall coherence, consistency, and continuity. While the presentation of the curriculum to church members was still weeks away, I chose to evaluate and edit at this time because I wanted members of the expert panel to have as much of a completed, polished product as possible for their review.

Weeks 11 and 12 occurred during the weeks beginning August 6, 2023, and August 13, 2023. Both weeks were devoted to curriculum review by the expert panel, to give them sufficient time to thoroughly review. During week 11, I distributed the entire curriculum to members of the expert panel. For two of the panel members, I personally gave them a printed copy of the PowerPoint slides used to present the lessons along with a copy of the one-page curriculum evaluation rubric.³ For the third panel member, I sent him via email the same items in a single PDF document. During week 12, then, the panel members continued reviewing the curriculum. As they finished, they filled in the rubric, added comments they considered useful to enhancing the curriculum, and returned the materials to me with the understanding that I would follow up with them as needed.

Week 13 occurred during the week beginning August 20, 2023. During week 13, I reviewed panel members' feedback from their respective reviews of the curriculum.⁴ Using the evaluation rubric, panel member 1 rated the curriculum as "exemplary" in all

³ See appendix 2 for a sample form of the curriculum evaluation rubric.

⁴ See appendix 4 for curriculum scores from the members of the expert panel.

four listed categories, i.e., biblical soundness, scope, methodology, and applicability. In his summary remarks accompanying the score, this panel member said, “This document shows hard work. It is clear, concise, and thoroughly thought out. Excellent composition and practical application.” Apart from the score on the rubric, this panel member made no comments within the printed copy of the PowerPoint slides containing the curriculum.

On his copy of the evaluation rubric, panel member 2 rated the curriculum as “exemplary” for its biblical soundness,” both “sufficient” and “exemplary” for its scope, “sufficient” for its methodology, and both “sufficient” as well as “exemplary” for its applicability.⁵ Among his comments accompanying the score, this panel member said:

One further point I really appreciated in this curriculum is the emphasis on prayer and other elements leading up to the delivered sermon. Any investment a worshiper can make into the sermon process, such as praying for the pastor, reading and pondering over the scripture passage ahead of the service, or simply the enhanced ability to listen to and process the message in a sermon—all these components will lead to a better understanding and application of the sermons received each week in a local church.

Within the printed copy of the PowerPoint slides, this panel member pointed out that the source for a quote by John Stott was missing from the third lesson, “The Preacher’s Role and the Spirit’s Role in Preaching.” This inadvertent omission was promptly rectified.

Panel member 3, in his evaluation, rated the curriculum as “sufficient” for its biblical soundness, “exemplary” for its scope, “exemplary” for its methodology, and both “sufficient” and “exemplary” for its applicability.⁶ In his summary remarks, he described the curriculum as “very useful and helpful.” He offered one suggestion for modifying the

⁵ For scope, next to the statement “The content of each lesson covers the particular issue it is designed to address” the panel member marked “sufficient.” Also for scope, next to the statement “As a whole, the curriculum offers a sufficient lay-level primer on sermon-listening” the panel member marked “exemplary.” For applicability, next to the statement “By the end, participants will better appreciate what goes into preaching” the panel member marked “sufficient.” Also for applicability, next to the statement “By the end, participants will know how to productively listen to sermons” the panel member marked “exemplary.”

⁶ For applicability, next to the statement “By the end, participants will better appreciate what goes into preaching” the panel member marked “sufficient.” Also for applicability, next to the statement “By the end, participants will know how to productively listen to sermons” the panel member marked “exemplary.”

curriculum, namely utilizing a different term for “practical justification,” which appears in the second lesson, “Introduction to Expository Preaching,” heading a list of reasons for expository preaching. This list appears after a list labeled as “biblical and theological justification” for expository preaching. The panel member’s concern here was that using this term “could imply that the biblical and theological underpinnings [of expository preaching] are theoretical only, which, of course, is not the case.” This suggestion was considered but declined because the other panel members did not mark it as a concern and because the term does not necessarily diminish the biblical-theological rationale.

Altogether, the expert panel’s aggregate score placed the curriculum between “sufficient” and “exemplary.” This satisfied the condition that at least 90 percent of the panel’s cumulative scoring meet or exceed the “sufficient” level for the curriculum to proceed to the presentation phase. Panel members’ comments reflected careful attention to the curriculum, affirmation of the curriculum’s usefulness, and encouragement for the reviewee’s efforts thus far. Once any suggested edits had been addressed and integrated as needed, the curriculum was considered officially ready to present to participants.

Week 14 occurred during the week beginning August 27, 2023. During week 14, I made additional and miscellaneous preparations for the upcoming implementation period. Foremost among these preparations was finalizing the dates and other logistics for convening participants and teaching the curriculum. After consulting the church calendar and factoring in all other scheduled church events, I settled on Sunday, September 17, as the date for the first group meeting and lesson. With a meeting schedule now in hand, I began preparing a promotional handout for the sermon-listening course to distribute to church members. I also promoted the course at our monthly church business meeting.

The meeting schedule reflected the exigencies posed by the church’s ongoing activities calendar. The desired meeting time for the course was Sunday at 6 p.m. because the church was already habituated to meeting at this time. This time, though, was already dedicated to an ongoing Bible study as well as the monthly church business meeting. The

next best time to meet was Sunday at 4:45 p.m. because the church had used this time for other studies in the recent past. Twice a month, though, this time was unavailable due to other monthly meetings. All told, there was no convenient, consistent Sunday meeting time available. Meeting times during the week were quickly deemed less practicable.

Still, the participants needed a meeting schedule that helped them to complete the course in a reasonable amount of time, without much time off between meetings. Too much time off, and they might forget the material, become distracted, and lose interest. Accordingly, a final schedule was produced that called for participants to meet on three dates for a single lesson each time and on two dates for two lessons each time. All five meetings were set to start at 4:45 p.m., and on the dates with two lessons the meeting would last twice as long, into the 6 p.m. hour. This schedule constituted an acceptable interruption to the regular Sunday evening Bible study. This way, the course could be completed across just two months with no more than a week off between meetings.

During this same week, I also began approaching certain church members and asking them to participate in the upcoming sermon-listening course. The church members I invited were people whom I considered active and dedicated members in First Baptist Church. I also judged them to be supporters of preaching in general and of my preaching in particular. Their consistent attentiveness during sermons as well as various exchanges with them in the past regarding some aspect of preaching now brought them to mind as candidates to participate in a course on being trained in sermon-listening. Like with the expert panel's members, church members' enthusiasm for the project was a plus. I aimed to recruit at least fifteen people on whom I could depend to attend the entire course.

Implementation Period

Week 15 occurred during the week beginning September 17, 2023. That very day, a Sunday, I met with participants for the first meeting of the sermon-listening course. Participants included church members whom I had personally approached and invited as

well as other interested church members responding to the general invitation issued to the congregation. We convened at 4:45 p.m. in the Great Room, the church's fellowship hall, on the church campus. We met for an hour and ten minutes, which allowed us sufficient time to administer the pre-course survey and present the first lesson of the curriculum.

Following initial welcome remarks, the pre-course survey was administered. Copies were distributed to participants, who then completed their individual handout in relative quiet. As each participant finished their survey, they signaled me, and I collected their survey individually. I marked each survey with a unique number and then recorded that number along with the correlating participant's name on a master list. (For the post-course survey, participants would be assigned the same number that they received for the pre-course survey. This would enable comparison of pre- and post-course survey scores and charting of any changes.) Administering the pre-course survey took twenty minutes.

The rest of the meeting time was spent teaching the first lesson, "The Project: Sermon-Listening in FBC Rockmart." I presented the lesson (and all subsequent lessons) utilizing the Great Room's projector system. Participants were supplied with a minimal, one-page outline of the lesson to take notes.⁷ Up front, I invited participants to speak up whenever they wished during these lessons with questions and comments on the content. I also paused at the end of each subsection of the content to invite anyone to question or comment on what had been presented by that point. We progressed through all the slides in the allotted time, concluding with a statement about the project's basic rationale and benefit: "This project aims, with God's help, to bring about better sermon-listening."

At the end of the lesson, just before dismissal participants received a one-page summary sheet. This summary sheet presented the main points from the lesson that had just been covered. While some participants took notes during the presentation, this sheet gave them all a common, condensed outline to review on their own, save for any future

⁷ See appendix 5 for copies of all seven one-page lesson outlines.

reference, and, if needed, refer to during upcoming lessons and discussions. A one-page summary sheet was distributed for each of the lessons after each of the meetings. By the end of the sermon-listening course, participants had received seven summary sheets.⁸

Since this was the opening lesson, most of the participants I had personally recruited to participate (to ensure a minimum of fifteen consistent participants) attended. For those unable to attend the first lesson, I met with them at their convenience during the following week to administer the pre-course survey. I also handed them a printed copy of the PowerPoint slides from the lesson they had missed. I repeated this procedure for each week of the sermon-listening course for the participants I had personally recruited. For all participants, I also announced at the end of every meeting that I would have copies of the PowerPoint slides printed for them so they could catch up on any lesson they missed.

Week 16 occurred during the week beginning September 24, 2023. That same day, a Sunday, I met with participants for the next meeting of the sermon-listening course. We convened at the same time and in the same location as the first meeting. Most of the group members I had personally approached and invited to participate in the course were in attendance. Several others who had responded to the church-wide invitation continued their participation from the opening week. For this second meeting, we met for two hours because, unlike with the opening meeting, this second meeting included two lessons.

Since there was no survey to administer at the start of this second meeting, we commenced straightaway with the curriculum. Again, as with all the lessons, participants were supplied with a one-page lesson outline. Briefly, and to help stimulate participants' recall, we reviewed major points of the first lesson. We then turned to the second lesson, "Introduction to Expository Preaching." I continued utilizing the Great Room's projector system to present the PowerPoint slides containing the lessons. I also continued inviting

⁸ See appendix 6 for copies of all seven one-page summary sheets. Throughout the course, participants were also offered copies, to be printed upon request, of all the PowerPoints slides from any lesson they wanted. Participants who missed a meeting were given such copies to help them catch up.

and encouraging questions and discussion from participants throughout the presentation. After the second lesson, we took a ten-minute break. We then resumed the meeting by turning to the third lesson, “The Preacher’s Role and the Spirit’s Role in Preaching.”

This double-lesson prompted a great deal of group discussion, the most of any other meeting. Apparently intrigued by the overview of preaching and the explication of the preacher’s and Spirit’s roles, participants asked many questions about the process by which I usually prepare my sermons. In response, I shared with them a brief outline of my typical, weekly routine. As part of this discussion, and to illustrate what participants were learning about the sermon components, I showed them several sermon manuscripts recently composed and delivered. Some discussion occurred in other meetings, but this meeting typified the group’s willingness and facility to discuss the curriculum’s content.

Following the double-lesson presentation, the rest of the week was utilized to follow up with any participants who were unable to attend the meeting. They were given a copy of the PowerPoint slides from the second and third lessons to review and invited to follow up with me with any questions. This follow-up protocol was similarly utilized with any participants unable to attend the remaining meetings and lessons as well.

Week 17 occurred during the week beginning October 1, 2023. That Sunday, there was no group meeting and no presentation of the next lesson in the curriculum. The church’s regular activities schedule, namely a church council meeting at 4:45 p.m. and a Bible study lesson at 6 p.m., precluded meeting. This week was utilized to thank group members when I saw them for their participation thus far and to make sure that everyone was caught up on all the lessons presented by this point in the sermon-listening course.

Week 18 occurred during the week beginning October 8, 2023. That Sunday, in keeping with the regular meeting time, participants convened for the third meeting of the sermon-listening course. During this third meeting, the fourth lesson from the curriculum, “Biblical-Theological Basis for Sermon-Listening,” was presented. This lesson was the only lesson presented at this meeting. Accordingly, the meeting lasted for approximately

one hour. The presentation of this lesson resembled the presentation of previous lessons in previous meetings, including time allotted for questions and discussion throughout the meeting. The follow-up protocol was conducted with any participants who were absent.

Week 19 occurred during the week beginning October 15, 2023. That day, a Sunday, participants met for the fourth meeting of the sermon-listening course. During this meeting, the fifth lesson, “Before Listening: Attitude of Expectancy,” as well as the sixth lesson, “While Listening: Analysis of Content,” were presented. Since this meeting entailed two lessons, similar to the second meeting this meeting lasted for approximately two hours. A fifteen-minute break was observed between lessons to allow participants to refresh themselves. Attendance remained consistent as far as those I personally recruited to satisfy the fifteen-minimum threshold were concerned. Additional church members who responded to the church-wide invitation also kept on attending and participating.

Week 20 occurred during the week beginning October 22, 2023. For the second and final time during the length of the study, that Sunday there was no group meeting and no presentation of the next lesson in the curriculum. Again, the church’s regular activities precluded meeting; this time it was a deacons meeting at 4:45 p.m. and a church business meeting at 6 p.m. Like before, this week was utilized to thank group members as I saw them all for their participation. This week was also used to make sure that everyone was caught up on all the lessons presented by this point in the sermon-listening course.

Week 21 occurred during the week beginning October 29, 2023. That day, a Sunday, participants met for the fifth and final meeting of the sermon-listening course. At this concluding meeting, the seventh lesson, “After Listening: Application of the Lesson,” was presented. Since this was the only lesson presented, the meeting lasted for almost an hour. As far as those personally recruited for the course were concerned, attendance held strong; the minimum threshold was met for this meeting and, thus, the course as a whole. A number of additional church members, many who had attended multiple lessons, came to this last one too. The presentation proceeded in a manner consistent with prior lessons.

At the close of the last lesson, before participants were dismissed for good the post-course survey was administered. As planned, the exact same survey from the initial meeting was utilized again. Copies were distributed, and participants completed theirs in relative quiet. As participants finished, surveys were collected individually. Like the first time, each survey was marked with a unique number between 01 and 25, inclusive. This number enabled confirmation of participants' completion of both surveys. Also, and more to the point of the survey, this number enabled comparison of post-course survey results to pre-course survey results and the charting of any changes in perceptions of sermon-listening for individual participants. Administering the survey took twenty minutes.

Follow-Up Period

Week 22 occurred during the week beginning November 5, 2023. During week 22, participants' responses from the pre-course survey were compared to their responses from the (identical) post-course survey and then analyzed to gauge any changes in their perceptions of sermon-listening. To facilitate comparison and analysis, the surveys were subjected to a t-test for dependent samples. Results (which are reviewed and discussed in greater depth in the next chapter) showed an appreciable change in participants' sermon-listening perceptions from the beginning of the course, when the pre-course survey was administered, to the end of the course, when the post-course survey was administered. The results having been analyzed, the project's weekly schedule was thus concluded.

While receipt of the results marked the end of the official schedule, during the ensuing days and weeks participants informally shared additional feedback. The feedback variously consisted of their acknowledgment of the need for the course, their satisfaction from participating in it, and their recognition of the positive change that the training had already brought about in their continuing sermon-listening experience. This kind of data was not required or sought by the project's goals, but a general acknowledgment of it is hereby included as part of the details and description of the project as it unfolded.

Conclusion

The project's schedule began the week beginning May 28, 2023, and wrapped up the week beginning November 5, 2023. In this amount of time, the sermon-listening curriculum was composed and presented, the pre- and post-course survey was designed and distributed, an expert panel reviewed and approved the lessons, a class of participants from among the church's membership was recruited and instructed, and any progress in participants' sermon-listening perceptions was measured and evaluated. All three of the project's goals were addressed and accomplished. The project, consisting of preparation, implementation, and follow-up periods, totaled twenty-two weeks, or 154 days, in all.

In all, instruction time amounted to approximately seven hours (one hour per lesson), or 420 minutes. Average attendance was seventeen participants, which was two more than the number personally recruited to participate. The number of participants attending a particular lesson ranged from eleven to twenty-one. The number of unique participants, persons who attended at least one lesson, was twenty-five, which was ten more than the number personally recruited to participate. Along with the instruction time and attendance, the project schedule, setting, presentation method, and group interaction experience likewise remained consistent throughout implementation of the project.

As far as an inventory of project components is concerned, the project utilized human resources as well as material resources. The human resources served as members of the expert panel as well as participants in the lessons on sermon-listening. The material resources included promotional handouts, pre-course and post-course surveys, evaluation rubrics, copies of PowerPoint slides (printed as needed), lesson outlines, summary sheets, a PowerPoint software program, and a projector system. Participants consistently met in the church's fellowship hall (a.k.a. Great Room) for presentation of the curriculum.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Once the sermon-listening curriculum has been presented and all participants have completed the post-course inventory, the project must be evaluated. The evaluation assesses, reports, and records the project's results as well as its merits and demerits. As such, once complete the evaluation commends the project (or at least aspects of it) to the review and usage of preachers, congregations, and other parties with interests in sermon-listening. In this closing chapter, the project will be reviewed in numerous ways, namely evaluation of its purpose, evaluation of its goals, strengths, weaknesses, reflections on what I would have done differently, theological reflections, and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

As announced in chapter 1, the purpose of this project was to train members of First Baptist Church of Rockmart, Georgia, in sermon-listening based on principles of expository preaching. For the preceding stages of the project, from its inauguration to its implementation, this purpose served to shape and steer the project; it was both guide and guardrail as the project progressed. For the final stage, the evaluation, by which time the project had been implemented, the purpose ceased to shape and steer and, instead, served now to review and assess the project. The project's success, failure, or inconclusiveness is thereby weighed and measured by how it measured up to its own statement of purpose.

Anecdotally, the project's purpose can be evaluated in several respects. Those from among the church's membership who participated in the training are noted for their commitment, consistency, enthusiasm, and engagement displayed for the duration of the project. The curriculum that was used for training, upon development, was approved by

the expert panel and then, upon deployment, received with rapt attention by participants. The meetings featured not just presentation of the curriculum but also, springing from the curriculum, discussion about preaching that was, to participants' credit, varied, incisive, and extensive. Participants exhibited a keen grasp and appreciation of the principles of expository preaching that informed and sustained the sermon-listening curriculum.

The project's purpose can also be evaluated statistically. When comparing the results from pre- and post-course surveys, it was noticed that participants responded with greater degrees of agreement to questions in the post-course survey. This first observation was then clarified by running a t-test. In the methodology section of the opening chapter, it was stated that results of the post-course survey would be compared to results of the pre-course survey using a t-test for dependent samples, which statistically establishes if some course of intervention has made a difference. In this case, the t-test confirmed a statistical difference between pre-course and post-course survey results. Furthermore, the change in scores is great enough that the difference is considered statistically significant, meaning that the change in scores is not due to chance but to the course of intervention.¹

According to this statistical result, implementation of the project satisfied the project's stated purpose of training participants in sermon-listening. Overall, the sermon-listening project helped those members of First Baptist Church who took part in it. They were now better trained to prepare to listen, to analyze what they heard, and to apply it as well. From the standpoint of the curriculum, this result means that the curriculum and the instruction thereof succeeded in improving perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening strategies. Participants had progressed and also improved in their perceptions of sermon-listening from taking the course. The expert panel's earlier assessment was validated.

It was stated in the opening chapter, while explaining the ecclesial context for

¹ See appendix 7 for t-test results. The results include: mean increase of 24.437, $t_{(16)}=5.772$, $p=.0000369$. Because (1) the mean scores increased from the pre-course SLI to the post-course SLI, (2) the absolute value of the t Stat is larger than the t Critical value, and (3) the p value is less than .05, we may say that there was a statistically significant difference. The project was a success in helping train participants.

this project, that the preaching ministry of First Baptist Church is, historically as well as presently, a strength of church life. Many church members, including those participating in this project, already demonstrate attentiveness regarding the public exposition of God's Word. This project, therefore, did not seek to arrest and correct an ongoing weakness in the church but to take a relative strength and make it stronger. In that sense, the standard of success for this project was higher than if the present preaching ministry was poor and members' interest in it was lacking. Even so, according to anecdotal as well as statistical results this project succeeded in raising the quality of the church's preaching ministry by further shaping and sharpening the attentiveness of its already-attentive membership.

Besides their implications for church life, the results also constitute the latest validation of expository preaching. The project's purpose stated that participants would be trained in sermon-listening according to principles of expository preaching. During implementation, the curriculum guided participants through an overview of expository preaching and then sermon-listening strategies that incorporate, refer to, and reflect the presuppositions and components of expository preaching. This project depended on the principles of expository preaching. Success in training participants in sermon-listening curriculum thus reflects positively on the principles underpinning the whole endeavor. Expository preaching is a sound discipline whose principles resonated with listeners.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Evaluating the project's goals likewise contributes to the overall assessment of this project. There were three goals included for this project. The first goal was to assess perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening among members of First Baptist Church. This goal was measured by administering the Sermon-Listening Inventory (SLI) to at least fifteen church members. Participants filled out the SLI at the first meeting, prior to presentation of the first lesson of the sermon-listening curriculum. The stated threshold of fifteen was exceeded by three for a total of eighteen participants filling out the pre-course

SLI. Of the eighteen, sixteen participated in the remaining lessons of the course and filled out the post-course SLI.² Meeting this threshold plus tabulating pre-course survey results using simple descriptive statistics constitutes achievement of the project's first goal.

Results of the pre-course survey yielded some noteworthy observations about participants' views on preaching and sermon-listening.³ The statement with the highest score was statement 13, which says, "I believe that preaching is necessary because God's Word is living, active, and life-changing." The group score for this question (95) was just one less than the maximum (96). Every participant except one said that they "strongly agreed" with this statement. This score indicates that they came into this course already persuaded about the necessity of preaching because of what God's Word is and does.

As far as the pre-course SLI was concerned, the statement that had the lowest score was statement 12, "I am comfortable explaining the five essential components of an expository sermon." The group score for this question (49) averaged out to a "disagree somewhat" response. This score indicates that participants came into the course dubious about their ability to explicate a sermon's constituent parts. The next lowest scores were from statements 22 (56), 23 (60), and 24 (59), which were statements about participants' comfortability explaining Nehemiah 8:1–12, Matthew 13:13–23, and Romans 10:14–17, respectively, as they touch on aspects of sermon-listening. These scores indicate their relative unfamiliarity with the biblical-theological rationale behind sermon-listening.

Several responses on the pre-course survey confirmed a number of positive impressions that I already had of the First Baptist Church membership as a whole. Their high score on statement 13, which refers to preaching's necessity vis-à-vis God's Word, was consistent with the church's high view of the nature of God's Word. I was similarly heartened by the group's responses to statement 14 (91), which refers to the priority of

² See appendix 8 for a demographic description of the sixteen participants.

³ See appendix 9 for tabulation of results from the pre-course SLI.

preaching for Jesus and the early church, and statement 15 (90), which talks about the revelation and amplification of God's glory in preaching. One showed me that they are familiar with what the Bible says about the ministries of Jesus and the early church, and the other showed me that they possess a dynamic, big-picture view of preaching. These scores supported my impression that the present church membership, in keeping with its faith heritage, appreciates the biblical, theological, and historical value of preaching.

Something from the pre-course responses that surprised me was participants' response to statement 21, "I believe that the Spirit's presence and participation affects the sermon's capability to change lives." Before seeing the group's collective response to this statement, I was certain of their general belief in the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Southern Baptists have not, however, historically speaking, emphasized the Spirit in the doctrinal or practical sense. This being so, I was struck by participants' high collective score on this statement. All but two of the participants registered strong agreement with the statement. (The other two registered agreement.) This was higher than I would have guessed. The response indicated their mindfulness of the Spirit and dependence on him.

I was also surprised by participants' response to statement 30, "I think that sermon-listening entails hard work." Their pre-course response averaged out to an "agree somewhat" result. A closer look shows that one participant registered strong disagreement with the statement, a couple of participants registered disagreement, and one participant registered "disagree somewhat." All told, a quarter of participants registered some form of disagreement with the claim that sermon-listening entails hard work. With no follow-up mechanism allowing me to delve into their disagreement, I was left wondering what exactly they perceived about sermon-listening when it comes to the effort it involves.

The second goal of the project was to develop curriculum on sermon-listening based on principles of expository preaching. It was envisioned that lessons would touch on the definition and distinctives of expository preaching, sermon planning and delivery, biblical and theological foundations of preaching and sermon-listening, optimal listening

practices, and other topics that helped to train members in sermon-listening. Completing this goal depended on the assessment of an expert panel utilizing a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. At least 90 percent of the evaluation criteria had to meet “sufficient” for the curriculum to pass muster. As first reported in chapter 4, the panel scored the curriculum above 90 percent. The panel’s approval marked the achievement of the project’s second goal.

The initial step toward meeting this goal was putting together a curriculum that reflected the priority and influence of expository preaching. Every lesson was written to display the core conviction of expository preaching that the biblical text is the focus. The first lesson stressed the centrality of Scripture and, consequently, expository preaching in the life of First Baptist Church. The second and third lessons amounted to an introduction to expository preaching for laypersons. The fourth lesson explicated some biblical texts whose lessons for listening presume that God’s Word is being preached. The closing trio of lessons, which address different stages of the sermon-listening process, offer listening strategies likewise correlating to the philosophy and practice of expository preaching.

The curriculum’s composition was true to the stated goal, and the expert panel confirmed it in their evaluation. While judging the curriculum, they approved it on all counts. In the panel’s collective view, the curriculum was faithful to the Bible in all the places where it dealt with Scripture. The curriculum, furthermore, demonstrated a sound and effective methodology for teaching participants about sermon-listening. The panel also affirmed that the curriculum’s scope was appropriately sized for the task at hand. The curriculum was also commended by the committee for its applicability to participants’ lives. What few amendments the panel offered were noted and integrated as needed.

The project’s third and ultimate goal was to train members in sermon-listening by teaching the developed curriculum. Once the curriculum was approved by the expert panel, it was presented to church members in five meetings from mid-September to late-October. Upon presentation of the curriculum’s concluding lesson, this third goal was

formally measured by having participants complete a post-course SLI. Post-course results were then compared to pre-course results using the aforementioned t-test for dependent samples. As also reported in the previous section of this chapter, the t-test reported back registering a statistically significant difference between the pre-course and post-course survey results. This outcome marked successful completion of the project's third goal.

As with pre-course survey results, several points from the post-course results stand out.⁴ Of the thirty-five statements participants responded to in the SLI, for twenty-four of them the group registered an average response of "strongly agree." For the other eleven statements, the group registered an average response of "agree." For the post-course SLI, there were no responses to statements that averaged out to "agree somewhat" or any of the "disagree" options. The post-course results show changed perceptions and greater affirmation of sermon-listening matters and comfortability explicating them.

Comparison with the pre-course scores heightens the import of the post-course scores. The number of statements for which participants scored "strongly agree" in their average rose by fifteen, from nine in the pre-course results to twenty-four in the post-course results. The number of statements for which participants scored "agree" in their average decreased by six, from seventeen in the pre-course results to eleven in the post-course results. The decrease in the amount of "agree" responses is explained by a change of fourteen responses to "strongly agree" in the post-course results. The lone "disagree somewhat" response and seven "agree somewhat" responses from the pre-course results all changed to an "agree" response. This comparison of results indicates that participants grew in terms of their perception of preaching and sermon-listening in conjunction with the instruction they received from the curriculum during the sermon-listening course.

The group made its greatest gains in select areas from the pre-course to post-course SLI results. The greatest gain was for statement 12, "I am comfortable explaining

⁴ See appendix 10 for tabulation of results from the post-course SLI.

the five essential components of an expository sermon.” After scoring a forty-nine in the pre-course results, participants registered an eighty-two in the post-course results. This was a gain of thirty-three points, moving the group’s average response from “somewhat disagree” to “agree.” That is, after completing the sermon-listening course participants felt much more comfortable explaining the five essential components of an expository sermon. During the course, they received instruction in this area of sermon knowledge.

The next greatest area of improvement was participants’ perceptions of the three biblical texts related to sermon-listening: Nehemiah 8:1–12, Matthew 13:13–23, and Romans 10:14–17. These texts were addressed in statements 22, 23, 24 on the SLI. Scores for these statements went up by twenty-five, twenty-two, and twenty-four points, respectively. This indicates greater understanding by participants. A similar gain was noted for statement 30, “I think that sermon-listening entails hard work.” Participants increased their group score by twenty-five points. This indicates greater appreciation for the effort, represented by all the strategies, required for successful sermon-listening.

Participants’ improvement in their responses to SLI statements 22, 23, and 24 signifies the greatest amount of improvement in their responses to any group of questions on the SLI. In the composition of the SLI, all statements were grouped according to the lessons from which they were lifted.⁵ Statements 22, 23, and 24, for example, all came from lesson 4 in the curriculum, “Biblical-Theological Basis for Sermon-Listening.” The average improvement of responses in this particular group of statements was twenty-four points. This is more than ten points higher than the average improvement from the next highest group of responses. Besides emphasizing participants’ relatively low score on the pre-course survey, and besides indicating their relatively vast improvement in this area of sermon-listening, this figure helps identify which single lesson in the curriculum made

⁵ This grouping strategy was not stated on the SLI or otherwise made known to participants during the sermon-listening course.

the most difference in the increase in participants' perceptions of sermon-listening.

The group of questions for which participants registered their second-highest gains from their responses came from lesson 6, "While Listening: Analysis of Content." The average increase in responses in this particular group of statements was fourteen points. The single greatest factor in this result was participants' change, as indicated by their responses, in their outlook on statement 30, "I think that sermon-listening entails hard work." As already noted, participants' responses to this statement rose by twenty-five points. Their responses to other statements in this group, which deal with strategies for analyzing sermon content, increased by an average of eleven points. The implication here is that lesson 6 made a great difference largely by its emphasis on hard work.

According to participants' average gain in responses to groups of statements (as opposed to individual statements), the balance of the lessons are ordered: lesson 7, "After Listening: Application of the Lesson," an average gain of thirteen points; lesson 2, "Introduction to Expository Preaching," an average gain of eleven points; lesson 3, "The Preacher's Role and the Spirit's Role in Preaching," an average gain of nine points; lesson 5, "Before Listening: Attitude of Expectation," an average gain of seven points; and lesson one, "The Project: Sermon-Listening in FBC Rockmart," an average gain of five points. By this measure, it was the opening lesson that made the least difference in participants' increase in their perceptions.⁶ Even so, they registered an increase here.

While no SLI statements registered a decrease, not every statement showed an increase. For nine statements (8, 13, 14, 15, 19, 21, 25, 28, 36), participants averaged the same "strongly agree" response across both surveys. They entered and exited the sermon-listening course strongly agreeing about these matters. Also, there was no higher category

⁶ Participants registered their highest average response per question for this group of questions in the pre-course survey, leaving themselves with less room for improvement for the post-course survey. For the post-course survey, though, this was not the group of questions for which they registered their highest average response per question. It is not necessarily the case, then, that lesson 1 made the least difference because participants had less room for improvement in their responses. Their responses simply did not change as much as their responses to other groups of questions. They stayed relatively the same.

of response for them than “strongly agree.” Perhaps more notable are the three statements (9, 32, 33) for which participants scored an average response of “agree” from pre-course to post-course results; they did not progress to “strongly agree.” These statements pertain to their comfort level discussing the sermon with the preacher and whether identifying sermon sections and asking analytical questions aid the sermon-listening experience.

Strengths of the Project

An accounting of the project’s strengths begins with the curriculum developed for the sermon-listening course. Spanning seven lessons, the curriculum progressed from the state of the church’s preaching ministry to an overview of expository preaching to the biblical-theological basis of sermon-listening to practical sermon-listening strategies. The lessons varied by topic, but they all related to preaching and sermon-listening, thus giving the impression of a well-rounded curriculum. The members of the expert panel, as noted in their rubrics, as well as the participants in the course, as expressed in their aggregate and informal reactions, agreed about this impression. A well-rounded curriculum should be considered a strength of this project because of the apparent interrelationships among the topics covered; the presentation of a given topic enhanced the presentation of others. If any lesson is removed from the presentation, the entire presentation is diminished.

As just mentioned, the curriculum demonstrated a progression starting with the state of the church’s preaching ministry and ending with three phases of practical sermon-listening strategies. Rather than presenting the topics randomly, they were presented in such a way that each topic provided a foundation for the next, and each topic built on the previous. Panel members likewise reacted positively to this feature of the curriculum on their feedback. During the lessons, participants at times referred to previous content to help state a point or ask a question about the current topic, thereby displaying the fact and benefit of the curriculum’s progression. This progression constitutes another strength of the project due to its logical order as well as its benefit to participants’ understanding.

Portions of the curriculum were particularly well received by participants. For one, they warmly welcomed the two lessons offering a primer on preaching, specifically the second lesson on expository preaching and the third lesson on the preacher's role and the Spirit's role. Their engagement with the content revealed a prior understanding and indicated a desire to build on it. They offered more questions and comments during these lessons than during others. We referred to sermons from my preaching ministry among them to illustrate certain points. Participants voiced their appreciation following these lessons. Altogether, they were pleased to learn more about what goes into preaching.

Also well received were the lessons explaining the sermon-listening strategies, lessons 5, 6, and 7. Participants understood and appreciated the three distinct categories of pre-sermon, during-sermon, and after-sermon strategies. While some sermon-listening strategies had occurred to them on their own (praying for the preacher in advance), others were new to them (summarizing the message), and still others were new in the sense of having been intuited but never explicated until now (asking analytical questions during the message). After dealing with the dense content of lesson 4 (on the biblical-theological basis), they liked the practicality of lessons 5, 6, and 7. The lessons' content met them at their lay level of understanding while also challenging them to expand their thinking.

In addition to its comprehensive and progressive design, the curriculum went over well with participants thanks to the general presentation strategy. The number of lessons, seven, allowed for a substantive and complete presentation while maintaining natural divisions in the content. The number of meetings, five, appealed to participants as they pondered fitting the sermon-listening course into their schedules. The meeting times, one hour for three of the meetings and two hours for two, permitted enough time to cover the lessons. The relatively short course calendar, consisting of seven weeks to go through all the curriculum, helped encourage and maintain participants' interest and involvement. This general presentation strategy appeared to be a strength because it ensured sufficient training in sermon-listening while keeping participants engaged throughout the process.

Still another strength of the project was the discussion with participants about preaching that took place for the duration of implementation. Straightaway with the first lesson, participants began asking questions and making comments about preaching. They queried and spoke concerning preaching in general as well as my preaching ministry in particular. For example, during the first lesson participants asked several questions about my personal sermon preparation routine. During the second lesson, we held an unplanned and extended discussion on the nature of topical preaching. Dialoguing like this reflected positively on participants' grasp of the content, increased their learning, and strengthened the relationship between themselves as sermon listeners and myself as their preacher.

Such fruitful dialogue as what participants brought to the project affirmed the wisdom of proactively and intentionally recruiting them to participate. The project called for participants who were interested in the church's preaching ministry and who generally supported the preacher in the discharge of his sacred duty. They also needed to be regular attendees at Sunday morning worship, when preaching occurred. While planning on who to invite, I also considered the benefit of seeking out those in positions of leadership and influence who might pass on in the future what they learned from the project. In view of these criteria and benefits, it behooved me to approach certain individuals ahead of time to secure their commitment. The alternative was to simply announce the project and wait to see who attended, but with that approach I could not count on people's consistency.

Weaknesses of the Project

Along with the strengths of the project, there are weaknesses that surfaced as the project progressed and should be noted too. For one, the relatively narrow scope of the project constitutes a restricted benefit. While participants gained sermon-listening training in a short timeframe, the project's scope and associated calendar precluded the possibility of gauging long-term effects and retention of the sermon-listening training acquired. Ultimately, sermon-listening is not a short-term exercise but a long-term and

lifelong habit. While the project's purpose and scope were stated early and explicitly, its content deserves long-term attention, practice, and evaluation. The project's short scope belies a long view of sermon-listening. This kind of project helps some but not totally.

This project aimed to instill sermon-listening training, which is part of the sermon-listening experience. Still, a project about sermon-listening training does not address the entire sermon-listening experience. Participants received some instruction in sermon-listening, and during this instruction there was some reflection on past sermon-listening experience through the prism of any new knowledge they were gaining. Even so, participants' reflections were coincidental, not central, to the project. This project did not aim to assess any part of the sermon-listening experience beyond their passive intake of sermon-listening instruction, i.e., what participants did with any knowledge gained, such as observing them while listening to sermons or debriefing with them afterward.

As for what the project focused on, the instrument used for assessing the effect of the training in sermon-listening warrants scrutiny. The pre- and post-course surveys, which were deliberately identical in design, utilized a Likert scale to capture participants' responses. The Likert scale, however, only asks for participants' degree of agreement or disagreement with statements about sermon-listening. The scale does not draw out what exactly participants know about a facet of sermon-listening; if anything, it registers their confidence level about their knowledge, whatever that knowledge actually entails, of the facet of sermon-listening at hand. Despite the prevalence of use of a Likert scale in other projects, this project (and, ultimately, the church) might have been served better with a means of more precisely measuring the change in their sermon-listening knowledge.

Concerning other weaknesses about the project, the number of participants is worth noting and reflecting upon. Those who participated are to be commended for their involvement. That number, however, is but a fraction of the greater group that regularly attends worship services and listens to sermons. For First Baptist Church of Rockmart, fifteen participants in this project are an eighth of the approximate average attendance

(120). That leaves many church members to train in sermon-listening strategies. While, realistically, not all church members could be recruited and counted on to take part, it is possible that more members could have been recruited for this round of instruction.

For those who participated, one segment of the curriculum was noticeably challenging for them. The fourth lesson, on the biblical-theological basis of sermon-listening, was, due to its biblical and theological content, denser than the other lessons. Most of the lesson consisted of Scripture, biblical exegesis, and consequent theological implications. It was pitched on more of an academic level than a lay level of instruction. Participants, while attentive, were more passive in their overall learning posture during this lesson; there was more silence, less follow-up and feedback, and less enthusiasm expressed compared with other lessons. I interpreted these nonverbal and visual signs as indications that the content might have overwhelmed and/or confused its recipients.

On the matter of additional weaknesses with the curriculum, there was nothing explicitly said about what to do if listeners, while listening and upon review of what they heard, detected heresy in a sermon. While several of the listening strategies presented in the curriculum (such as asking questions of the sermon, checking the sermon against Scripture, and following up with the preacher) are applicable to heretical sermon content, these strategies appear to presume orthodox preaching and teaching. Participants should be explicitly alerted to the possibility that every preacher, owing to their innately flawed humanity, is vulnerable to slipping into heresy. Participants should then be taught how to proceed in the event they suspect or confirm heresy in what they have just listened to.

Participants who attended the lessons were not given handouts of the slides from the PowerPoint presentation.⁷ These handouts, which were separate from the lesson outline and summary sheet handouts that participants were given at every meeting, were

⁷ All the PowerPoint slides, which present the entire sermon-listening curriculum utilized in this project, are found in appendix 3.

given only to participants who missed any of the lessons, to enable them to catch up on the content they missed. Those who attended had to depend on their personal note-taking skills to capture the content from the PowerPoint slides, while those who missed were provided the complete, original content on which the survey questions were based. This incongruity constituted a disadvantage for the participants who attended the lessons, since their records were not as complete as the records of those who had missed the lessons.

What I Would Do Differently

If given the opportunity to carry out this project again, there are some areas of the project that I would revise and execute differently. Some of these revisions stem from the project's perceived weaknesses catalogued in the previous section. To begin, I would review and revise the fourth lesson, "Biblical-Theological Basis for Sermon-Listening." Among other measures, I would revise by restating the relevant biblical text next to any exegetical and theological comments; this would help participants appreciate the biblical basis of my comments that much better. I would also summarize the most salient findings at the end of each text before going on to the next text. Also, I would use the conclusion to restate all the factors, first noted throughout the exegesis, that enhance attentiveness, receptivity, and understanding while listening. Overall, I would revise this lesson to help clarify and accentuate the points that establish the biblical basis for sermon-listening.

In light of the previously stated weakness perceived in the survey instrument, I would either substitute another instrument or supplement the existing sermon-listening inventory with some additional evaluation measure. As far as substituting goes, I might utilize a type of quiz (if a suitable, established one exists) that more precisely measures participants' knowledge and progress therein. As far as supplementing goes, I might use individual interviews to gauge participants' progress in their acquisition of any sermon-listening knowledge. In this latter case, summary write-ups from the interviews would be included with the results from the sermon-listening inventory in the final project report.

In either case, these tools would clarify their progress in sermon-listening knowledge.

Another change I would make is to print and provide copies of all PowerPoint slides to all participants in attendance for the lessons. This would have multiple benefits: For one, this would better match the instruction that attending participants receive with what absent participants (who were given copies of PowerPoint slides from any lesson they missed) receive. For another, participants would have all the curriculum content in their lasting possession for reference during the sermon-listening course as well as any time afterward. In addition, they would be relieved of the pressure to write down all the content from slides as they are projected on the screen; they could concentrate better on enhancing the printouts with notes about extemporaneous content or group discussion.

Some things that I would do differently do not stem from a weakness about the project but simply a notion to enhance the project. For example, I would include sermon-listening exercises in the curriculum presentation. In the lesson on expository preaching, I would play video of some sermon (mine or another preacher's) and invite participants to discuss how the video illustrates the preaching concept currently being presented. Later, in the lessons on sermon-listening strategies I would lead participants through exercises related to the listening strategy currently in focus, such as: reading an upcoming sermon text and asking preliminary questions, listing ways to pray about the upcoming sermon and then praying thusly, taking notes on a sermon (or excerpt), summarizing the message of a sermon excerpt, posing some applicational questions, and planning for application.

I would also provide a book on preaching to supplement participants' overall learning experience. Participants would be asked to read portions of the book between meetings and then anticipate some group discussion at the next meeting. While adding to participants' knowledge of preaching and/or sermon-listening, these readings would also encourage them to continue thinking about these matters between meetings; they would be that much more informed and inspired to discuss sermon-listening at the start of the next meeting. Discussion would occupy a short period of the meeting time. Questions on

the pre- and post-course surveys would still reflect just the sermon-listening curriculum. For the purpose just described, I would likely use David Helm’s *Expositional Preaching*⁸ or David Strain’s *Expository Preaching*, which includes a chapter on sermon-listening.⁹

Theological Reflections

Further, fuller evaluation of this project includes some theological reflections. For one, participants, as professing Christians and long-time church members, displayed, via their positive and consistent engagement with the project, part of their new nature that comes with being a believer, namely their heart’s desire to listen to sermons. Scripture gives not just one reason for this desire but many, including believers’ love for God’s Word. In stanzas that speak for all sincerely dedicated believers, the psalmist says, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. . . . In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word” (Ps 119:11, 14–16). This “delight” in God’s Word helps explain participants’ desire to listen to sermons and, specifically, their abiding interest in the sermon-listening curriculum.

Besides loving God’s Word, participants’ desire to listen to sermons and, as a consequence, their part in this project might also be explained by their recognition of the preacher’s sacred responsibility. What better explains participants’ regular attendance and attention to the preacher’s sermons—interest in hearing him exposit his own opinions or hearing him exposit God’s decrees? Far more sound, in the case of professing Christians and long-time church members such as participated in this project, is the explanation that they desire to listen because they know that the preacher is called to “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2). Preachers are expected to proclaim “not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord” (2

⁸ David R. Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

⁹ David Strain, *Expository Preaching* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021).

Cor 4:5). Having been reached and redeemed by God's Word via the gospel, participants innately want to listen to sermons because preachers proclaim more of that same Word.

It is probable that many participants consciously (and the rest subconsciously) understand that sermon-listening is part of their spiritual formation. That is, they desire to listen to sermons and learn about listening to sermons because it nurtures their growth as Jesus's disciples. In their reborn hearts, they know that God "gave the . . . shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph 4:11–13). Right along with Paul—"Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to . . . the preaching of Jesus Christ" (Rom 16:25)—they know that they are fortified in their faith through preaching and the listening thereof. Listening serves their spiritual formation.

Delving into participants' desire to listen to sermons is one point of theological reflection induced by this project. Another point of theological reflection is what sermon-listening means for preaching as a sacred responsibility. One implication that surfaces is that attentive listeners, especially those who are trained in sermon-listening, help explain the preacher's responsibility to study. Besides reasons of listeners' maturation in Christ and the sanctity of the Word, preachers ought to "do your best to present yourself to God as one approved" and be found "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15) because many listeners are listening attentively—some, as this very project has aimed to achieve, because they have received formal training in sermon-listening. Listeners' training helps illuminate the preacher's biblical responsibility to study well when preparing to preach.

Listeners' attentiveness, especially when enhanced by any formal training in sermon-listening, also underscores the preacher's responsibility to be ready to preach "in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2). In addition to the urgency and saving power of God's Word that obliges preaching in both convenient, comfortable settings ("in season") and inconvenient, uncomfortable settings ("out of season"), preachers can meet attentive,

even trained, listeners in all such settings as well. This is especially true because of the Spirit's presence and power to help people pay attention (cf. Acts 16:14). Preachers must be ready to preach at all times and in all settings in part because there are likely to be attentive listeners on hand, even trained listeners depending on the specific setting.

The admonition about stricter judgment upon Bible teachers—"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (Jas 3:1)—is still another aspect of the preacher's responsibility underscored by listeners' attentiveness. When it comes to the first or primary reason for stricter judgment, the teaching's sacred content invariably comes to mind. Listeners are not mentioned in this text, but they are still associated with its admonition as the ones receiving the teaching. Listeners who are attentive to Bible teaching or even trained in listening to it are in a position to judge the soundness of the teaching and the teacher. While their judgment is not the same as that which is referenced in the text, theirs may still presage, alert preachers to, and remind them of the stricter judgment looming.

Personal Reflections

Regarding my personal reflections on the project, my first impulse is to express gratitude for the church members who participated in it. Having been with First Baptist Church for more than seven years now, I have built relationships with all the participants. These relationships gave me confidence I could turn to them and solicit their participation in the project. By the same token, I believe that for them it was these relationships that led them to agree to participate—and with real interest. Their participation and support encouraged me. Their support for the project is representative of their support for my ministry overall. These are people who genuinely care about preaching and learning from the sermons. As challenging as church work can be, these participants inspired my hope.

As I think about these participants in their ongoing role as sermon-listeners, I find that this project has renewed and raised my concern for them. It has not always been

at the forefront of my thoughts when planning for preaching that so many listeners do not bring comparable training to their part of the sermon (listening) that I bring to my part of the sermon (preaching). Surely, I have fallen short many times in conveying Scripture to them on account of my neglect, both in sermon development and delivery, of their lack of training in sermon-listening. Training these participants in sermon-listening has reminded me to keep all listeners in mind so that I will compose a message to meet them at a level that maximizes their opportunity to hear, understand, analyze, and apply God's Word. At the same time, I want to offer more training to help elevate listeners' listening abilities.

While prompting me to be more mindful about listeners' abilities to listen, this project has also motivated me to continue striving for excellence in preaching. Listeners deserve my best because of their need to know God better. God's Word deserves my best because of its revelatory and life-changing content. My best will not happen, however, by being complacent with my current state. To stave off complacency and the stagnation that flows from it, I must regularly take stock of my approach to preparation and delivery. I intend to undertake a sweeping review of my preaching habits at some point after this project. So long as I continue preaching, I know that I must continue training for it.

This project itself has contributed to my ongoing training. While researching and composing the curriculum and then presenting it for the sermon-listening course, I received a refresher on the building blocks of preaching. Lessons on the fundamentals of expository preaching and both the preacher's role and the Spirit's role in the process were beneficial to me at the same time they were beneficial to participants. I was not just the facilitator of the sermon-listening course but, from my own position, a fellow learner too. Particularly edifying to me was the refresher on the Spirit's important duty illuminating during development as well as anointing and persuading during delivery. This point was a welcome correction and relief to the notion that I bear all the responsibility for preaching.

To design and carry out this project, I had to be a consistent self-starter. I know that this is to be expected of doctoral level projects; I was not surprised by this condition.

Still, having now traversed the process of putting the project together, I am struck by the experience of it all. There were so many phases to this project, including the distinctive chapters to write as well as the curriculum to design and implement. Participants were sought out, research was conducted, and results were tabulated. With almost every task, I reminded myself in so many words that starting it and finishing it was up to me. One of the ways that served to keep me accountable and on schedule was to provide my church with updates on my progress. Knowing that others knew the stage I was at and that I still had more to go helped to spur me on to complete the current task or start the next one.

Now that I have reached the end of this project, I feel that I am ready to do it well. That is to say, in the course of carrying out this project I have been learning how to do it. The process of going through with this project has been the most instructive factor in learning how to do it. The sentiment is akin to what I feel on most Sunday afternoons once my latest sermon has been delivered for the first time that morning. Doubtless, if I was to take up a project like this again, the work would proceed more swiftly and with greater precision of thought and performance. As it stands, I hope that some practitioner of preaching will find this project helpful to his calling, utilize it within his own church context, and thereby improve upon it such as a subsequent undertaking would produce.

Conclusion

From an anecdotal as well as a statistical standpoint, the project achieved its stated purpose of training members of First Baptist Church in sermon-listening. On the way to achieving its purpose, the project successfully met all three of its stated goals. Strengths of the project include several aspects of the sermon-listening curriculum plus participants' engagement with the presentation. Weaknesses include the project's scope, part of the SLI's design, and some of the curriculum's content. Given the opportunity to do anything differently, I would address some of the perceived weaknesses and enhance the curriculum with a couple of new features. Theological reflections about the project

relate to listeners' desire for preaching as well as the preacher's responsibility. Personal reflections relate to my appreciation for the project's participants, my continued training as a preacher alongside theirs as listeners, and the process of carrying out the project.

APPENDIX 1

SERMON-LISTENING INVENTORY

For the project's first and third goals, participants registered their perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening. Their responses were recorded using the following survey instrument, the Sermon-Listening Inventory (SLI). The inventory was scheduled to be first administered prior to the start of the lessons from the developed curriculum on sermon-listening. To gauge any change in perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening, and to help compare with pre-course perceptions, this same SLI was administered at the end of the course, following the presentation of the seventh lesson of the curriculum.

SERMON-LISTENING INVENTORY (SLI)

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help train members of First Baptist Church of Rockmart to listen to a sermon. Jason N. Odom is conducting this research to collect data for a project focusing on First Baptist Church of Rockmart. As a significant part of the project, you are being asked to complete this inventory prior to the first teaching session as well as after the last session. Any information that you provide as part of this inventory will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary, meaning that you are free to withdraw at any time.* By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

1. What is your age range?

- a. 20s _____
- b. 30s _____
- c. 40s _____
- d. 50s _____
- e. 60s or older _____

2. What is your gender?

- a. male _____
- b. female _____

3. How many years have you been a professing Christian?

- a. 0–5 years _____
- b. 6–10 years _____
- c. 11–15 years _____
- d. 16–20 years _____
- e. 21 years or more _____

4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart?

- a. 0–5 years _____
- b. 6–10 years _____
- c. 11–15 years _____
- d. 16–20 years _____
- e. 21 years or more _____

5. Have you ever received training in how to listen to a sermon?

- a. yes _____
- b. no _____

For statements 6–40, the following key explains the options for answering:

- SD = strongly disagree
- D = disagree
- DS = disagree somewhat
- AS = agree somewhat
- A = agree
- SA = strongly agree

For each statement below, please circle the option that best reflects your sermon-listening knowledge at this present time.

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 6. I consider myself, as a listener, to be an active and integral part of preaching. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. I think that worshiping God well includes listening to the sermon well. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. I think of listening as not just hearing the sermon but also understanding, obeying, and applying its message. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. I am comfortable talking with others, including the preacher, about the sermon afterward. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. I consider sermon-listening important to my discipleship. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. I am comfortable telling someone what expository preaching is and does. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. I am comfortable explaining the five essential components of an expository sermon. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. I believe that preaching is necessary because God’s Word is living, active, and life-changing. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. I believe that preaching was a priority for Jesus, Paul, and others in the early church. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. I believe that preaching reveals God’s glory and amplifies his glory. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

16. I value expository preaching for emboldening preachers to take up hard, less popular, or lesser-known topics.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. I value expository preaching for familiarizing listeners with more of the Bible than other kinds of preaching.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. I am comfortable explaining the preacher's role in sermon development and delivery.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. I believe that the preacher's character affects the sermon's credibility.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. I am comfortable explaining the Holy Spirit's role in sermon development and delivery.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21. I believe that the Spirit's presence and participation affect the sermon's capability to change lives.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22. I am comfortable explaining how the people in Nehemiah 8:1–12 demonstrate attentive listening.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23. I am comfortable explaining at least some of the factors taught in Matthew 13:13–23 that enable hearing with understanding.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24. I am comfortable explaining the link between preaching, listening, and faith that is expressed in Romans 10:14–17.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25. I think that praying for the preacher, oneself, and fellow listeners prepares listeners to listen to the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
26. I think that reading the sermon text and reflecting on it in advance prepares listeners to listen to the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

27. I think that planning one's week around the Sunday worship service prepares listeners to listen to the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
28. I think that making a conscious effort to focus prepares listeners to listen to the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
29. I think that worshipping prepares listeners to listen to the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
30. I think that sermon-listening entails hard work.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
31. I think that note-taking improves the sermon-listening experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
32. I think that being able to identify the sermon's main sections improves the sermon-listening experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
33. I think that asking analytical questions improves the sermon-listening experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
34. I think that reviewing the message improves the sermon-listening experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
35. I think that summarizing the message improves the sermon-listening experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
36. I think that praying helps listeners apply what they heard during the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
37. I think that repenting helps listeners apply what they heard during the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
38. I think that asking applicational questions helps listeners apply what they heard during the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

39. I think that planning helps listeners apply what they heard during the sermon. SD D DS AS A SA

40. I think that demonstrating urgency helps listeners apply what they heard during the sermon. SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 2
EVALUATION RUBRIC

For the project's second goal, an expert panel evaluated the curriculum that was developed. To facilitate their evaluation, the panel utilized the following rubric. The rubric was divided into four main categories for assessing the curriculum's suitability: (1) biblical soundness, (2) scope, (3) methodology, and (4) applicability of the curriculum.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Soundness					
The curriculum exhibits sound exegesis.					
The curriculum exhibits sound theology.					
Scope					
The content of each lesson covers the particular issue it is designed to address.					
As a whole, the curriculum offers a sufficient lay-level primer on sermon-listening.					
Methodology					
Each lesson presents a main point and supporting points.					
The overall order of lessons is clear and logical.					
Applicability					
By the end, participants will better appreciate what goes into preaching.					
By the end, participants will know how to productively listen to sermons.					

Comments:

APPENDIX 3

SERMON-LISTENING CURRICULUM

After its development, the sermon-listening curriculum was converted into a PowerPoint slideshow for its presentation. Participants received and interacted with the curriculum via the PowerPoint presentation. The entire curriculum, all seven lessons, was presented in this manner. Participants who were absent for a meeting were given printed copies of the slides of the lesson(s) they missed to help them catch up on the content.

HEARING WITH UNDERSTANDING

The Sermon-Listening Course

1

DMin Degree Overview

2

DMin Degree Overview

Expository Preaching Track

“Designed to equip pastors and other church leaders in the skills of sermon preparation and public exposition of the Scriptures, the Doctor of Ministry in Expository Preaching is founded upon the belief that the health of the local church is grounded in the preaching of the Word of God.”

3

DMin Degree Overview

Course of Study

Intro to Doctoral Research & Writing (1 hour)

Project Methodology (1 hour)

Four Foundational Seminars (16 hours)

 Historical and Theological Foundations for Expository Preaching

 Hermeneutics

 Sermon Development and Delivery

 Expository Preaching and the Local Church

Contextualized Writing Seminars (8 hours)

Research Project (6 hours)

4

DMin Degree Overview

Ministry Research Project

“The ministry research project (course 80700) is the culmination of the program of study.

Through a written report of 80-125 (+/–10%) pages, the student has the opportunity to apply professional knowledge and documented research into the context of ministry.

The entire project is supervised by a faculty supervisor in conjunction with the Professional Doctoral Studies director.”

5

Sermon-Listening Course Overview

6

Sermon-Listening Course Overview

Lesson 1: The Project: Sermon-Listening in FBC Rockmart

Lesson 2: Introduction to Expository Preaching

Lesson 3: The Preacher's Role and the Spirit's Role in Preaching

Lesson 4: Biblical-Theological Basis for Sermon-Listening

Lesson 5: Before Listening: Attitude of Expectancy

Lesson 6: While Listening: Analysis of Content

Lesson 7: After Listening: Application of the Lesson

7

LESSON 1

The Project: Sermon-Listening in FBC Rockmart

8

Introduction

9

Introduction

Effective preaching lies not just with the preacher but also with hearers. Hearers are responsible for paying attention, processing the sermon's content, and applying its message.

Typically, though, hearers are at a disadvantage, as they lack formal knowledge of how to listen to a sermon.

When acquired, this knowledge serves to sharpen their sermon-listening skills and, ultimately, enable faithful application of the message.

10

Church Context

11

Church Context

This ministry project is taking place in First Baptist Church of Rockmart, Georgia, in which preaching has been a mainstay of church life.

Every pastor in the church's near-150-year history has been called out of consideration of their preaching ability, among other proficiencies.

Once called and installed, the pastor's responsibilities have included the primary preaching duties within the church.

12

Church Context

The church appreciates an expository approach to preaching, including going verse by verse.

The church gladly receives preaching series of various lengths so long as they are Bible-based. Expositing entire books of the Bible is the regular course of preaching in First Baptist Church.

In recent years, the church has maintained interest and enthusiasm for three relatively long series from Matthew (covering more than two years), Leviticus (covering nine months), and Genesis (currently in progress, slated to take a year and a half).

13

Church Context

Preaching occupies a central, climactic place in the regular worship service.

Preaching is a comparatively lengthy part of the service, typically taking up 40 to 50 percent of the time. (The sermon usually takes thirty to thirty-five minutes.)

Other elements of the service are supposed to revolve around, reflect, and reinforce the sermon's theme. This arrangement reflects the primacy of preaching in the history of First Baptist Church.

14

Church Context

The preacher has received seminary instruction in expository preaching, but most hearers have not.

Their discipleship has not included any formal instruction about how to listen to preaching; the church offers no such discipleship class. Consequently, hearers are left to intuit how to listen to a sermon.

Difficulties with understanding and applying the sermon could, at least partly, be due to a lack of knowing how to listen to it.

15

Church Context

Formal instruction in listening to a sermon could help address this discrepancy.

In the meantime, the absence of any such instruction leaves hearers to evaluate a sermon by various criteria, including its entertainment value.

Whatever size the congregation is, there could be several different standards at play for judging the sermon, some less helpful than others.

16

Rationale for the Project

17

Rationale for the Project

The strongest rationale for any project on preaching is preaching's indispensability to church life (see Acts 5:42; 2 Tim 4:2).

Preaching is integral to God's purpose for the church, and so it must be studied, sustained, and strengthened—no matter the church and how well the preaching there has been received.

This includes First Baptist Church of Rockmart.

18

Rationale for the Project

As a portion of the church's worship service, preaching is a form of worship. For one, the preacher worships by expositing Scripture and its implications.

At the same time, the person sitting and listening likewise worships, in their case by paying attention to the message, processing it, reflecting on it, affirming it, and resolving to apply it.

To listen well is to worship well.

19

Rationale for the Project

Hearing, such as during the preaching event, is crucial to a person's faith formation. To be specific, it is hearing with understanding that yields faith.

The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 could read Isaiah, but he did not immediately understand; understanding was a separate matter requiring Philip's help.

Instruction in sermon-listening, therefore, entails not merely how to listen but also how to understand.

20

Rationale for the Project

Application is catalytic for spiritual growth. A preacher preaches so that hearers will go and apply the message.

Instinctively, and even more so after they listen to so many sermons, hearers have some sense of the sermon's application.

The real test of their listening (not to mention their overall profession of faith) is their subsequent obedience. Put another way: Their obedience demonstrates whether they have listened.

21

Rationale for the Project

Members of First Baptist Church are typically positive when responding to the preaching.

But having never been trained in sermon-listening, and despite wanting to follow up, they might be reluctant to converse with the preacher about specifics of the sermon. Lacking confidence, then, they deny themselves an opportunity to learn more.

With some know-how on sermon-listening, though, they might grow comfortable dialoguing more deeply with the pastor afterward.

22

Purpose of the Project

23

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to train members of First Baptist Church of Rockmart, Georgia, in sermon-listening based on principles of expository preaching.

24

Goals of the Project

25

Goals of the Project

1. The first goal is to assess perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening among members of First Baptist Church.
2. The second goal is to develop curriculum on sermon-listening that is based on principles of expository preaching.
3. The third goal is to train members in sermon-listening by teaching the developed curriculum.

26

Research Methodology

27

Research Methodology

The first goal will be measured by administering the Sermon-Listening Inventory (SLI) to at least fifteen members. The SLI seeks information on church members' perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening.

The second goal will be measured by an expert panel that assesses the biblical soundness, scope, methodology, and applicability of the curriculum.

The third goal will be measured by administering the same SLI to measure change in perceptions of sermon-listening. Post-course survey results will then be compared to pre-course survey results.

28

Conclusion

29

Conclusion

A church's wellbeing and witness invariably depend on effective preaching. This calls not only for the preacher's best but the people's best.

In preaching, people give their best as they listen to the sermon attentively, i.e., expectantly, analytically, and applicationally.

This project aims, with God's help, to bring about better sermon-listening.

30

HEARING WITH UNDERSTANDING

The Sermon-Listening Course

31

Lesson 1 Recap

32

Lesson 1 Recap

Effective preaching lies not just with the preacher but also with hearers. Hearers are responsible for paying attention, processing the sermon's content, and applying its message.

33

Lesson 1 Recap

Preaching is worship. The preacher worships by expositing Scripture and its implications. At the same time, the person sitting and listening likewise worships by paying attention to the message, processing it, reflecting on it, affirming it, and resolving to apply it. To listen well is to worship well.

34

Lesson 1 Recap

A preacher preaches so that hearers will go and apply the message. The real test of their listening is their subsequent obedience. Their obedience demonstrates whether they have listened.

35

Lesson 1 Recap

Having never been trained in sermon-listening, and despite wanting to follow up, hearers might be reluctant to converse with the preacher about specifics of the sermon. Lacking confidence, they deny themselves an opportunity to learn more. With some know-how on sermon-listening, though, they might grow comfortable dialoguing more deeply with the pastor afterward.

36

Lesson 1 Recap

A church's wellbeing and witness depend on effective preaching. This calls not only for the preacher's best but hearers' best too. In preaching, hearers give their best as they listen to the sermon attentively, that is, expectantly, analytically, and applicationally.

37

LESSON 2

Introduction to Expository Preaching

38

Definition

39

Definition

Expository preaching conveys God's Word by explaining a biblical text and applying the text while relying on the Holy Spirit to persuade people of the text's truthfulness.

40

Definition

“Expository preaching conveys God’s Word . . .”

Expository preaching deals entirely and exclusively with God’s Word, the Bible.

This exclusive focus on the Bible sets the pathway and the guardrails for what ought (and ought not) to be preached.

41

Definition

“ . . . by explaining a biblical text . . .”

Expository preaching deals with a portion of the Bible because the text possesses God’s authority.

Expository preaching does not seek to impose an external meaning (the expositor’s own opinion) on the text but to show what the text says and means.

To get at the meaning, the expositor studies the context, which includes historical, grammatical, and literary aspects.

42

Definition

“ . . . and applying the text . . . ”

Here, the expositor connects the lesson from the text to the lives of contemporary hearers.

The goal is to stimulate their growth in Christian character.

Application is the natural and necessary conclusion to exposition.

43

Definition

“ . . . while relying on the Holy Spirit to persuade people of the text’s truthfulness.”

The expositor is dealing with the Spirit-inspired Word.

The Spirit who inspired the Word is still present to impart understanding of the Word and persuade hearers about its truthfulness.

The Spirit does this first for the expositor and then for the hearers.

44

Essential Components

45

Essential Components

A committed expositor is obligated to use a sermon structure that reflects what he believes expository preaching is.

Accordingly, I recognize the following essential components of an expository message: introduction, exposition, illustration, application, and conclusion.

46

Essential Components

The introduction aims to quickly accomplish several tasks: gaining people's attention, arousing their interest, raising a problem or need, introducing the text, and indicating the text's relevance to the problem just raised.

Like every other sermon component, the introduction is based on the biblical text being expounded.

47

Essential Components

After the introduction comes the exposition. This component, because it deals directly with the text, comprises the heart of the sermon.

As the label indicates, the exposition is concerned with expositing, or explaining, the given text.

Exposition includes identifying the main point, or big idea, of the text.

48

Essential Components

Illustration serves as an aid to exposition. The expositor highlights and explicates part of the text, such as a key term or the main point, using a story or image or another means.

Illustrations help to transform the abstract into the concrete, the ancient into the modern, the unfamiliar into the familiar, the general into the particular, the vague into the precise.

A helpful illustration leaves hearers with a clearer understanding of the text afterward.

49

Essential Components

Application might be interspersed among the exposition or presented afterward.

While exposition identifies the indicatives of the text, application identifies the consequent imperatives.

Application brings the text to bear upon life, envisioning realistic scenarios in which the text's truth would make a positive difference.

50

Essential Components

Like the introduction, the conclusion aims to accomplish several tasks quickly.

It recaps the lesson of the text at hand, exhorts hearers to live out what they have learned, reminds them of the grace that enables them to apply it, and imagines the eschatological terminus of the text and its application.

The conclusion does not aim to introduce any new material from the text at hand but to wrap up what has been presented.

51

Biblical and Theological Justification

52

Biblical and Theological Justification

As God's Word, the Bible possesses special qualities. First, it is divinely inspired (2 Tim 3:16–17; 2 Pet 1:19–21).

Second, it is inerrant, not containing any errors (2 Sam 7:28; Heb 6:18). Third, the Bible is authoritative, demonstrating and discharging God's right to reign and rule (Deut 6:17; Col 3:16).

Fourth, it is sufficient for knowing God and enjoying a right relationship with him (John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:15–17).

53

Biblical and Theological Justification

Along with its special qualities, God's Word performs special functions. It "is living and active" (Heb 4:12).

What God initially spoke long ago, he still speaks every time that his Word is read, re-presented, and proclaimed anew.

When God speaks, he is acting.

54

Biblical and Theological Justification

As God's Word acts and speaks, he accomplishes his will (Isa 55:10–11).

Redeeming people from sin is God's chief accomplishment with his Word. The gospel, as preserved and presented in the Bible, "is the power of God for salvation" (Rom 1:16).

When God's Word goes forth, it produces contrition and faith in people.

55

Biblical and Theological Justification

Because of what God's Word is (inspired, inerrant, authoritative, sufficient) and does (speaks and acts, accomplishes God's will, accomplishes salvation), Scripture naturally and necessarily obligates believers to proclaim it (2 Cor 4:13).

56

Biblical and Theological Justification

Jesus himself was a preacher (Mark 1:14, 38–39). After Jesus, and propelled by the Great Commission, the early church continued preaching.

Peter’s preaching was the catalyst for a mass conversion at Pentecost (Acts 2; cf. 5:42). Numerous disciples started traveling abroad and preaching (Acts 11:20).

Preaching was a regular activity in the early church.

57

Biblical and Theological Justification

As the chief contributor to the New Testament, Paul’s view on preaching reflects and epitomizes the early church’s view.

Paul was especially intent about pointing people to Jesus in his preaching: “Him we proclaim . . . that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28).

Paul instructed his protégé, Timothy, to “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2). Paul declared, “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16).

58

Biblical and Theological Justification

The three main New Testament Greek terms describing preaching are *euangelizomai* (occurs 54 times in the New Testament), *katangelo* (18), and *kerysso* (59).

These verbs typically refer to a public proclamation by a person of recognized authority.

Usually, the content of the proclamation is some aspect of Christ's person and work.

59

Biblical and Theological Justification

Scripture is the story of God's salvation plan, the center and climax of which is Christ.

Jesus himself declared that Scripture points to himself (Luke 24:27). Paul was likewise Christ-centered (1 Cor 1:22–24; 2:1–2; 2 Cor 4:4–6; Gal 6:14; Col 1:28–29).

Preaching, therefore, proclaims “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) while relating it textually, typologically, or contextually to Christ.

60

Biblical and Theological Justification

Through preaching, God is presented in his infinite attributes and his mighty works.

His weightiness and worthiness are front and center to behold and inspire people to praise.

Preaching glorifies God, displays God's glory, and invites more glory.

61

Biblical and Theological Justification

Because God's Word is life-changing, preaching seeks conversions (Rom 10:17).

After Peter preaches at Pentecost, "those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:40–41).

Preaching confronts people with their need for a savior and urges them to give their lives to him.

62

Biblical and Theological Justification

Preaching also sanctifies believers, helping them grow in their faith and align their lives with the holy position they now occupy before God in Christ.

Paul preached so “that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28–29; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

63

Practical Justification

64

Practical Justification

To close this section, I want to show that there is practical justification for expository preaching too.*

First, expository preaching is less likely to stray from Scripture. This is because expository preaching is based on God's Word, informed by God's Word, and vindicated by God's Word.

For expository preaching to stray from God's Word is to deny itself.

*The eight points of practical justification in this section are from Michael E. Pohlman, "Expository Preaching: Its Benefits," unpublished class notes for 80301 (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Summer Semester, 2021), 1-3.

65

Practical Justification

Second, expository preaching teaches people how to read their Bibles.

As the expositor returns to God's Word week after week, working through entire books and consecutive passages within those books, he models for hearers how to go through God's Word on their own.

They become expository Bible-readers.

66

Practical Justification

Third, expository preaching imbues the preacher with confidence and the sermon with authority.

The preacher is emboldened to take up and preach on hard topics. He does not step out and speak on his own; he is backed by the Bible.

The expositor rests in knowing that any argument is with God more so than with him.

67

Practical Justification

Fourth, expository preaching is relevant without being a slave to relevance.

Being a slave to relevance means cherry-picking texts, often to address people's felt needs. Conversely, being relevant means bringing God's Word to bear on people's lives.

Because expository preachers affirm the sufficiency of God's Word, they always aim to connect it to people's lives.

68

Practical Justification

Fifth, expository preaching compels the preacher to handle hard texts and topics.

Besides giving him confidence and authority to face such difficult matters, expository preaching obligates him to do so.

In good conscience, he cannot claim to be an expositor and duck the difficult biblical texts.

69

Practical Justification

Sixth, expository preaching introduces the congregation to the whole Bible.

As expositors proceed verse-by-verse through whole sections and books, hearers gradually gain a more complete grasp of God's Word.

This includes the more obscure passages and books that readers, even preachers, might want to avoid.

70

Practical Justification

Seventh, expository preaching helps preachers vary style and mood.

The Bible features different literary genres, even within a single book. Each genre displays a distinctive style and mood.

To accurately convey Scripture, expository preaching reflects the given text's style and mood during sermon development and, ultimately, delivery.

71

Practical Justification

Eighth, expository preaching frees preachers from agonizing every week about what text they will preach next.

Since they affirm that the whole Bible is God's Word, they can just take up the next text following the last one they preached because it is also God's Word.

This also saves preachers time from studying the text's background.

72

Conclusion

73

Conclusion

Expository preaching is biblically, theologically, and practically justified.

This finding indicates the importance of expository preaching for today.

Personally speaking from experience and reflection, I believe that expository preaching surpasses any other approach to preaching.

74

HEARING WITH UNDERSTANDING

The Sermon-Listening Course

75

Lesson 2 Recap

76

Lesson 2 Recap

Expository preaching conveys God's Word by explaining a biblical text and applying the text while relying on the Holy Spirit to persuade people of its truthfulness.

77

Lesson 2 Recap

The introduction aims to gain people's attention, arouse their interest, raise a problem or need, introduce the text, and indicate the text's relevance to the problem just raised. The exposition is concerned with expositing, or explaining, the biblical text. Illustration highlights and explicates part of the text, such as a key term or the main point, using a story or image or another means. Application brings the text to bear upon life, envisioning realistic scenarios in which the text's truth would make a positive difference. The conclusion recaps the lesson of the text at hand, exhorts hearers to live out what they have learned, reminds them of the grace that enables them to apply it, and imagines the eschatological endpoint of the text and its application.

78

Lesson 2 Recap

Because God's Word is inspired, living, active, life-changing, inerrant, authoritative, and entirely sufficient, and because God's Word speaks and acts, accomplishes God's will, and accomplishes salvation, believers are obligated to preach God's Word.

79

Lesson 2 Recap

Jesus himself was a preacher (Mark 1:14, 38–39). Preaching was a regular activity in the early church. Peter's preaching was the catalyst for a mass conversion at Pentecost. Numerous disciples started traveling abroad and preaching. Paul was intent about pointing people to Jesus in his preaching. Paul instructed his protégé, Timothy, to "preach the word" (2 Tim 4:2). Paul declared, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16).

80

Lesson 2 Recap

Preaching presents God in his infinite attributes and his mighty works. His weightiness and worthiness are front and center to behold and inspire people to praise. Preaching glorifies God, displays God's glory, and invites more glory.

81

Lesson 2 Recap

Expository preaching compels and emboldens the preacher to take up and preach on hard topics. In good conscience, he cannot claim to be an expositor and duck the difficult biblical texts. He is emboldened because he does not step out and speak on his own; he is backed by the Bible.

82

Lesson 2 Recap

Expository preaching introduces the congregation to the whole Bible. As expositors proceed verse-by-verse through whole sections and books, hearers gradually gain a more complete grasp of God's Word.

83

LESSON 3

The Preacher's Role and the Spirit's Role in Preaching

84

Introduction

85

Introduction

The preacher and the Holy Spirit both proclaim God's Word.

They carry out distinct, overlapping, weighty, and consequential roles in preaching.

This lesson will outline their respective roles and the implications.

86

Preacher's Role: Prayer

87

Preacher's Role: Prayer

Prayer is encouraged at all times and in all circumstances.

Paul tells the Ephesians to be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication” (Eph 6:18; Phil 4:6; 1 Thess 5:17).

Sermon development falls within this all-encompassing exhortation to pray. Preachers should pray while preparing their sermon.

88

Preacher's Role: Prayer

For Jesus, the early church, and Paul, prayer was preparatory for preaching.

Jesus prayed and then announced his intent to go and preach (Mark 1:35, 38).

The early church prayed and then “continued to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). Paul asked for prayer “that God may open to us a door . . . to declare the mystery of Christ” (Col 4:3).

89

Preacher's Role: Study

90

Preacher's Role: Study

Study is necessary:

- (1) because preachers are dealing with the divinely inspired Word (2 Tim 3:16),
- (2) so that preachers will be found “rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15), and
- (3) in order to obey the Word and teach it to others (Ezra 7:10).

91

Preacher's Role: Study

Scripture does not inspire mere study but toilsome study.

Paul extols “those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17). Paul tells Timothy to “immerse yourself in” his duty to communicate Scripture (1 Tim 4:13–16).

James endorses study by warning that “we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (Jas 3:1).

92

Preacher's Role: Mechanics

93

Preacher's Role: Mechanics

After developing the sermon, the preacher delivers it.

Sermon delivery is a matter of mechanics, i.e., physical movement and vocal modulation.

The Bible prescribes virtually nothing in terms of specific mechanics. Still, the Bible offers some general principles.

94

Preacher's Role: Mechanics

Whatever mechanics the preacher uses, they must help and not hinder hearers' reception of the message.

Paul says, "We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry" (2 Cor 6:3).

In preaching, an obstacle consists of movement or vocal modulation that distracts from and even contradicts the current message.

95

Preacher's Role: Mechanics

Mechanics that distract from the message can, unfortunately, draw hearers' attention to the messenger instead of the message.

This is tantamount to proclaiming oneself in place of Jesus (2 Cor 4:5).

Conversely, mechanics that dovetail with the message will draw attention to the message.

96

Preacher's Role: Manner

97

Preacher's Role: Manner

Along with mechanics, sermon delivery includes the preacher's manner.

The preacher's manner is his attitude about the message and the emotions he displays.

The preacher must consider what attitude and emotions fit the content of his message.

98

Preacher's Role: Manner

When appropriate, passion is permitted during sermon delivery.

Jeremiah explains his calling to proclaim God's Word as "a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jer 20:9).

Passion helps express urgency and adds to hearers' understanding of the text. It is disciplined and directed by the content of the text.

99

Preacher's Role: Manner

The early church proclaimed God's Word with boldness (Acts 4:29).

Paul was regularly noted for preaching and speaking "boldly" (Acts 9:28; 19:8; 28:31). At least once, Paul prayed specifically for boldness (Eph 6:19–20).

Present-day preachers should likewise preach with boldness characteristic of the early church.

100

Preacher's Role: Character

101

Preacher's Role: Character

As he preaches, the preacher invariably presents himself.

Stott says, "The practice of preaching cannot be divorced from the person of the preacher."*

As hearers consider the preacher's message (both content and delivery), they also factor his character into their consideration of the message.

* John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (1982; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 205.

102

Preacher's Role: Character

Character, specifically high character, is one of the qualifications of pastors outlined in Scripture.

To Timothy, Paul says, "Now the overseer is to be above reproach" (1 Tim 3:2; cf. Titus 1:7).

A high standard of character reflects the tremendous worth of God's kingdom, which pastors represent; God's Word, which pastors preach; and God's people, whose souls pastors shepherd.

103

Preacher's Role: Character

The pastor's character criterion appears in the same list as the teaching criterion, which suggests that the pastor's character impacts his ministry of the Word (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9).

Paul says, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching" (1 Tim 4:16; cf. Titus 2:7–8).

The preacher's integrity encourages hearers' belief and application of the sermon. His falseness undermines their belief and discourages spiritual growth.

104

Spirit's Role: Illumination

105

Spirit's Role: Illumination

As the preacher prays and studies, the Spirit illuminates his understanding.

The preacher needs the Spirit to help him understand God's Word because "no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:11; cf. 1 Cor 2:13).

The Spirit is able to illuminate because he is God and because he inspired Scripture (2 Tim 3:16).

106

Spirit's Role: Illumination

The preacher can count on the Spirit to help him understand Scripture.

The psalmist cries, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Ps 119:18). Paul calls him "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" (Eph 1:17).

The Spirit has come to help. As the preacher studies, the Spirit rewards his effort with understanding.

107

Spirit's Role: Anointing

108

Spirit's Role: Anointing

When he preaches, the preacher receives special aid.

Vines and Dooley explain that “the Holy Spirit will aid us as we seek to accurately and passionately preach the Word He inspired to the blessing of those who hear us.”*

This special aid is known as “anointing.”

* Jerry Vines and Adam B. Dooley, *Passion in the Pulpit: How to Exegete the Emotion of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 149.

109

Spirit's Role: Anointing

The Spirit's anointing gives preaching its power. Jesus, quoting Isaiah, said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news” (Luke 4:18; cf. Isa 61:1).

Members of the early church were “filled with the Holy Spirit” as they continued speaking God's Word (Acts 4:31). Likewise, Paul says that “my speech and my message were . . . in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:4; cf. 1 Thess 1:5).

While the Spirit's illumination aids the preacher's study, his anointing aids his proclamation.

110

Spirit's Role: Persuading

111

Spirit's Role: Persuading

While the preacher preaches, the Spirit persuades hearers.

Jesus says that the Spirit “will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment . . .” (John 16:8). Paul says that “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3).

Due to the Spirit’s persuasive presence, “preachers don’t have to resort to arm-twisting, guilt-tripping, and manipulating shenanigans.”* The Spirit does the heavy lifting required to move people from apathy to faith.

* Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 116.

112

Spirit's Role: Persuading

To persuade, the Spirit opens hearers' hearts and minds. He "opened [Lydia's] heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14).

Paul prayed that believers would gain wisdom and knowledge by "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened" (Eph 1:17–18).

Hearers need God to help them receive and believe the truth.

113

Conclusion

114

Conclusion

The preacher and the Spirit carry out distinct, overlapping, weighty, and consequential roles in preaching.

Sometimes, their roles complement each other. One example is the preacher's study and the Spirit's illumination.

Another example is the preacher's passion and the Spirit's anointing.

115

HEARING WITH UNDERSTANDING

The Sermon-Listening Course

116

Lesson 3 Recap

117

Lesson 3 Recap

The preacher's role in sermon development and delivery consists of praying over the message, studying the text deeply, employing delivery mechanics and a manner of speaking that amplify the message (rather than distract from it), and cultivating integrity of character.

118

Lesson 3 Recap

As hearers consider the preacher's message, they also factor his character into their judgment of the message. Character is one of the qualifications of pastors listed in Scripture. The preacher's integrity encourages hearers' belief and application of the sermon. Conversely, his falseness undermines their belief and discourages spiritual growth.

119

Lesson 3 Recap

The Holy Spirit's role in sermon development and delivery includes illuminating the preacher's understanding of the text, anointing him with spiritual power to proclaim, and persuading hearers to believe his message.

120

Lesson 3 Recap

Because of the Spirit's presence and participation in preaching, preachers don't have to employ manipulative tactics to convince hearers of the message. The Spirit himself does the heavy lifting required to move people from apathy to faith.

121

LESSON 4

Biblical-Theological Basis for Sermon-Listening

122

Introduction

123

Introduction

The Bible teaches that listening (or hearing) is instrumental for salvation and spiritual growth.

Exegesis of multiple and diverse biblical texts supports this thesis.

124

Nehemiah 8:1–12

125

Nehemiah 8:1–12

The Bible teaches that listening (or hearing) is instrumental for salvation and spiritual growth.

An exegesis of Nehemiah 8:1–12 supports this thesis by explaining that listening to God’s Word, attentively so, leads to understanding, repentance, rejoicing, and life-change.

126

Nehemiah 8:1–12

¹ And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uria, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand.

127

Nehemiah 8:1–12

⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

128

Nehemiah 8:1–12

⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our LORD. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” ¹¹ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” ¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

129

Nehemiah 8:1–12

As the text indicates, hearing is a natural and necessary part of the process that leads to their understanding and rejoicing.

Verse 2 refers to “all who could understand what they heard.”
Verse 3 mentions “the ears of all the people,” which denotes their hearing.

Verse 9 explains that the people wept “as they heard.”

130

Nehemiah 8:1–12

The importance of listening is indicated by how many times it is mentioned.

Three times explicitly and twice implicitly, the people “heard” God’s Word.

If they do not listen, then there will be no basis for the Levites’ explanation, for the people’s understanding, and for their response. Before anything else, they must hear and listen.

131

Nehemiah 8:1–12

The story gives many signs of the people’s attentiveness.

Verse 1 suggests this when it says that they “gathered as one man.” Verse 3 says that the people, via their listening, “were attentive.”

It is likewise indicated when verse 6 says that “all the people stood” as Ezra opens the scroll. Their attentiveness prepares them to listen.

132

Nehemiah 8:1–12

The listening depicted here is an intentional, full-bodied discipline.

In Nehemiah 8, the people assemble, call for God’s Word, respond to the blessing, and stay in place for the Levites’ explanation.

Besides their ears, their voices and bodies are engaged too. All this external action strongly suggests that their minds and hearts within are engaged.

133

Nehemiah 8:1–12

Ultimately, the people show that they have been listening attentively to God’s Word by understanding and responding.

Verses 2 and 3 make clear that those listening were those “who could understand.” Verse 7 states that the Levites helped them “to understand.”

Verses 8 and 12 confirm that “the people understood” and that “they had understood.”

134

Nehemiah 8:1–12

As reported in verses 9, 10, and 11, the people’s reaction upon hearing and understanding God’s Word is to “mourn” and “weep” (v. 9).

Verse 12 says that they started “rejoicing.” Their joy overflowed in charity (v. 10).

These various, God-honoring responses were the outcome of a process that began with their attentive listening to God’s Word.

135

Nehemiah 8:1–12

The narrative shows several signs of spiritual growth from the people as they heard God’s Word. First, they understood God’s Word, up to and including the implications for their personal lives.

Next, they mourned and wept. Then they rejoiced.

They also displayed charity. Their relationship with God had changed, deepened, and improved.

136

Nehemiah 8:1–12

Listening that leads to spiritual growth is attentive listening.

This involves planning to listen, assuming a posture conducive to listening, vocally indicating willingness to hear and listen, receiving follow-up explanation, and responding in ways consistent with what was heard.

These various behaviors shape and show attentive listening to God's Word.

137

Matthew 13:13–23

138

Matthew 13:13–23

The Bible teaches that listening (or hearing) is instrumental for salvation and spiritual growth.

An exegesis of Matthew 13:13–23 supports this thesis by explaining that hearing with understanding results in spiritual fruitfulness and that hearing without understanding results in spiritual barrenness.

139

Matthew 13:13–23

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” ¹¹ And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

140

Matthew 13:13–23

¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” ¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ ¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

141

Matthew 13:13–23

¹⁸ “Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

142

Matthew 13:13–23

As Jesus explains why he speaks in parables, he makes multiple references to hearing, or listening. He tells his disciples that he speaks in parables “because . . . hearing they do not hear” (v. 13).

The Isaiah passage that Jesus cites contains references to those who “indeed hear” (v. 14), “barely hear” (v. 15), and “hear with their ears” (v. 15).

Jesus pronounces a blessing specifically on his disciples’ “ears, for they hear” (v. 16).

143

Matthew 13:13–23

But there is more to hearing than registering words. When Jesus states in verse 13 that some people “do not hear” by parables, he clarifies: “nor do they understand.”

The Isaiah text that he quotes declares, “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive” (v. 14; cf. Isa 6:9).

To Jesus, hearing entails understanding.

144

Matthew 13:13–23

Their status as Jesus' disciples predisposes them to understand the message.

Those who possess prior kingdom insight are favored with further insight.

If a "dull" heart prevents understanding (v. 15; cf. Isa 6:10), then it follows that a heart energized by devotion aids understanding.

145

Matthew 13:13 –23

The first scenario, seeds scattered on the path, represents those who hear the kingdom message but do not let the truth penetrate.

The second scenario, featuring rocky ground, represents a superficial hearer who lacks depth. Hardship reveals that he is just a fair-weather follower. The third scenario, seeds scattered among thorns, represents worries about worldly things or devotion to wealth that snuff out spiritual life.

Finally, in the fourth scenario, someone receives the word, understands it, and acts on it. The result is that he bears fruit.

146

Matthew 13:13–23

Hearing, or listening, figures prominently in this passage. In verse 18, Jesus bids his disciples to “hear” the ensuing interpretation of the parable.

Then, as the interpretation unfolds Jesus reveals that each of the four types of soil stands for someone who “hears the word” (vv. 19, 20, 22, 23).

Hearing is what leads to their responses.

147

Matthew 13:13–23

Jesus’ interpretation of the parable indicates some conditions for understanding. If the devil’s thievery closes the door to understanding, this suggests that guarding oneself from his influence leads to understanding.

If the message fails to take root due to shallowness, this suggests that deeper spirituality leads to understanding.

If the message is choked out by worries and wealth, this suggests that freedom from them leads to understanding.

148

Matthew 13:13–23

In the parable of the sower, the person who hears and understands subsequently changes.

He develops and produces spiritual fruit in keeping with his enhanced understanding.

On the other hand, the person who hears but does not understand does not change. He does not develop and produce spiritual fruit. Instead, he displays rebelliousness and spiritual barrenness.

149

Matthew 13:13–23

Several factors, as Jesus indicates, may contribute to hearing with understanding: an active and ongoing commitment to God, previous kingdom insight to build upon, a spiritually invigorated heart, a guarded heart, a deeper spirituality that is resistant to trouble and persecution, and freedom from entanglements with worry and wealth.

150

Romans 10:14–17

151

Romans 10:14–17

The Bible teaches that listening (or hearing) is instrumental for salvation and spiritual growth.

An exegesis of Romans 10:14–17 supports this thesis by explaining that listening to preaching is how people hear the gospel and come to faith.

152

Romans 10:14–17

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

153

Romans 10:14–17

Of the five times hearing is mentioned, three times it is linked with believing or having faith (vv. 14, 16, 17).

Of the other two times hearing is mentioned, both times it is linked with preaching (vv. 14, 17).

Hearing is the link between preaching and believing the gospel.

154

Romans 10:14–17

Hearing plays a role in cultivating people's faith.

Isaiah, as quoted by Paul, affirms the natural and indispensable part that hearing plays in belief (v. 16; cf. Isa 53:1).

For someone to believe the gospel and put their faith in Jesus, they must first hear it.

155

Romans 10:14–17

For Paul, believing entails obeying.

This relationship between faith and obedience further illuminates the link between hearing and believing.

Hearing leads not to mere faith but to faith expressing itself in obedience.

156

Romans 10:14–17

According to Paul’s rhetorical questions, those who hear and believe subsequently “call on him [Jesus]” (v. 14). This kind of calling is a profession of faith.

Calling upon Jesus for salvation is the ultimate outcome of the process, a process that invariably includes hearing.

Ideally, the one who hears then believes and asks to be saved.

157

Romans 10:14–17

Not all who hear believe and call on Jesus to save them.

Right after Paul’s rhetorical questions, he admits, “But they have not all obeyed the gospel” (v. 16).

Apparently, hearing leads to believing but does not ensure it. Some people hear but do not believe.

158

Romans 10:14–17

According to verse 17, hearing that leads to faith comes “through the word of Christ.”

It must be the gospel that people hear if they are going to believe and call out for salvation.

Hearers will see their need to be saved and call out to Jesus as they listen to a message based exclusively on the gospel.

159

Conclusion

160

Conclusion

Exegesis of Nehemiah 8:1–12, Matthew 13:13–23, and Romans 10:14–17 offers a biblical basis for the claim that listening (or hearing) is instrumental for salvation and spiritual growth.

In each of the three texts, listening is an intermediate step.

Each text reveals one or more factors that enhance attentiveness, receptivity, and understanding while listening.

161

HEARING WITH UNDERSTANDING

The Sermon-Listening Course

162

Lesson 4 Recap

163

Lesson 4 Recap

In Nehemiah 8:1–12, the people demonstrate attentive listening by planning to listen, assuming a posture conducive to listening, vocally indicating willingness to hear and listen, receiving follow-up explanation, and responding in ways consistent with what was heard.

164

Lesson 4 Recap

Matthew 13:13–23 indicates several factors that enable hearing with understanding: an active and ongoing commitment to God, previous kingdom insight to build upon, a spiritually invigorated heart, a guarded heart, a deeper spirituality that is resistant to trouble and persecution, and freedom from entanglements with worry and wealth.

165

Lesson 4 Recap

Romans 10:14–17 explains that listening to preaching is how people hear the gospel and come to faith.

166

LESSON 5

Before Listening: Attitude of Expectancy

167

Introduction

168

Introduction

Sermon-listening involves more than just hearing the message with auditory faculties.

It is a discipline that requires an attitude of expectancy, analysis of the content, and application of the lesson.

169

Introduction

An attitude of expectancy believes that God speaks through the preaching of his Word and so prepares listeners to be attentive to it.

Consequently, listeners perform a number of exercises before the sermon. These exercises help them to be receptive to the sermon.

These exercises include: praying, reading, scheduling, focusing, and worshiping.

170

Praying

171

Praying

Praying is a prevalent pre-sermon exercise. Listeners should pray with at least three different persons in mind.

First, they should pray for the preacher.

There are at least three ways for listeners to pray for the preacher leading up to the sermon:

- (1) his study during the week,
- (2) his delivery during the sermon,
- and (3) his personal integrity in his life.

172

Praying

While praying for the preacher's study, delivery, and integrity, thoughtful listeners should pray for the Holy Spirit's anointing upon him.

Such anointing will benefit listeners' sermon-listening experience as the preacher proclaims with a heightened clarity and conviction.

173

Praying

Second, as listeners prepare to listen they should pray for themselves.

They should pray for

- (1) a heart ready to receive the sermon and learn from it,
- (2) cognitive and affective illumination to understand the sermon, and
- (3) obedience and life-change.

Like with the preacher, listeners should pray for the Spirit's help to accomplish all this.

174

Praying

Third, as listeners prepare to listen they should pray for their fellow listeners.

The ways that listeners pray for themselves apply to their fellow listeners: receptiveness, understanding, submissiveness, life-change, the Spirit's aid, etc.

Overall, they should be praying for the salvation of sinners as well as the encouragement of saints.

175

Reading

176

Reading

Besides praying, expectant listeners should also read the upcoming sermon text. The text might be published in some form of church media, such as the bulletin.

Listeners can also approach the preacher and ask for the text.

If the preacher is currently preaching through a book of the Bible, listeners can infer the next preaching passage.

177

Reading

While reading the text, expectant listeners ask questions of the text they have just read.

The answers help shape their preliminary understanding.

178

Reading

Ramey suggests four questions:

- (1) “What did I learn?”
- (2) “Where do I fall short?”
- (3) “What do I need to do about it?”
- (4) “How can I make this a consistent part of my life?”*

*Ken Ramey, *Expository Listening: A Handbook for Hearing and Doing God’s Word* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress, 2010), 38–39.

179

Reading

Schlafer suggests six questions:

- “1. What are the primary images which these Scriptures depict? How do the Scriptures appeal directly to the senses of the hearing community?
2. What actions are going on in the texts? Who is doing what, for or to whom? How do these actions pick up from verses prior to the reading? How are the actions picked up in verses that follow it?
3. What messages are being delivered? What concepts are explained? What complex issues are struggled with?
4. How do the readings carry forward or contrast with ideas that have been the subject of lessons in previous weeks? . . .
5. What echoes do you hear of issues and questions that are alive in your parish, in the news, in your own personal experience?
6. What hard questions, infuriating pronouncements do the texts present—the sorts of things that make you say: ‘I’ll bet the preacher won’t touch that with a ten-foot pole, but I sure would like to hear *someone* take that on in a sermon someday!’”*

*David J. Schlafer, *Surviving the Sermon: A Guide to Preaching for Those Who Have to Listen* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1992), 99–100.

180

Reading

Strain likewise suggests six questions:

- “(1) What in it is difficult to understand?
- (2) How does it fit with what precedes and follows it?
- (3) What is its central idea?
- (4) What does it say about God the Father, Son, or Spirit?
- (5) What about sin and grace?
- (6) How does it challenge or comfort or encourage you?”*

*David Strain, *Expository Preaching* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021), 96.

181

Reading

Besides the advance learning that is taking place, reading in advance stokes listeners’ anticipation to hear the text expounded in the sermon.

During the sermon, the answers to these preliminary questions will be confirmed or corrected by the exposition.

182

Scheduling

183

Scheduling

A third factor impacting listeners' expectancy is scheduling.

Expectant listeners schedule around the upcoming worship service and, in particular, the sermon-listening experience.

They prioritize and safeguard the service and the sermon.

184

Scheduling

Scheduling with Sunday in mind includes giving attention to Saturday evening. Listeners should get a good night's rest on Saturday night.

They should also consider, as part of a restful Saturday night, turning off worldly entertainment, such as television, and reading Scripture instead.

Adequate rest leaves listeners' minds alert, not dull, for Sunday.

185

Focusing

186

Focusing

A fourth factor contributing to listeners' expectancy is focusing. Listeners focus as they concentrate on God's voice speaking to them.

They are mindful and moved that God will be addressing them through his Word. As a function of focusing on God, they are focused on his Word.

Focusing is a conscious, voluntary, sustained exertion for listeners.

187

Focusing

As listeners enter the sanctuary for the service, they focus by becoming physically still. The physical stillness helps to quiet their minds and turn their attention to the preached Word.

Furthermore, listeners may achieve focus by reducing or eliminating distractions.

To literally put distractions behind them, listeners should sit close to the front.

188

Worshiping

189

Worshiping

Worshiping before the sermon also helps focus listeners for the preaching.

Singing as part of the worship service directs listeners' attention to God, which is where it needs to be during the upcoming sermon.

190

Worshiping

Other elements can fix listeners' focus and stoke expectancy for the sermon too.

These elements include prayers, Scripture readings, collection of tithes and offerings, and instrumental music.

So long as these elements direct listeners' attention to God and help them set their affections on God, they prepare listeners for an optimal sermon-listening experience.

191

Worshiping

From the pre-service music to the free moments, whatever invites listeners to focus on God is beneficial for when they listen to the sermon.

Such an order of service, when it generates worship from listeners' hearts, predisposes them to give attention and receive God's Word preached to them.

God-centered worship produces expectant listeners.

192

Conclusion

193

Conclusion

Praying, reading, scheduling, focusing, and worshiping all help to prepare expectant listeners.

These disciplines also reflect listeners' personal and ongoing responsibility to prepare to listen to the sermon.

While working out their grace-based salvation, listeners are specifically enabled and compelled by grace to prepare to listen to sermons.

194

HEARING WITH UNDERSTANDING

The Sermon-Listening Course

195

Lesson 5 Recap

196

Lesson 5 Recap

For the preacher, listeners should pray for his study during the week, his delivery during the sermon, and his personal integrity in his life. For other listeners and themselves, listeners should pray for receptiveness, understanding, submissiveness, life-change, and the Spirit's aid.

197

Lesson 5 Recap

Reading the sermon text in advance gives listeners a preliminary understanding and stokes listeners' anticipation to hear the text expounded in the sermon.

198

Lesson 5 Recap

Expectant listeners schedule around the upcoming worship service and, in particular, the sermon-listening experience. They prioritize and safeguard the service and the sermon.

199

Lesson 5 Recap

Listeners focus as they concentrate on God's voice speaking to them. They are mindful and moved that God will be addressing them through his Word. As a function of focusing on God, they are focused on his Word.

200

Lesson 5 Recap

Worshipping before the sermon also helps focus listeners for the preaching. Singing as part of the worship service directs listeners' attention to God, which is where it needs to be during the upcoming sermon. Other elements can fix listeners' focus and stoke expectancy for the sermon too, including Scripture readings, collection of tithes and offerings, and instrumental music.

201

LESSON 6

While Listening: Analysis of Content

202

Introduction

203

Introduction

Analysis of the content attunes listeners to the sermon's progress and organizes what they hear to understand the message.

This stage, which corresponds to the delivery of the sermon, is when actual sermon-listening happens.

Analysis involves hard work, note-taking, identifying main sections, asking questions, reviewing, and summarizing the sermon.

204

Hard Work

205

Hard Work

Listeners, says Berry, “are expected to work with the preacher to grasp the sermon’s central message. This is often hard work, and it requires serious attention.”*

Bergmeier explains sermon analysis in terms of “holy sweat” and listening “energetically.”**

The etymology of the word *attend* implies active listening.

* Donald L. Berry, *How to Listen to a Sermon: With “Honoring the Gospel” and Other Homilies for the Sake of Heaven* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011), 9.

** Thadeus L. Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny Listen: Taking Full Advantage of the Sermons We Hear* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 80–82.

206

Hard Work

While working hard to analyze the sermon, listeners rely on the Holy Spirit to help them.

Since sermons deal with things of God, God himself must assist listeners in their sermon analysis.

His illumination compensates for listeners' sin-impaired nature so that they can listen, think, and discern clearly.

207

Note-taking

208

Note-taking

Some listeners take notes. Note-taking enables listeners to concentrate on the message.

Note-taking also helps them review and remember the content and organize it in a way that enhances recall and application.

They might even improve upon the message as they organize their notes, cutting out extraneous content and clarifying main points.

209

Note-taking

Listeners are not trying to record the message verbatim but to set down the main ideas.

Note-taking is counterproductive when listeners try to write down every word.

When note-taking becomes an end in itself, listeners are not experiencing God in the sermon; their attention is diverted and their affection inhibited.

210

Identifying the Main Sections

211

Identifying the Main Sections

Instead of merely and instinctively listening for main ideas, familiarity with the sermon's main sections offers a more precise, dependable guide for listeners to follow the sermon, take thoughtful notes, and begin analyzing the content.

In general, there are five main sections: introduction, exposition, illustration, application, and conclusion.

212

Identifying the Main Sections

Among the five sections, exposition is foundational.

Exposition is the explanation of the biblical text at hand.

Listeners will recognize this section as the preacher attempts to help them understand what the text says and what it means by what it says.

213

Identifying the Main Sections

At appropriate junctures, illustration either clarifies aspects of the text, convinces listeners of the explanation, makes the text's meaning more vivid, or captivates listeners' attention.

Types of illustration include stories, personal testimonies, statistics, quotes, definitions, and visuals.

214

Identifying the Main Sections

With or without the assistance of illustrations, exposition of the text leads to its application.

Application relates the implications of the text that was expounded earlier in the sermon.

This section is characterized by the preacher's instructions and exhortations to implement the lesson from the text.

215

Identifying the Main Sections

The introduction and conclusion, the other two main sections of the sermon, bracket the sermon at both ends.

Besides its location at the start of the sermon, the introduction is characterized by two principal features: (1) introducing the sermon's subject and (2) garnering listeners' interest in it.

216

Identifying the Main Sections

The conclusion is characterized by a summary of the sermon's message, one last challenge for listeners to apply the message, a sense of having reached the summit of thought and emotion, and a clear impression of closing.

217

Asking Questions

218

Asking Questions

Upon distinguishing the main sections of the sermon, listeners may delve even deeper in their analysis by asking various questions.

With these questions, they aim to identify some details of the message that will clarify their comprehension of the whole.

219

Asking Questions

Strain suggests the following “good questions” to ask while listening to the sermon:

- “(1) What is the main point of the sermon, and is it the same as the main point of the text?
- (2) What are his subpoints, and do they contribute to his main point?
- (3) What unanswered theological or practical questions did the sermon raise for you?
- (4) How did he apply the passage?
- (5) What difference should this message make in your life, in your marriage, in your parenting, in your business dealings?”*

* David Strain, *Expository Preaching* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021), 101.

220

Asking Questions

Bergmeier prompts listeners to search for “the principle thought” (of the exposition), the “purpose of the illustrations,” and the “practice of application.”*

Beeke says to identify the truths God wants listeners to believe, how God wants listeners to be different after hearing the sermon, and how God wants them to put the truths they have learned into practice.**

*Thadeus L. Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny Listen: Taking Full Advantage of the Sermons We Hear* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 92–93.

**Joel R. Beeke, *The Family at Church: Listening to Sermons and Attending Prayer Meetings* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 20–21.

221

Asking Questions

Van Harn recommends completing four statements related to the sermon:

- “1. The sermon was about . . .
2. The sermon enabled me to believe that . . .
3. The sermon asked that I . . .
4. The sermon made me feel . . .”*

*Roger E. Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 138.

222

Asking Questions

Besides querying the sermon, listeners can also listen and look for clues within the sermon.

Such clues include content clues as well as verbal and visual clues from the preacher's delivery.

223

Asking Questions

Content clues include repeated words or phrases, the punchline to a story, or a recurring theme.

The sermon's opening sentences usually provide hints about the main ideas to come.

The closing sentences might simply state the overall point.

224

Asking Questions

Verbal clues include the preacher's tone of voice.

A firm tone, for example, underscores the thrust of the argument that the preacher is making.

225

Asking Questions

As for the clues listeners look for, these are visual cues consisting of the preacher's facial expressions, hand gestures, and other motions.

The preacher's general posture and eye contact are other potentially helpful visual cues.

226

Reviewing

227

Reviewing

Adams insists that “proper listening does not end with the closing words of the sermon but extends to work done after the preaching event.”*

The Bereans of Acts 17 exemplify sermon review.

The Bereans were called “noble” for listening to Paul and Silas’s message and then “examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

* Jay Adams, *Be Careful How You Listen: How to Get the Most Out of a Sermon* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 76.

228

Reviewing

There are multiple ways of reviewing the sermon. For one, listeners can look over their sermon notes, reorganize them as needed, and ask any analytical questions.

They can check what they heard against the biblical text.

Listeners can also converse with the preacher, other church leaders, or fellow listeners to clarify some part of the sermon.

229

Summarizing

230

Summarizing

After hearing the sermon, listeners ought to try to summarize the message in one or two sentences.

The notes they have taken can aid them in composing this summary. So can the analytical questions they ask.

After composing their summary, listeners should check it against their notes and/or questions to confirm accuracy.

231

Summarizing

With a one- or two-sentence summary, listeners give themselves a short, portable form of the sermon that they can readily recall in the future.

Recall is more likely when listeners use clear, concise, creative, memorable wording.

Thinking about explaining the message to someone who was not on hand to hear it themselves can help with composing the summary.

232

Conclusion

233

Conclusion

Listeners who do the hard work of analysis, up to and including taking notes, tracking the sermon's main sections, asking questions of the sermon, following up with others, and summarizing demonstrate teachability.

They also display longing to make progress in their Christian life and willingness to work at it.

They are primed to apply what they learn from their analysis.

234

HEARING WITH UNDERSTANDING

The Sermon-Listening Course

235

Lesson 6 Recap

236

Lesson 6 Recap

Listeners, says Berry, “are expected to work with the preacher to grasp the sermon’s central message. This is often hard work, and it requires serious attention.” Bergmeier explains sermon analysis in terms of “holy sweat” and listening “energetically.”

237

Lesson 6 Recap

Note-taking enables listeners to concentrate on the message. Note-taking also helps them review and remember the content and organize it in a way that enhances recall and application.

238

Lesson 6 Recap

Familiarity with the sermon's main sections offers a more precise, dependable guide for listeners to follow the sermon, take thoughtful notes, and begin analyzing the content. In general, there are five main sections: introduction, exposition, illustration, application, and conclusion.

239

Lesson 6 Recap

Listeners may delve even deeper in their analysis by asking various questions. With these questions, they aim to identify some details of the message that will clarify their comprehension of the whole.

240

Lesson 6 Recap

There are multiple ways of reviewing the sermon. For one, listeners can look over their sermon notes, reorganize them as needed, and ask any analytical questions. They can check what they heard against the biblical text.

241

Lesson 6 Recap

After hearing the sermon, listeners ought to try to summarize the message in one or two sentences. Recall is more likely when listeners use clear, concise, creative, memorable wording.

242

LESSON 7

After Listening: Application of the Lesson

243

Introduction

244

Introduction

Application of the sermon's lesson puts the proclaimed Word into practice.

Application completes the sermon-listening process and confirms that listening has occurred.

Application involves praying, repenting, asking questions, planning, and demonstrating urgency.

245

Praying

246

Praying

Prayer, which fuels anticipation of the sermon, also facilitates application.

The reason for praying remains the same as at the beginning: accessing the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is the source of power that enables listeners to apply what they learned from the sermon. Only with the Spirit's help can listeners succeed in applying the sermon.

247

Praying

There are specific requests that listeners can submit when praying about application:

- (1) help to obey God's Word,
- (2) a desire to repent of the sin that the sermon has brought to their attention,
- (3) praise for what has been revealed to them from God's Word,
- (4) gratitude to God for teaching them from his Word, and
- (5) how to live out what they learned.

248

Repenting

249

Repenting

Ash says, “Every time the Bible is preached, we ought to repent.”*

To repent means to turn from a previous way of life.

While determining proper application of the sermon, listeners recognize where they have fallen short in faithful living. The way in which listeners have fallen short is the point at which they are to repent.

*Christopher Ash, *Listen Up! A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2009), 22.

250

Repenting

Demonstrating new behavior might take time.

Repentance, however, because it involves a change in listeners' attitude about their prior behavior, is a step they can undertake at once.

It is the immediate decision by listeners, as immediate as the end of the sermon, to change accordingly.

251

Asking Questions

252

Asking Questions

Ideally, while delivering the sermon the preacher will give practical steps for application.

This will save listeners both time and effort to determine the application for themselves, especially if listeners took notes.

Still, listeners may utilize applicational questions to confirm their understanding of what the preacher has proffered for application.

253

Asking Questions

To identify the proper application, listeners can ask questions of the sermon.

Adams proposes the following questions:

- “1. How does God want me to change (beliefs/actions)?
2. How must I bring about the change?
3. What is the first step?
4. Where and when should I begin?”*

*Jay Adams, *Be Careful How You Listen: How to Get the Most Out of a Sermon* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 104.

254

Asking Questions

Bergmeier proposes the following questions,

“First, how does this truth help me control that which controls me? . . .

Second, how does this truth help me show compassion to the helpless? . . .

Third, how does this truth help me keep myself unstained by the world?”*

*Thadeus L. Bergmeier, *Helping Johnny Listen: Taking Full Advantage of the Sermons We Hear* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 115–122.

255

Planning

256

Planning

Any questions that listeners pose enable them to plan the application.

They think about application in order to plan application, which leads to purposeful application.

Purposeful application entails an action plan that helps listeners to implement what they have learned from God's Word.

257

Planning

Forming an action plan for application calls for specificity.

This is what the applicational questions are getting at: specificity. Listeners ought to plan for how, what, where, when, and with whom to put the sermon's message into practice.

As the specifics materialize, listeners will have the makings of the action plan required for purposeful application.

258

Planning

As listeners plan for application, they might identify several options. This does not mean they should apply them all.

Anyabwile says, “Choose one or two particular applications from the Scripture and prayerfully put them into practice over the coming week.”*

This strategy relieves pressure, enhances focus, and presents realistic goals.

*Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 24.

259

Demonstrating Urgency

260

Demonstrating Urgency

Whichever option listeners choose, application must happen as soon as possible.

This urgency derives from the nature of preaching, for preaching bears God's "living and active" Word (Heb 4:12).

The only response appropriate to a proclamation from the king is a prompt response; a slow response suggests half-hearted commitment on listeners' part.

261

Demonstrating Urgency

Responding with urgency is also necessary due to the spiritual conflict taking place around preaching.

Ash warns, "Every time we listen to a sermon, the devil will whisper in our ear: 'That was good stuff. Why not do something about it tomorrow?'"*

The devil is delighted in listeners who put off until later what they ought to apply at once.

* Christopher Ash, *Listen Up! A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2009), 22–23.

262

Conclusion

263

Conclusion

While actual listening happens during the sermon delivery, complete listening requires application.

By praying, repenting, asking questions, planning, and showing urgency, listeners begin to transform what they heard to how they live.

Because listening is for life-change, only by this point can it be confirmed that listeners have truly listened.

264

Lesson 7 Recap

265

Lesson 7 Recap

There are specific requests that listeners can submit when praying about application: (1) help to obey God's Word, (2) a desire to repent of the sin that the sermon has brought to their attention, (3) praise for what has been revealed to them from God's Word, (4) gratitude to God for teaching them from his Word, and (5) how to live out what they learned.

266

Lesson 7 Recap

While determining proper application of the sermon, listeners recognize where they have fallen short in faithful living. The way in which listeners have fallen short is the point at which they are to repent.

267

Lesson 7 Recap

Adams proposes the following applicational questions: “1. How does God want me to change (beliefs/actions)? 2. How must I bring about the change? 3. What is the first step? 4. Where and when should I begin?”

268

Lesson 7 Recap

Purposeful application entails an action plan that helps listeners to implement what they have learned from God's Word. Forming an action plan for application calls for specificity.

269

Lesson 7 Recap

The only response appropriate to a proclamation from the king is a prompt response; a slow response suggests half-hearted commitment on listeners' part. The devil is delighted in listeners who put off until later what they ought to apply at once.

270

APPENDIX 4
EXPERT PANEL FEEDBACK

The expert panel tasked with reviewing and approving the sermon-listening curriculum included three members. Weeks 11, 12, and 13 of the implementation phase were dedicated to distributing the curriculum to panel members; allowing them time to review the curriculum, register their scores, and return it to the facilitator; and reviewing their scores. Overall, the expert panel's aggregate score placed the curriculum between "sufficient" and "exemplary." This satisfied the requirement that at least 90 percent of the panel's cumulative scoring meet or exceed "sufficient" for the curriculum to proceed.

Name of Evaluator: Panel Member 1

Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Soundness					
The curriculum exhibits sound exegesis.				X	
The curriculum exhibits sound theology.				X	
Scope					
The content of each lesson covers the particular issue it is designed to address.				X	
As a whole, the curriculum offers a sufficient lay-level primer on sermon-listening.				X	
Methodology					
Each lesson presents a main point and supporting points.				X	
The overall order of lessons is clear and logical.				X	
Applicability					
By the end, participants will better appreciate what goes into preaching.				X	
By the end, participants will know how to productively listen to sermons.				X	

Comments: This document shows hard work. It is clear, concise, and thoroughly thought out. Excellent composition and practical application. This work is worthy of publication.

Name of Evaluator: Panel Member 2

Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Soundness					
The curriculum exhibits sound exegesis.				X	Scripture passages selected are relevant and well interpreted.
The curriculum exhibits sound theology.				X	These are effective tools provided here for a participant to better understand and apply scripture, as preached in a sermon setting. They are theologically beneficial and edifying for a worshiper.
Scope					
The content of each lesson covers the particular issue it is designed to address.			X		The topic of each session is clearly stated and well developed in each session outline.
As a whole, the curriculum offers a sufficient lay-level primer on sermon-listening.				X	Yes, each participant will be challenged to increase their personal awareness to the preaching process before, during, and after the sermon is delivered.
Methodology					
Each lesson presents a main point and supporting points.			X		Well-developed and pertinent teaching points are included in all seven sessions.
The overall order of lessons is clear and logical.			X		Mr. Odom follows a systematic progression from introduction through the conclusion.
Applicability					
By the end, participants will better appreciate what goes into preaching.			X		By participating in this study, a lay person's understanding of the full process of preaching will be enhanced and expanded.

By the end, participants will know how to productively listen to sermons.				X	This curriculum is well planned, logically developed, and will be most productive in helping congregants to “better listen” to a sermon presentation.
---	--	--	--	---	---

Comments: This is an interesting study which is needed in local congregations. For many years, the practice of preaching seems to have been a “come and see (hear)” event, with little preparation or connectional involvement on the part of the worshiper. In this study, we expand the role of the worshiper to include preparation before the sermon is delivered, a better ability to process the sermon as it is delivered, and even a time of reflection following the sermon delivery. All helpful and beneficial to the study participants.

FBC Rockmart is a congregation which does indeed “listen well” as sermons are presented. I can imagine this study will be well received by many in our congregation who are already quite engaged in the sermons presented by our pastor, Jason Odom. This study will assist in a better understanding and application of the spoken Word of God, received in our services each week.

One further point I really appreciated in this curriculum is the emphasis on prayer and other elements leading up to the delivered sermon. Any investment a worshiper can make into the sermon process, such as praying for the pastor, reading and pondering over the scripture passage ahead of the service, or simply the enhanced ability to listen to and process the message in a sermon—all of these components will lead to a better understanding and application of the sermons received each week in a local church.

I am grateful for the opportunity to preview this curriculum. I enjoyed reading through the project, and I believe this to be an excellent study which will be a benefit to many.

Name of Evaluator: Panel Member 3

Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Soundness					
The curriculum exhibits sound exegesis.			X		
The curriculum exhibits sound theology.			X		
Scope					
The content of each lesson covers the particular issue it is designed to address.				X	
As a whole, the curriculum offers a sufficient lay-level primer on sermon-listening.				X	
Methodology					
Each lesson presents a main point and supporting points.				X	
The overall order of lessons is clear and logical.				X	
Applicability					
By the end, participants will better appreciate what goes into preaching.			X		
By the end, participants will know how to productively listen to sermons.				X	

Comments: I think you've put together a very useful and helpful curriculum, Jason. Just one suggestion: You might consider using a different term rather than "practical justification." It could imply that the biblical and theological underpinnings are theoretical only, which, of course, is not the case.

APPENDIX 5
LESSON OUTLINES

For each lesson of the sermon-listening curriculum, participants were supplied with a minimal, one-page outline of the lesson to take notes. Participants were invited to utilize the outline as little or as much as they wanted for taking notes from the content of the PowerPoint slides. At the very least, they could use the outline to track the progress of the current lesson. The content of the outlines reflects the section headings in the lessons.

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 1: The Project: Sermon-Listening in FBC Rockmart

Outline

Introduction

Church Context

Rationale for the Project

Purpose of the Project

Goals of the Project

Methodology

Conclusion

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 2: Introduction to Expository Preaching

Outline

Definition

Essential Components

Biblical and Theological Justification

Practical Justification

Conclusion

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 3: The Preacher's Role and the Spirit's Role in Preaching

Outline

Introduction

Preacher's Role: Prayer

Preacher's Role: Study

Preacher's Role: Mechanics

Preacher's Role: Manner

Preacher's Role: Character

Spirit's Role: Illumination

Spirit's Role: Anointing

Spirit's Role: Persuading

Conclusion

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 4: Biblical-Theological Basis for Sermon-Listening

Outline

Introduction

Nehemiah 8:1–12

Matthew 13:13–23

Romans 10:14–17

Conclusion

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 5: Before Listening: Attitude of Expectancy

Outline

Introduction

Praying

Reading

Scheduling

Focusing

Worshiping

Conclusion

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 6: While Listening: Analysis of Content

Outline

Introduction

Hard Work

Note-taking

Identifying the Main Sections

Asking Questions

Reviewing

Summarizing

Conclusion

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 7: After Listening: Application of the Lesson

Outline

Introduction

Praying

Repenting

Asking Questions

Planning

Demonstrating Urgency

Conclusion

APPENDIX 6
SUMMARY SHEETS

At the end of each lesson in the sermon-listening curriculum, participants were given a one-page summary sheet. This summary sheet presented the main points from the lesson that had just been covered. While some participants took notes during the lessons, this summary sheet gave them all a common, condensed outline to review on their own, save for any future reference, and, if needed, refer to during upcoming lessons. By the end of the sermon-listening course, participants had received seven summary sheets.

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 1: The Project: Sermon-Listening in FBC Rockmart

Summary Sheet

Effective preaching lies not just with the preacher but also with hearers. Hearers are responsible for paying attention, processing the sermon's content, and applying its message.

Preaching is worship. The preacher worships by expositing Scripture and its implications. At the same time, the person sitting and listening likewise worships by paying attention to the message, processing it, reflecting on it, affirming it, and resolving to apply it. To listen well is to worship well.

A preacher preaches so that hearers will go and apply the message. The real test of their listening is their subsequent obedience. Their obedience demonstrates whether they have listened.

Having never been trained in sermon-listening, and despite wanting to follow up, hearers might be reluctant to converse with the preacher about specifics of the sermon. Lacking confidence, they deny themselves an opportunity to learn more. With some know-how on sermon-listening, though, they might grow comfortable dialoguing more deeply with the pastor afterward.

A church's wellbeing and witness depend on effective preaching. This calls not only for the preacher's best but hearers' best too. In preaching, hearers give their best as they listen to the sermon attentively, that is, expectantly, analytically, and applicationally.

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 2: Introduction to Expository Preaching

Summary Sheet

Expository preaching conveys God's Word by explaining a biblical text and applying the text while relying on the Holy Spirit to persuade people of its truthfulness.

The introduction aims to gain people's attention, arouse their interest, raise a problem or need, introduce the text, and indicate the text's relevance to the problem just raised. The exposition aims to explain the biblical text. Illustration highlights and explicates part of the text, such as a key term or the main point, using a story or image or another means. Application brings the text to bear upon life, envisioning realistic scenarios in which the text's truth would make a positive difference. The conclusion recaps the lesson, exhorts hearers to live out what they have learned, reminds them of the grace that enables them to apply it, and imagines the eschatological endpoint of the text and its application.

Because God's Word is inspired, living, active, life-changing, inerrant, authoritative, and entirely sufficient, and because God's Word speaks and acts, accomplishes God's will, and accomplishes salvation, believers are obligated to preach God's Word.

Jesus himself was a preacher (Mark 1:14, 38–39). Preaching was a regular activity in the early church. Peter's preaching was the catalyst for a mass conversion at Pentecost. Many disciples started traveling abroad and preaching. Paul was intent about pointing people to Jesus in his preaching. Paul instructed his protégé, Timothy, to "preach the word" (2 Tim 4:2). Paul declared, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16).

Preaching presents God in his infinite attributes and his mighty works. His weightiness and worthiness are front and center to behold and inspire people to praise. Preaching glorifies God, displays God's glory, and invites more glory.

Expository preaching compels and emboldens the preacher to take up and preach on hard topics. He cannot claim to be an expositor and duck the difficult texts. He is emboldened because he does not step out and speak on his own; he is backed by the Bible.

Expository preaching introduces the congregation to the whole Bible. As expositors proceed verse-by-verse through whole sections and books, hearers gradually gain a more complete grasp of God's Word.

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 3: The Preacher's Role and the Spirit's Role in Preaching

Summary Sheet

The preacher's role in sermon development and delivery consists of praying over the message, studying the text deeply, employing delivery mechanics and a manner of speaking that amplify the message (rather than distract from it), and cultivating integrity of character.

As hearers consider the preacher's message, they also factor his character into their judgment of the message. Character is one of the qualifications of pastors listed in Scripture. The preacher's integrity encourages hearers' belief and application of the sermon. Conversely, his falseness undermines their belief and discourages spiritual growth.

The Holy Spirit's role in sermon development and delivery includes illuminating the preacher's understanding of the text, anointing him with spiritual power to proclaim, and persuading hearers to believe his message.

Because of the Spirit's presence and participation in preaching, preachers don't have to employ manipulative tactics to convince hearers of the message. The Spirit himself does the heavy lifting required to move people from apathy to faith.

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 4: Biblical-Theological Basis for Sermon-Listening

Summary Sheet

In Nehemiah 8:1–12, the people demonstrate attentive listening by planning to listen, assuming a posture conducive to listening, vocally indicating willingness to hear and listen, receiving follow-up explanation, and responding in ways consistent with what was heard.

Matthew 13:13–23 indicates several factors that enable hearing with understanding: an active and ongoing commitment to God, previous kingdom insight to build upon, a spiritually invigorated heart, a guarded heart, a deeper spirituality that is resistant to trouble and persecution, and freedom from entanglements with worry and wealth.

Romans 10:14–17 explains that listening to preaching is how people hear the gospel and come to faith.

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 5: Before Listening: Attitude of Expectancy

Summary Sheet

For the preacher, listeners should pray for his study during the week, his delivery during the sermon, and his personal integrity in his life. For other listeners and themselves, listeners should pray for receptiveness, understanding, submissiveness, life-change, and the Spirit's aid.

Reading the sermon text in advance gives listeners a preliminary understanding and stokes listeners' anticipation to hear the text expounded in the sermon.

Expectant listeners schedule around the upcoming worship service and, in particular, the sermon-listening experience. They prioritize and safeguard the service and the sermon.

Listeners focus as they concentrate on God's voice speaking to them. They are mindful and moved that God will be addressing them through his Word. As a function of focusing on God, they are focused on his Word.

Worshiping before the sermon also helps focus listeners for the preaching. Singing as part of the worship service directs listeners' attention to God, which is where it needs to be during the upcoming sermon. Other elements can fix listeners' focus and stoke expectancy for the sermon too, including Scripture readings, collection of tithes and offerings, and instrumental music.

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 6: While Listening: Analysis of Content

Summary Sheet

Listeners, says Berry, “are expected to work with the preacher to grasp the sermon’s central message. This is often hard work, and it requires serious attention.” Bergmeier explains sermon analysis in terms of “holy sweat” and listening “energetically.”

Note-taking enables listeners to concentrate on the message. Note-taking also helps them review and remember the content and organize it in a way that enhances recall and application.

Familiarity with the sermon’s main sections offers a more precise, dependable guide for listeners to follow the sermon, take thoughtful notes, and begin analyzing the content. In general, there are five main sections: introduction, exposition, illustration, application, and conclusion.

Listeners may delve even deeper in their analysis by asking various questions. With these questions, they aim to identify some details of the message that will clarify their comprehension of the whole.

There are multiple ways of reviewing the sermon. For one, listeners can look over their sermon notes, reorganize them as needed, and ask any analytical questions. They can check what they heard against the biblical text.

After hearing the sermon, listeners ought to try to summarize the message in one or two sentences. Recall is more likely when listeners use clear, concise, creative, memorable wording.

Hearing with Understanding: The Sermon-Listening Course

Lesson 7: After Listening: Application of the Lesson

Summary Sheet

There are specific requests that listeners can submit when praying about application: (1) help to obey God's Word, (2) a desire to repent of the sin that the sermon has brought to their attention, (3) praise for what has been revealed to them from God's Word, (4) gratitude to God for teaching them from his Word, and (5) how to live out what they learned.

While determining proper application of the sermon, listeners recognize where they have fallen short in faithful living. The way in which listeners have fallen short is the point at which they are to repent.

Adams proposes the following applicational questions: "1. How does God want me to change (beliefs/actions)? 2. How must I bring about the change? 3. What is the first step? 4. Where and when should I begin?"

Purposeful application entails an action plan that helps listeners to implement what they have learned from God's Word. Forming an action plan for application calls for specificity.

The only response appropriate to a proclamation from the king is a prompt response; a slow response suggests half-hearted commitment on listeners' part. The devil is delighted in listeners who put off until later what they ought to apply at once.

APPENDIX 7

T-TEST RESULTS

In the methodology section of the first chapter, it was stated that results from the post-course survey would be compared to results of the pre-course survey using a t-test for dependent samples, which statistically establishes if some course of intervention has made a difference. In this case, the t-test confirmed a statistical difference between pre-course and post-course survey results. The change in scores is great enough that the difference is considered statistically significant, meaning that the change in scores is not due to chance but to the course of intervention. The curriculum proved to be effective.

Table A1. T-test results

T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	171.375	195.8125
Variance	295.85	144.5625
Observations	16	16
Pearson Correlation	0.37140242	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	15	—
t stat	-5.772053493	—
P(T<=t) one-tail	1.84253E-05	—
t Critical one-tail	1.753050356	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	3.68505E-05	—
t Critical two-tail	2.131449546	—

APPENDIX 8

DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS

As stated in the project's first goal, fifteen church members were sought to participate in the sermon-listening course. Ultimately, sixteen church members comprised the group that completed the curriculum. Their completion of the curriculum included taking both versions, pre-course and post-course, of the SLI. At the start of the SLI, for the first five questions participants were asked to register demographic information, up to and including his or her age range, his or her gender, how many years the participant has been a professing Christian, how many years the participant has been a member of the church, and whether he or she has ever received formal training in sermon-listening. The demographic information for participants 05 and 06 is not included because they filled out the pre-course SLI at the start of the course but not the post-course SLI at the end.

Participant 01

1. What is your age range? 60s or older
2. What is your gender? male
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 21 years or more
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 02

1. What is your age range? 60s or older
2. What is your gender? female
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 21 years or more
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 03

1. What is your age range? 50s
2. What is your gender? female
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 0–5 years
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 04

1. What is your age range? 60s or older
2. What is your gender? male
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 0–5 years
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 0–5 years
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 07

1. What is your age range? 60s or older
2. What is your gender? female
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 21 years or more
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 08

1. What is your age range? 60s or older
2. What is your gender? male
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 6–10 years
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 09

1. What is your age range? 30s
2. What is your gender? male
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 11–15 years
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 10

1. What is your age range? 40s
2. What is your gender? female
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 6–10 years
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 11

1. What is your age range? 50s
2. What is your gender? female
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 16–20 years
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 12

1. What is your age range? 50s
2. What is your gender? male
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 16–20 years
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 13

1. What is your age range? 60s or older
2. What is your gender? male
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 21 years or more
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 14

1. What is your age range? 60s or older
2. What is your gender? female
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 21 years or more
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 15

1. What is your age range? 50s
2. What is your gender? female
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 21 years or more
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 16

1. What is your age range? 60s or older
2. What is your gender? female
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 21 years or more
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 17

1. What is your age range? 60s or older
2. What is your gender? male
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 21 years or more
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Participant 18

1. What is your age range? 60s or older
2. What is your gender? female
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 0–5 years
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

Total

1. What is your age range? 0 20s, 1 30s, 1 40s, 4 50s, 10 60s or older
2. What is your gender? 7 male, 9 female
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 1 0–5 years, 0 6–10 years, 0 11–15 years, 0 16–20 years, 15 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 3 0–5 years, 2 6–10 years, 1 11–15 years, 2 16–20 years, 8 21 years or more
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? 0 yes 16 no

Average Participant Profile

1. What is your age range? 60s or older
2. What is your gender? female
3. How many years have you been a professing Christian? 21 years or more
4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart? 21 years or more
5. Have you ever received formal training in how to listen to a sermon? no

APPENDIX 9

PRE-COURSE SLI RESULTS

Prior to the first lesson of the sermon-listening curriculum, participants were asked to complete the Sermon-Listening Inventory (SLI). The results of the pre-course SLI reflect participants' sermon-listening perceptions before they began and completed their training in the curriculum. Following presentation of the curriculum, these results were compared to results from the post-course SLI to gauge any change in participants' sermon-listening perceptions. The pre-course results were the baseline for assessment. The pre-course SLI results for participants 05 and 06 are not included because they filled out the pre-course SLI at the start of the lessons but not the post-course SLI at the end.

Table A2. Pre-course SLI results

	Statement 6	Statement 7	Statement 8	Statement 9
Participant 1	2 (D)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)
Participant 2	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 4	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 7	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 8	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)
Participant 9	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 11	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 13	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	5 (A)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	4 (AS)
Participant 18	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
	Total = 84	Total = 87	Total = 89	Total = 83
	Average = 5	Average = 5	Average = 6	Average = 5

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 10	Statement 11	Statement 12	Statement 13
Participant 1	4 (AS)	2 (D)	2 (D)	5 (A)
Participant 2	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	5 (A)	2 (D)	2 (D)	6 (SA)
Participant 4	6 (SA)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 7	5 (A)	4 (AS)	2 (D)	6 (SA)
Participant 8	5 (A)	2 (D)	2 (D)	6 (SA)
Participant 9	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	5 (A)	5 (A)	2 (D)	6 (SA)
Participant 13	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	5 (A)	1 (SD)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	3 (DS)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	3 (DS)	6 (SA)
Participant 18	5 (A)	2 (D)	2 (D)	6 (SA)
	Total = 87	Total = 67	Total = 49	Total = 95
	Average = 5	Average = 4	Average = 3	Average = 6

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 14	Statement 15	Statement 16	Statement 17
Participant 1	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)
Participant 2	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)
Participant 4	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 7	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 8	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	5 (A)
Participant 9	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 12	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 13	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 16	5 (A)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 17	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 18	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
	Total = 91	Total = 90	Total = 82	Total = 84
	Average = 6	Average = 6	Average = 5	Average = 5

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 18	Statement 19	Statement 20	Statement 21
Participant 1	3 (DS)	5 (A)	3 (DS)	5 (A)
Participant 2	4 (AS)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 4	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 7	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 8	2 (D)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 9	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 10	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	5 (A)
Participant 13	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	4 (AS)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 15	5 (A)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 18	2 (D)	5 (A)	2 (D)	6 (SA)
	Total = 65	Total = 91	Total = 67	Total = 94
	Average = 4	Average = 6	Average = 4	Average = 6

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 22	Statement 23	Statement 24	Statement 25
Participant 1	2 (D)	3 (DS)	3 (DS)	5 (A)
Participant 2	4 (AS)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	3 (DS)	3 (DS)	3 (DS)	6 (SA)
Participant 4	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 7	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 8	2 (D)	2 (D)	2 (D)	6 (SA)
Participant 9	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 10	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	1 (SD)	1 (SD)	1 (SD)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	5 (A)
Participant 13	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	5 (A)
Participant 15	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	3 (DS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	5 (A)
Participant 18	2 (D)	2 (D)	2 (D)	5 (A)
	Total = 56	Total = 60	Total = 59	Total = 91
	Average = 4	Average = 4	Average = 4	Average = 6

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 26	Statement 27	Statement 28	Statement 29
Participant 1	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)
Participant 2	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)
Participant 4	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 7	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 8	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 9	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	2 (D)	2 (D)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	5 (A)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 13	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 14	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	4 (AS)	3 (DS)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 18	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)
	Total = 80	Total = 79	Total = 88	Total = 85
	Average = 5	Average = 5	Average = 6	Average = 5

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 30	Statement 31	Statement 32	Statement 33
Participant 1	4 (AS)	2 (D)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)
Participant 2	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 4	5 (A)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 7	4 (AS)	3 (DS)	4 (AS)	3 (DS)
Participant 8	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 9	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 10	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 11	1 (SD)	2 (D)	5 (A)	4 (AS)
Participant 12	2 (D)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 13	3 (DS)	3 (DS)	5 (A)	4 (AS)
Participant 14	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	4 (AS)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 17	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 18	2 (D)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
	Total = 63	Total = 69	Total = 82	Total = 77
	Average = 4	Average = 4	Average = 5	Average = 5

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 34	Statement 35	Statement 36	Statement 37
Participant 1	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)
Participant 2	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)
Participant 4	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 7	4 (AS)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 8	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 9	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	2 (D)	2 (D)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)
Participant 13	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 14	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 17	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 18	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	2 (D)
	Total = 77	Total = 79	Total = 89	Total = 79
	Average = 5	Average = 5	Average = 6	Average = 5

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 38	Statement 39	Statement 40	
Participant 1	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	Total = 133
Participant 2	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	Total = 189
Participant 3	5 (A)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	Total = 158
Participant 4	5 (A)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	Total = 185
Participant 7	5 (A)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	Total = 169
Participant 8	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)	Total = 169
Participant 9	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	Total = 187
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	Total = 194
Participant 11	5 (A)	2 (D)	5 (A)	Total = 152
Participant 12	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	Total = 164
Participant 13	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	Total = 177
Participant 14	5 (A)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	Total = 168
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	Total = 196
Participant 16	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	Total = 176
Participant 17	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	Total = 174
Participant 18	2 (D)	6 (SA)	2 (D)	Total = 151
	Total = 78	Total = 74	Total = 72	Total = 2742
	Average = 5	Average = 5	Average = 5	Average = 4

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

APPENDIX 10

POST-COURSE SLI RESULTS

After the closing lesson of the sermon-listening curriculum, participants were asked to complete the Sermon-Listening Inventory (SLI) a second time. The results of this post-course SLI reflect participants' sermon-listening perceptions after completing their training in the curriculum. The post-course results were compared to results from the pre-course SLI to measure any change in participants' sermon-listening perceptions. The post-course SLI results for participants 05 and 06 are not included because they filled out the pre-course SLI at the start of the lessons but not the post-course SLI at the end.

Table A3. Post-course SLI results

	Statement 6	Statement 7	Statement 8	Statement 9
Participant 1	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 2	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 4	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 7	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)
Participant 8	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 9	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 13	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 18	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
	Total = 91	Total = 93	Total = 93	Total = 86
	Average = 6	Average = 6	Average = 6	Average = 5

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 10	Statement 11	Statement 12	Statement 13
Participant 1	6 (SA)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 2	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 4	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 7	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	5 (A)
Participant 8	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 9	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 13	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	6 (SA)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 18	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
	Total = 93	Total = 87	Total = 82	Total = 95
	Average = 6	Average = 5	Average = 5	Average = 6

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 14	Statement 15	Statement 16	Statement 17
Participant 1	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 2	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 4	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 7	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 8	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 9	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 13	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 18	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
	Total = 94	Total = 95	Total = 91	Total = 93
	Average = 6	Average = 6	Average = 6	Average = 6

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 18	Statement 19	Statement 20	Statement 21
Participant 1	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 2	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 4	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 7	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 8	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 9	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 13	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 15	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 18	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
	Total = 81	Total = 94	Total = 83	Total = 95
	Average = 5	Average = 6	Average = 5	Average = 6

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 22	Statement 23	Statement 24	Statement 25
Participant 1	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 2	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 4	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 7	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	5 (A)
Participant 8	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)
Participant 9	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 13	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 18	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
	Total = 81	Total = 82	Total = 83	Total = 94
	Average = 5	Average = 5	Average = 5	Average = 6

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 26	Statement 27	Statement 28	Statement 29
Participant 1	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 2	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 4	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 7	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 8	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 9	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 13	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	5 (A)	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 18	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
	Total = 89	Total = 90	Total = 93	Total = 91
	Average = 6	Average = 6	Average = 6	Average = 6

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 30	Statement 31	Statement 32	Statement 33
Participant 1	5 (A)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 2	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 4	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 7	5 (A)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)	4 (AS)
Participant 8	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 9	5 (A)	4 (AS)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 13	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	5 (A)	5 (A)	4 (AS)	5 (A)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	4 (AS)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 17	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 18	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)
	Total = 88	Total = 86	Total = 87	Total = 87
	Average = 6	Average = 5	Average = 5	Average = 5

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 34	Statement 35	Statement 36	Statement 37
Participant 1	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	4 (AS)
Participant 2	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 3	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 4	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 7	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)
Participant 8	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 9	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 11	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 12	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
Participant 13	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 14	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 16	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 17	6 (SA)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)
Participant 18	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	5 (A)
	Total = 91	Total = 89	Total = 94	Total = 91
	Average = 6	Average = 6	Average = 6	Average = 6

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

	Statement 38	Statement 39	Statement 40	
Participant 1	5 (A)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	Total = 180
Participant 2	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	Total = 200
Participant 3	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	Total = 204
Participant 4	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	Total = 204
Participant 7	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	Total = 167
Participant 8	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	Total = 194
Participant 9	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	Total = 188
Participant 10	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	Total = 210
Participant 11	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	Total = 210
Participant 12	6 (SA)	5 (A)	5 (A)	Total = 191
Participant 13	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	Total = 209
Participant 14	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	Total = 186
Participant 15	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	6 (SA)	Total = 208
Participant 16	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	Total = 197
Participant 17	5 (A)	5 (A)	6 (SA)	Total = 191
Participant 18	5 (A)	5 (A)	5 (A)	Total = 194
	Total = 89	Total = 89	Total = 93	Total = 3133
	Average = 6	Average = 6	Average = 6	Average = 5

Note:

- 1 = SD (strongly disagree)
- 2 = D (disagree)
- 3 = DS (disagree somewhat)
- 4 = AS (agree somewhat)
- 5 = A (agree)
- 6 = SA (strongly agree)

APPENDIX 11

REVISED SERMON-LISTENING INVENTORY

After receiving feedback on the project, the sermon-listening inventory was revised at several points. In the instructions, participants are now prompted to choose the option that reflects their perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening rather than their sermon-listening knowledge. Statements asking participants to register how comfortable they are talking about Nehemiah 8:1–12, Matthew 13:13–23, and Romans 10:14–17 have been removed for being unfairly specific for a pre-training survey for lay listeners. Some statements have been slightly expanded to clarify the idea to which participants are being asked to respond. This appendix consists of the revised SLI. It has been included here to offer future sermon-listening trainers a tool that has been enhanced through feedback.

SERMON-LISTENING INVENTORY (SLI)

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help train members of First Baptist Church of Rockmart to listen to a sermon. Jason N. Odom is conducting this research to collect data for a project focusing on First Baptist Church of Rockmart. As a significant part of the project, you are being asked to complete this inventory prior to the first teaching session as well as after the last session. Any information that you provide as part of this inventory will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary, meaning that you are free to withdraw at any time.* By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

1. What is your age range?

- a. 20s _____
- b. 30s _____
- c. 40s _____
- d. 50s _____
- e. 60s or older _____

2. What is your gender?

- a. male _____
- b. female _____

3. How many years have you been a professing Christian?

- a. 0–5 years _____
- b. 6–10 years _____
- c. 11–15 years _____
- d. 16–20 years _____
- e. 21 years or more _____

4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church of Rockmart?

- a. 0–5 years _____
- b. 6–10 years _____
- c. 11–15 years _____
- d. 16–20 years _____
- e. 21 years or more _____

5. Have you ever received training in how to listen to a sermon?

- a. yes _____
- b. no _____

For statements 6–37, the following key explains the options for answering:

- SD = strongly disagree
- D = disagree
- DS = disagree somewhat
- AS = agree somewhat
- A = agree
- SA = strongly agree

For each statement below, please circle the option that best reflects your perceptions of preaching and sermon-listening at this present time.

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 6. I consider myself, as a listener, to be an active and integral part of preaching. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. I think that worshiping God well includes listening to the sermon well. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. I think of listening as not just hearing the sermon but also understanding, obeying, and applying its message. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. I am comfortable talking with others, including the preacher, about the sermon afterward. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. I consider sermon-listening important to my discipleship. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. I am comfortable telling someone what expository preaching is and does. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. I am comfortable explaining the five essential components of an expository sermon. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. I believe that preaching is necessary because God's Word is living, active, and life-changing. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. I believe that preaching was a priority for Jesus, Paul, and others in the early church. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. I believe that preaching reveals God's glory and amplifies his glory. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

16. I value expository preaching for emboldening preachers to take up hard, less popular, or lesser-known topics.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. I value expository preaching for familiarizing listeners with more of the Bible than other kinds of preaching.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. I am comfortable explaining the preacher's role in sermon development and delivery.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. I believe that the preacher's character affects the sermon's credibility.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. I am comfortable explaining the Holy Spirit's role in sermon development and delivery.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21. I believe that the Spirit's presence and participation affect the sermon's capability to change lives.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22. I think that praying for the preacher, oneself, and fellow listeners prepares listeners to listen to the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23. I think that reading the sermon text and reflecting on it in advance prepares listeners to listen to the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24. I think that planning one's week around the Sunday worship service prepares listeners to listen to the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25. I think that making a conscious effort to focus prepares listeners to listen to the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
26. I think that worshipping prepares listeners to listen to the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
27. I think that sermon-listening entails hard work.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

28. I think that note-taking improves the sermon-listening experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
29. I think that being able to identify the sermon's main sections improves the sermon-listening experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
30. I think that asking analytical questions improves the sermon-listening experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
31. I think that reviewing the message improves the sermon-listening experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
32. I think that summarizing the message improves the sermon-listening experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
33. I think that praying helps listeners apply what they heard during the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
34. I think that repenting of sin revealed by the sermon helps listeners apply what they heard during the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
35. I think that asking applicational questions helps listeners apply what they heard during the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
36. I think that making a plan helps listeners apply what they heard during the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
37. I think that demonstrating urgency helps listeners apply what they heard during the sermon.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Jay. *Be Careful How You Listen: How to Get the Most Out of a Sermon*. Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007.
- Anyabwile, Thabiti M. *What Is a Healthy Church Member? 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.
- Ash, Christopher. *Listen Up! A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons*. Epsom, UK: Good Book Company, 2009.
- Beeke, Joel R. *The Family at Church: Listening to Sermons and Attending Prayer Meetings*. Family Guidance Series. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015.
- Bergmeier, Thadeus L. *Helping Johnny Listen: Taking Full Advantage of the Sermons We Hear*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010.
- Berry, Donald L. *How to Listen to a Sermon: With "Honoring the Gospel" and Other Homilies for the Sake of Heaven*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011.
- Betts, T. J. *Nehemiah: A Pastoral and Exegetical Commentary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *Matthew*. New American Commentary, vol. 22. Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992.
- Breneman, Mervin. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. New American Commentary, vol. 10. Nashville: Holman Reference, 1993.
- Broadus, John A. *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. 4th ed. Edited by Vernon L. Stanfield. New York: HarperCollins, 1979.
- Carson, D. A. *Matthew*. Vol. 2, Chapters 13–28. Expositor's Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.
- Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018.
- Fensham, F. Charles. *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Hagner, Donald A. *Matthew 1–13*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2015.

- Helm, David R. *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God's Word Today*. 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.
- Hendricksen, William. *Matthew*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973.
- . *Romans*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981.
- Kidner, Derek. *Ezra and Nehemiah*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 12. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009.
- Kruse, Colin G. *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Kuruvilla, Abraham. *A Manual for Preaching: The Journey from Text to Sermon*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Preaching & Preachers*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972.
- Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World*. Chicago: Moody, 2008.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter to the Romans*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.
- Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to Matthew*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.
- Mounce, Robert H. *Romans*. New American Commentary, vol. 27. Nashville: Holman Reference, 1995.
- Piper, John. *Take Care How You Listen: Sermons by John Piper on Receiving the Word*. Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2012.
- Pohlman, Michael E. "Expository Preaching: Its Benefits." Unpublished class notes for 80301. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Summer Semester, 2021.
- Ramey, Ken. *Expository Listening: A Handbook for Hearing and Doing God's Word*. The Woodlands, TX: Kress, 2010.
- Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014.
- Schlafer, David J. *Surviving the Sermon: A Guide to Preaching for Those Who Have to Listen*. Boston: Cowley, 1992.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018.
- Šeba, Enoh. *Sermon Listening: A New Approach Based on Congregational Studies and Rhetoric*. Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2021.

- Shaddix, Jim. *The Passion-Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003.
- Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017.
- . *Romans: God's Good News for the World*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994.
- Strain, David. *Expository Preaching*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2021.
- Thielman, Frank S. *Romans*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018.
- Van Harn, Roger E. *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Vines, Jerry, and Jim Shaddix. *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*. Chicago: Moody, 2017.
- Williamson, H. G. M. *Ezra–Nehemiah*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 16. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2015.
- Willimon, Will. *Listeners Dare: Hearing God in the Sermon*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2022.
- York, Hershael W., and Bert Decker. *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003.

ABSTRACT

TRAINING MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ROCKMART, GEORGIA, TO LISTEN TO A SERMON

Jason Nathaniel Odom, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
Faculty Supervisor: Michael E. Pohlman

This project sought to train members of First Baptist Church of Rockmart, Georgia, in sermon-listening based on principles of expository preaching. Chapter 1 explains the project's ministry context, rationale, goals, and also research methodology. Chapter 2 presents exegesis of three key biblical texts (Neh 8:1–12; Matt 13:13–23; Rom 10:14–17) to show that listening (or hearing) is instrumental for salvation and spiritual growth. Chapter 3 delves into a number of Christian sources to demonstrate that sermon-listening is a discipline that involves an attitude of expectancy, analysis of the content, and application of the lesson. Chapter 4 details the design and execution of the project, including methodology and materials involved. Finally, Chapter 5 evaluates the project's effectiveness based on completion of the goals and then reflects on the overall process.

VITA

JASON NATHANIEL ODOM

EDUCATION

BA, Auburn University, 2005

MA, The University of Alabama, 2007

MDiv, Beeson Divinity School of Samford University, 2012

MTS, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Research Associate to the Dean, Beeson Divinity School of Samford
University, Birmingham, Alabama, 2012–2017

Adjunct Faculty, Judson College, Marion, Alabama, 2013

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Copy Editor, Student Life Bible Study, Birmingham, Alabama, 2007–2011

Pulpit Supply, Various Churches, Birmingham, Alabama, 2009–2016

Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Rockmart, Georgia, 2017–