

## **SECTION 27**

### **The Audience**

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“The best tests concerning content [of a sermon] are in the results: (1) Did the listeners experience God? (2) Was God’s Word learned and better understood? (3) Is the content clearly connected to the listener’s life?”

(Leith Anderson, “Should the Sermon Beat Up or Lift Up?” *Preaching* (May-June 1993): 19)

“...the sermon style needs to be matched to the church and community. What is wonderful in one context can be a constant irritant in another context.”

(Anderson, p. 20)

“Stories are especially important to the twenty-first-century preaching style. We increasingly deal with a generation that thinks more in images than in points. Stories stick. They are memorable. They are easy to identify with. Ask any generation of churchgoers to repeat the points of a six-weeks-ago sermon and few can do it. But ask for a rerun of the stories and illustrations, and a high percentage remember in detail.”

(Anderson, p. 21)

“Today’s communicators need to be both profound and simple, which requires a lot of work.”

(Anderson, p. 22)

“In thirty minutes or less the fabric of the presentation must simultaneously draw contrasting audiences into the same experience.”

(Anderson, p.22)

“Every audience is unique... The communicator must know the audience, and the sermon must be customized to fit the audience.”

(Anderson, p. 23)

“Today’s audiences are more connected to speakers through the heart than the head. That is to say, preaching to connect emotionally is usually more important than preaching to connect intellectually. Nevertheless, absence of either is a disaster. Both are necessary.”

(Anderson, p. 24)

“Sermons in the twenty-first-century church will know their audiences well and connect to their hearts as well as their minds.”

(Anderson, p. 25)

“A certain atmosphere is more comfortable and conducive to effective communication. Johnny Carson insisted his audience have 66-degree temperatures because that's the balance between keeping people comfortable and alert. Church services in very old or uncomfortably warm rooms make preaching difficult and distractions many.”

(Anderson, p. 25)

“The twenty-first century is an exciting and interesting time. No one wants to be bored because there seem to be no good reasons to be bored. Therefore, boring sermons are definitely out.”

(Anderson, p. 26)

“We preachers have our work cut out for us. The topics we choose, the way we present Scripture, the illustrations we use, the responses we ask for, all need to contribute to our goal of effectively presenting Christ to non-Christians.”

(Bill Hybels, “Speaking to the Secular Mind,” *Leadership* 88  
vol. 9, p. 29)

“You can be utterly biblical in every way, but to reach non-Christians, every topic has to start *where they are* and then bring them to a fuller Christian understanding.”

(Hybels, p. 31)

“I sometimes joke that one of my goals in ministry is to complete however many years God gives me without ever using a Spurgeon illustration. Non-Christians (even most Christians today) don't know who Spurgeon was. And once unchurched people find out, they wonder why I'm wasting my time with him. They think... ‘we've got missiles flying in the Persian Gulf, a teetering stock market, and political turmoil, and he's spending time reading some dead Englishman? If he's got the time to do that, he's not living in the same world I am.’”

(Hybels, p. 33)

“Our challenge is to really trust the Word of God when we speak it, teach it, and share it in conversation. A speaker I once heard said, ‘The farmer doesn’t plant the seed, then stand over it and scream at it to grow!’ Can we trust the Word that is ‘sharper than any double-edged sword?’”

(Youth minister Tiger McLuen in *Group*, Jan/Feb 1999, p. 22)

“It is a well-known truth of any public speaking: If you do not know your audience it is almost certain that you will miss the mark.”

(Danny Akin)

“If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ.”

(Martin Luther quoted in *Good News*, Sep/Oct 1998, p.9)

“The good preacher will exegete both the Scripture and culture. He knows he must know each equally well.”

(Danny Akin)

“Rhetoric (speaking) is the art of discovering the available means of persuasion.”

(Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, p. 1)

“...we all take a natural pleasure in learning easily.”

(Aristotle, p. 206)

## **I. The Basic Needs of the People to Whom You Speak**

1. The need for shelter and food.
2. The need to believe life is meaningful and has a purpose (a need cited by 70% in a recent survey, with two-thirds believing most churches and synagogues are not effective in meeting it).
3. The need for a sense of community and deeper relationships (nearly one-third of Americans say they have been lonely for a long period of time in their lives).
4. The need to be appreciated and respected (“the closer people feel to God, the better they feel about themselves”).

5. The need to be listened to and heard.
6. The need to feel one is growing in faith.
7. The need for practical help in developing a mature faith.  
(George Gallup, Jr., quoted in Anderson, pp. 23-24)

In the *Seven Laws of the Learner* the issue of needs and the audience is given extensive treatment in chapters 9-10. From those chapters the following principles are drawn:

**Part 1**

1. Seize attention (229).
2. Stir curiosity (229).
3. Stimulate felt need (231).
4. Surface real need (232).
5. Satisfy real need (233).

**Part 2**

1. Need building is the responsibility of the preacher/teacher (234).
2. Need meeting is the preacher/teacher's primary calling (235).
3. Need building is the preacher/teacher's main method to motivate his people (242).
4. Need motivates to the degree it is felt by your people (242).
5. Need building always precedes new units of content (243).
6. Need should be built according to your people's characteristics and circumstances (245).
7. Need building may be hindered by factors beyond the preacher/teacher's control (245).

***In Sum:*** "Build the Need Before Teaching the Content"

**Part 3**

1. Find the need (identify) (253).
2. Focus the need (isolate) (264).
3. Forecast the need (imagination) (265).
4. Feel the need (inspire) (266).
5. Fulfill the need (instruct and implement) (268).

#### **Part 4**

1. Describe the need in a factual presentation (information) (269).
2. Express the need through storytelling (identification) (270).
3. Sensitize the need through drama (involvement) (271).
4. Increase the need through your delivery (intensity) (273).
5. Raise the need through the music (inspiration) (274).
6. Exhibit the need with a diagram (imagination) (275).
7. Symbolize the need with a picture (illustration) (276).

## **II. Observing the People to Whom You Speak**

Ramesh Richard says we should observe our audience in the following arenas of their lives:

- The ways people communicate verbally and nonverbally.
- How they live: their technology, occupations, and income level.
- Relationships: the roles of husbands, wives, children, extended family, and community.
- The premises of their beliefs: their worldview, their values, their motivations.

As you build connections for your sermons, ask the following questions about your audience:

- What do they believe?
- What do they value?
- What do they need?
- What do they do? or How do they behave?

Aristotle reminds us in his *Rhetoric* that we must understand what is required to bring an audience into a state of emotion. To adequately communicate, a speaker must participate/know his audience.

## **III. Questions to Ask of Your Audience**

1. *To whom am I preaching?*

Kristi Rector says you must go to your people. You need exegetical time in the study and experiential time in the streets (“Getting to know you” in *Vital Ministries*, Jan-Feb 1999, pgs. 39-42).

2. *What is the setting for this message?*
3. *What are the needs of the audience?*
4. *What is going through the audience's mind as they read the text?*

5. *Where are members of the audience in their spiritual development or pilgrimage?*
6. *How does my audience listen?*
7. *Can they follow the progression of thought in my sermon with their ears?*
8. *What communication tools can I use to help my audience hear what I am saying?*
  - Repetition
  - Visuals
  - Movement
  - Gestures
  - Music
  - Drama
9. *What does my audience see in me?*

#### **IV. Developing the Central Proposition of the Sermon (CPS) with Your Audience in Mind**

1. Remember to state the CPS in the most memorable sentence possible.
2. Focus on the ear (preaching is oral and not written communication).
3. State the CPS in a positive, not negative, statement (if possible).
4. State the CPS in the active not passive voice.
5. Use words that are precise, concrete, and familiar to your listeners.
6. Speak so that your audience readily sees the truth of Scripture as relevant and applicable.

#### **V. Five Principles for Addressing Unbelievers**

1. Develop sensitivity.
    - Understand the way they think.
    - Learn to like unbelievers.
  2. Speak on topics and titles they would choose.
  3. Explain the wisdom of the Bible.
  4. Use current illustrations.
  5. Allow for responses that give freedom and time.
    - Give them freedom of choice.
    - Give them time to make a decision.
- (summarized from *Speaking To The Secular Mind* by Bill Hybels)

**VI. Five Extremes to Avoid in Proclamation of the Word of God**

1. Too emotional-haranguing, pleading, weeping, pressuring.
2. Too extended-“Now for the fifteenth verse of our hymn.”
3. Too expansive-“all who have ever sinned need to come.”
4. Too manipulative-“if you want complete financial freedom.”
5. Too “Madison Avenue”-slick, polished, packaged and hyped.

(From Bruce Wilkerson, *Seven Laws of the Learner*)

**VII. Suggestions for Making a Quick Connection with Your Audience**

1. Quiet a talkative group with silence. Stand there and look at them until all the eyes-and the ears-in the room focus on you.
2. Imply that you need their help. “I have something on my mind, and I’d like to share it with you to see what you think.”
3. Dramatize what you’re planning to tell them. *Example:* “I’m deeply troubled by something, and I’m wondering if the same thing is also troubling you.”
4. Ask them how they feel about the subject of your presentation.
5. Say something that will involve them. *Examples:* “I’m going to ask you to think about an important topic.” “I’d like you to do something for me.”

(Steve Adubato, *Business News New Jersey*)

**Conclusion**

When you speak/preach always keep in mind your listeners’ 3 point agenda:

- 1. What’s the point?**
- 2. What’s in it for me?**
- 3. Now what?**

In part, try and understand how they would like to live as opposed to how they do live. In addition, remember the counsel of Aristotle that “it is not enough to know *what* to say—one must know *how* to say it” (*Rhetoric*, pg. 182).