

Twelve Lessons

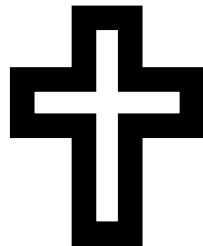
on

Sermon Delivery

Compiled and Written

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PRACTICAL ASPECTS – THE INTEREST FACTOR – LESSON 1

Introduction: Both elements, negative and positive, of the interest principle can be seen in the ministry of Paul. According to Acts 16:14 “*a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.*” The word “attended,” according to Strong’s Concordance, means to hold the mind towards, i.e. pay attention to, be cautious about, apply oneself to, and adhere to. She was very interested in what Paul was saying.

Another time Paul was preaching in Troas (Acts 20:9) and, according to the text, continued until midnight. There was a young man there named Eutychus that “*sat in a window...being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.*” Somewhere during Paul’s message this man lost interest, fell out the window and died. Could it be that our members are dying spiritually because our messages are not interesting? Here are some suggestions for making your messages more interesting.

Lesson Goals:

1. See the importance of the title of a message, sermon.
2. Understand the limits of concentration so we can make adjustments in our delivery.
3. Learn techniques to use that will aid in keeping a congregation’s concentration.

Definitions of Important Terms/Phrases:

1. Dramatization – To show or stress in an exciting or thrilling way (World Book Dictionary).
2. Suspense – The condition or state of being mentally uncertain (World Book Dictionary).
3. Climax – A figure in which a number of propositions or ideas are arranged so as to form a series in which each rises above the preceding in force or effectiveness of expression; the highest point (World Book Dictionary).

I. A CAREFULLY WORDED TITLE

A. Secular writers and producers of plays and motion pictures are well aware of this fact.

B. The Title is the name given to the message or lesson.

1. The Title should suggest the subject but not “give it away.”
2. The Title should be “concrete” (specific) and not “abstract” (not practical).
 - a. Example – Title: God’s Tear Bottle – Ps. 56:8
 - b. This is “concrete” and meets the needs of people that are hurting.
3. The Title should be “short” rather than “long.”
Example – Title: A Hen Pecked Husband – A Rooster Pecked Wife – A Dancing Girl – and a Rambling Boy – I Kings 21:25 and Is. 38:1-5
4. The Title could be a “paradox” – Example: “The Poor Rich Man,” “An Honest Thief,” “Full yet empty.”
5. The Title should be “honest.” A sensational Title which has no relation to the sermon makes the people feel they have been deceived and cheated.
Example – Title: The Great Speckled Bird – Jer. 12:9 and then the Preacher preached on 7 different kinds of birds and left the context and the title behind.

II. REALIZING THE LIMITS OF CONCENTRATION

A. Physical and Intellectual Limitations – Someone said, “The mind cannot retain what the seat will not endure.”

1. Young Children – A 5 to 7 minute message is all that can be expected to do any good.
2. Prisoners – 10 to 15 minutes because most of them will be of fairly low mentality.
3. Average Congregation – 30 minutes is as long as one can expect to retain their interest.
 - a. Aim in preaching – to bring the listener to a decision. The listener may be convicted by the message and ready to make a decision and then lose interest or become irritated as the message is drawn out.
 - b. Ego rather than God has prolonged many a message.
4. Circumstances
 - a. Drawn-out preliminaries causing the preacher to start late should be a “red flag” telling the preacher to shorten his message.
 - b. Be considerate of the lost: Preaching past 12 o’clock; they will lose interest by thinking about the noon meal. Preaching late if it is a night service; they will be conscious of being kept up rather late!
 - c. Be considerate in conferences – It is not fair to the other speakers on the program if you take their time and it is conceit for a preacher to expect a congregation to prefer to listen to him instead of the other

speakers.

- d. A preacher had succeeded in putting an elderly man to sleep by his sermon. Preaching for a decision, in the midst of his sermon, he shouted, "Those who want to go to hell, stand up." The old man heard the "Stand up" and did so. He looked around, paused with a puzzled look on his face and said, "Preacher, I don't know what we're voting on, but it looks like you and I are the only ones for it"
 - e. The Pastor announced at the close of his sermon that a meeting of the board would follow. All the audience, except one stranger, went out. The Pastor hemmed and said: "Brother, I guess you misunderstood. This is the meeting of the board." "Yes," said the stranger, "go right ahead. I was never so bored in all my life."
5. Rest Periods – Psychologists tell us that the human mind is incapable of intensive concentration for any great length of time. With an average audience the period of concentration is 5 to 7 minutes, then the mind of the hearer will relax and his thoughts will wander.
- a. The speaker must provide a point of relaxation. This can be accomplished by: (1) A brief illustration (2) An interesting word sentence (3) A quote (4) A poem (5) A joke
 - b. Important: These little rest periods must have relation to the message.

B. Technical Procedures – Variety – "the spice of life" – Variety in vocal technique and in literary material.

1. Variety in Vocal Technique – Mono tone speaking will kill the interest of the listener.
 - a. Frequent changes in Speech Rate, in Pitch, and Intensity.
 - b. Remember a Key Word is "Crescendo" – a gradual increase in force, loudness, and intensity. A Music "crescendo" is Do-Re-Me-Fa-So-La-Te-Do
 - c. When a speaker has reached a point of climactic intensity, he should relax and begin then next point on a lower level of intensity, even to the point of under stressing.
 - d. One way of accomplishing this is for the speaker to provide a point of relaxation.
2. Variety in Literary Material – There are four literary types of discourse.
 - a. Exposition – Imparting knowledge and making clear his own ideas. Pure exposition which is addressed to the minds and leaves the emotions untouched becomes quickly tiresome.
 - b. Argumentation – Bring forth points to convince his hearers and presenting evidence. Argumentation which is based largely on conflict cannot be expected long to hold the interest of one who is not deeply concerned about the subject being argued or who does not hold deep convictions pro or con.
 - c. Description – He will draw word pictures of people, places, and things. Description, while it delights the ear and stimulates the imagination, is like a sweet – too much becomes distasteful.
 - d. Narration – He will recount the deeds of men and discuss history. He will tell what God has achieved. Since narration flows from event to event, it holds the attention more than the other three but, every sermon cannot be Narration.

C. Avoidances – Giving chapter and verse references and having the congregation turn to the passage will cause a loss of progression of the sermon. The sermon thought will be lost in looking up a passage.

D. Attention Material

1. Local incidents – Disasters
2. Familiar topics – Home, Marriage, Children
3. Dramatization – Examples of Dramatization
 - a. 238,857 miles to the moon or dramatized, "It would take an express train, traveling eighty miles an hour, approximately four months to reach the moon."
 - b. Billion dollars or dramatized, "It would take a room twice as big as this auditorium full of dollar bills."
 - c. Quotes – "God opens the door of the day on golden hinges"
 - d. Job 41:18 – "the eyelids of the morning."
 - e. Samuel Rutherford – "Christ's cross is the sweetest burden that ever I bore; it is such a burden as wings are to the bird, or sails to the ship, to carry me forward to my harbor."
 - d. George Whitefield preaching to Lord Chesterfield – Lord Chesterfield "was listening in Lady Huntington's pew," when Whitefield "described" the sinner under the character of a blind beggar led by a little dog. His description; "The dog escapes, for some reason, and the man is left to grope his way guided only by his staff. Unconsciously he wanders to the edge of a precipice; his staff drops from his hand, down the abyss too far to send back an echo; he reaches forward cautiously to recover it; for a moment he poises on the edge....." While the whole congregation was tense with thrilled suspense, Lord Chesterfield who was listening intensely shouted, "He is gone," as he sprang from his seat to prevent the catastrophe.

4. Element of the Unexpected – I preached once of the Funeral of “I. Will Someday”, a sermon on procrastination and had a funeral complete with casket, pallbearers, and music. At the end of the sermon, I asked everyone to come by and view the body. The invitation was “If there is someone in this casket that is not ready to meet God, please come to the altar.” Inside the casket was a full length mirror.
5. Element of Suspense – The basis of successful preaching is “Make ‘em laugh, Make ‘em cry, and Make ‘em wait.” A murder mystery holds the interest of the reader because he is held in suspense over “who-done-it.”
6. Points of Climax – There should be a climactic moment in each point, also one climactic point in the introduction and one climactic point in the conclusion.

Conclusion: Think of a sermon like a circus parade. As in a circus parade there are elephants, animals in cages, bands, and clowns, so the sermon will be made up of a wide variety of materials. A circus parade has rest periods, surprises, suspense, drama, and all these are scattered out. A circus parade has points of climax. So should a sermon.