

WHAT WOULD LIFE BE LIKE?

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Church, with its spiritual relationships and experiences, has been the focus of my life for as long as I can remember. But never in all my years had I given much thought to the value of hearing as it related to maintaining contact with the world and accomplishing mundane things of everyday life, much less absorbing truths of scripture, which come by listening.

One Sunday morning, as I entered the sanctuary for music practice, the sounds of the band and singers greeted me at the front door. A friend approached, and we exchanged family updates. Across the hall the pastor caught my attention, and we spoke briefly. All of these were spontaneous, often forgotten encounters, yet over time created a sense of belonging and personal relevance. Suddenly a thought like a lightning bolt grabbed me -- What would life be like if I couldn't hear any of it, or at best only a small, unintelligible part?

What is it like being unable to process and appreciate a piece of music? How could I be a happy guy without the sound of laughter, the spontaneous interaction with friends and family? How could I communicate my own pain or sense the pain of others and respond empathetically? How could I share myself or offer anything worthwhile when opportunities dashed by without my knowing? How could I relate to the average person, who is constantly updated on life simply by having two good ears?

These questions assisted in opening a door of opportunity, the result of a prayer since 1983 -- now 12 years later -- that what I do professionally be used to directly serve God. Over time I was especially influenced by three scriptures in this regard: *1 Corinthians 10:31, Colossians 3:17, 23 and Romans 10:12-14*. Well, this is one instance where technology had lagged behind. But finally the computer caught up with the vision!

I have been reporting since 1975 and have used the computer in some form of transcription since 1978. In the early nineties, realtime technology was becoming more visible in the legal setting; however, the public, for the most part, knew little about this use of the computer. During that time, closed captioning of television programs was becoming commonplace. But the use of communication access realtime translation (CART) was rarely seen.

In the winter of 1995, a member at church approached me, asking about this new technology called realtime captioning, which was being offered to the deaf. He explained he had only one functional ear with 15 percent hearing at

best. We talked briefly then and afterward more frequently about how realtime might assist him. By February of 1996, I warily decided to try my skill and see if we could make realtime work for him at church.

On that first Sunday, he and I sat alone at the back of the balcony while he intently watched the computer screen as I struggled to put up something understandable. Unfortunately, I had little in the way of a Bible/church dictionary. But to my amazement, at the end of his first CART service, he remarked, "I have been at this church for eight-and-a-half years and never fully understood what was happening during the worship until today." Well, needless to say, I was touched and hooked! And the Hearing Ministry was born.

He was so excited after the first Sunday, he wanted to tell his friends. And from week to week several others began to attend regularly to watch. After almost three-and-a-half years using a single laptop screen for as many as four viewers, the program evolved with available funds to purchase equipment and provide an area to securely house the CART provider.

The area for the provider is, by design, in proximity to persons using CART. It is not only important in helping develop relationships with them, but it enhances the provider's ability to troubleshoot and facilitates the display of what is taking place around them. It is also a priority that they sit with their hearing friends during worship without the stigma of deafness and be able to observe the immediate display of musical lyrics, read the announcements, watch the dramas, enjoy multi-media presentations, and "listen" to the sermon -- being completely in touch with the service from beginning to end.

One Sunday an older gentleman reported that he just happened to sit where he could observe the captioning and afterward realized that he was missing maybe 30 percent of what was being said every week.

Another attendee commented, "My husband is learning English while in seminary, and he comprehends when reading, but he has a hard time understanding when listening. Captioning has meant a lot to him."

One woman said, "I was raised in a church but never knew Jesus. I have tried to worship at other churches but never knew what it was all about because I couldn't hear. For the first time in my life I feel a part, and I have so much hope." Interestingly, she has completed church orientation and a two-year adult curriculum at Fellowship Bible Church North with the assistance of CART.

A long-time hard-of-hearing specialist in Dallas, who regularly works with people with hearing loss, and is a regular member at our church said, "I lost my hearing several years ago. At the time I taught children's Bible class. But being unable to interact with my students without the assistance of a teacher aide and

hear teaching for myself alongside other believers, I became disheartened and left worship in despair after teaching my Bible class.”

At our church, In addition to CART, another assistive device used is the FM loop. It serves as an aid in distinguishing music with words. Though it is beneficial, it is not independently effective. Several of the CART users have cochlear implants with tiny electrodes implanted in the cochlea, which stimulates the hearing apparatus “to hear” by means of impulses from a small, external, computer-programmed speech processor which is worn under the clothing.

Statistically, the majority of persons with hearing loss are late deafened, which includes individuals who learned to speak and then lost their hearing. They find that learning sign language is very difficult, and that proficiency takes approximately eight years. Also, from figures furnished by the Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, in the 1992 Dallas County Census there were approximately 82,280 persons with various stages of hearing loss requiring accommodations in order to communicate, but that overall there are approximately 168,380 individuals with some form of hearing problem.

It’s understandable that those with total or partial hearing loss experience great frustration in being unable to effectively communicate and take part in any activities which the hearing take for granted. Further, it is common for people with hearing loss to go from church to church, searching for a place where they can “hear” or gain some understanding and have fellowship, but then leave in frustration because they’re not proactively accepted by the church body where there is little or no effort to effectively integrate them.

Well, there you have it. The Hearing Ministry at Fellowship Bible Church North is blessed to have three CART providers on weekly rotation. They include myself and two very special people: Jerry Callaway and Susan Hahaj. After eight years of evolution, our church recognizes the value of CART in its overall ministry. The program became a budget item in 2000 and continues weekly.

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God” ... Hebrews 12:15a

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Church Outlines:

Agape	AEU/TKPWAU/PAEU
angel	AEUPB/SKWREL
Greece	TKPWRAO*ES
Jonah	SKWROEPB/A

Josephus	SKWROES/TPUS
Judas	SKWRUD/AS
Nicodemus	TPHEUBG/OE/TKAOEPL/US
Noah	TPHO/WA
Obadiah	OEBD
omniscient	OPL/TPHEURB/KWREPBT
papyrus	PA/PAOEU/RUS
Pentateuch	PEPBT/A/TAOBG
Redeem	RAOE/TKAOEPL
Rome	RO*EPL