

Thanks for being willing to serve God's people by reading the Bible during our church gatherings. This is a vital element in any good church gathering. In fact, Bible reading is arguably the most important activity in our church meetings. Timothy was charged with this responsibility, along with preaching and teaching (1 Tim 4:11-16). Reading the Scriptures publicly enables the congregation to hear God's eternal Word for their salvation and edification.

What follows are some brief 'training tips' which may help you as you prepare to read the Bible publicly.

A few things to keep in mind as you prepare

- The Bible is the main way that God, through his Spirit, has chosen to speak to us. Which is why we refer to the Bible as His word (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- Therefore, we have a responsibility not only to teach it well, but to READ it well. Hearing God speak should be a high point of our time together, not just something to get out of the way before the sermon.
- When we read the Bible aloud, we need to do more than just say aloud the words on the page. We should be communicating the thoughts and ideas of the author. An important thing to remember is that **to communicate, we first need to understand**.

Tips for understanding the passage

- Pray (if we are going to be reading God's Word to people, you should be involving him in the process from the time that you first start preparing!).
- Read through the passage a number of times.
- Think about what type of writing it is (narrative, poetry, prophecy, apocalyptic etc.) so that you understand the way the message is being conveyed.
- Read the sections before and after the passage so that you can get an idea of the context.
- If you need some clarification, you can contact the preacher, they would be more than willing to talk with you about anything that you are confused about.
- Take time over several days to read it so that God's Word can work on you through His Spirit. DON'T leave it until the beginning of the church gathering!

Once the passage is understood, you can then think about how you communicate the meaning.

Tips for communicating the passage

- Pray (again!).
- Reflect on the fact that when you read aloud, you reveal meaning through your **emphasis**, **phrasing** and **expression**.
 - Meaning, in part, comes through *emphasis*. Wrong emphasis clouds, confuses, and changes meaning.
 - Pauses help in the way that you *phrase* what you read. Don't be scared of the pause for it helps to give deeper meaning to your reading. A well placed pause will give the listeners the chance to digest and understand what they have just heard. In fact, wrong pauses can even give the wrong meaning.
 - Your *expression* will help bring out the meaning for the passage. Don't think that you can just say the written words, as your expression can reveal or change the meaning of those words.

What follows is an explanation of these three ideas, or '*rules for reading to communicate the meaning*'.

a. emphasis

Rule 1: Emphasise those words which introduce each **new idea**. This means **not** emphasising old ideas or synonyms (see what I did there?).

For example:

*In the beginning was **the Word**. The Word was **with God**, and the Word **was God**".
"In all my prayers for **all of you**, I always pray **with joy**"*

Rule 2: Emphasise those words which make a **contrast**.

For example:

*"Ask God to **bless** those who persecute you. Yes, ask him to **bless**, not curse"
Righteousness is the road to **life**; **wickedness** is the road to **death**"
The **wages** of **sin** is **death**; but the **gift** of God is eternal **life**"*

Rule 3: When an adjective and a noun come together, you mostly emphasise the adjective because it describes the noun.

For example:

*God has saved us and called us to live a **holy** life"*

Rule 4: **Don't** emphasise words in **parenthesis**.

For example:

Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go..."

b. phrasing

A **phrase** is a group of related words. You group together the related words by **pausing** at the end of them. Pausing in the wrong places can give an ambiguous or even wrong meaning.

For example:

*"So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph **[PAUSE]** and the baby lying in the manger."
vs. "So they hurried off **[PAUSE]** and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger."*

Rule 1: **Don't** pause between a person or object, and a **restricting** phrase which follows it. They are essential for meaning.

For example:

*God listens **[PAUSE]** to men who are devout and do his will"
v.s. God listens to men **[PAUSE]** who are devout and do his will"*

Rule 2: **Do** pause between a person or thing, and a **non-restricting** phrase which follows it. This is a phrase that simply **adds** information.

For example:

*"The Sadducees, **[PAUSE]** who say there is no resurrection, **[PAUSE]** came to him with a question"*

To pause in the right place (commas are very helpful little things!) will add information about all Sadducees. If you ignore them and don't pause in the right place ...

*"The Sadducees who say there is no resurrection, **[PAUSE]** came to him with a question"
... you imply that only those Sadducees who say there is no resurrection came to Jesus.*

Rule 3: Pause **before** or after an **important idea** to draw attention to it.

To point to the **subject** of the sentence, pause **after** it.

For example:

*"It is the shepherd of the flock **[PAUSE]** who goes in by the door."*

To point to the object, or the action of the subject, pause **before** it.

*"And when he had exhausted every kind of temptation, the devil withdrew **[PAUSE]** until his next opportunity."*

c. expression

Don't just say the words, reveal the thought behind those words. This is especially noticeable in the way that we read questions that are asked. Your three tools for achieving expression are **volume**, **pace**, and **pitch**. Getting this right again only comes when we understand the passage. My favourite (non-biblical) example is: "What's *that*, on the road ahead?" v.s. "What's *that* on the road, a *head*?"

A better example of how we should read a question is in John 5:5-6:

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

Sometimes the writer helps the reader to give the correct expression:

⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do."

See below for some practice exercises.

Some practical tips

- Pray (hope you notice how important this is!).
- If possible, it can be helpful to print out or photocopy an enlarged copy of the passage which has room for you to underline, make notes, and add marks for pauses etc. (A good site - www.biblegateway.com)
- Make sure you are reading the Bible version which is read in your church setting (e.g. at LMAP we use NIV 2011).
- Practice reading the passage aloud.
- A good reason to practice reading the passage out loud is so that you can time your **breathing**, making sure that when you need to pause for a breath is an appropriate time to pause.
- Check pronunciations (especially as some names that can seem a bit confusing or convoluted) and whatever pronunciation you use, say it confidently.

And then on then on the day...

- Introduce the passage. Mention the Bible reference (e.g. 'We are reading from Mark chapter 1 starting from verse 15...') and the page number from the church copy of the Bible (e.g. '...you will find this one page 1001'), and then give people time to find the page (wait for the flutter of pages to stop!). It may be helpful to glance at a couple of people to see if they are ready before you begin reading.
- If appropriate make a comment about who it's written to, the author or who is speaking, or where we are up to if we are reading through a narrative. This helps people put the reading into context. This is especially helpful if you are reading a passage that is not directly being preached on.
- Unless reading from a Psalm, don't read the headings as if they are a part of the passage - these have just been added by editors of that Bible and aren't a part of God's word. (In Psalms, the titles are part of scripture)
- Read the passage carefully in the same way that you prepared it. Don't rush because you are nervous, or fail to add the right emphasis because it might feel a bit silly, and don't use a special 'church voice' - read it as yourself in the way that you have prepared it.
- Keep going. Even if you slip up, don't panic and don't apologise, just keep going. We are all grateful that you are serving in this way and nobody is judging you.
- Try to make some eye contact occasionally as you are reading so that you know people are following you.
- Use the microphone! Project your voice 'through' the microphone. Don't whisper into it.

One last thought

When we gathering together and hear God's word read, we want people to love reading God's Word. You are modelling to them how to read the Bible - so it's important for them to see you loving to read it too!

Further thinking

If you are interested in doing some further reading on the Bible or the public reading of the Scriptures - these resources may be of interest to you:

- <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/public-reading-scripture/>
- <http://thebriefing.com.au/2011/03/devoted-to-the-public-reading-of-scripture/>
- Mark D. Thompson, *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction* (Short Studies in Systematic Theology). Wheaton: Crossway, 2022.

Practical exercises

Activity 1:

How can changing the emphasis of this sentence change its meaning?

"We preach Christ to all people".

Challenge: How many different meanings can you make just by changing which word you emphasise?

Activity 2:

Read through the following verses. How can emphasis, pausing and expression increase the hearers' understanding? Add marks and notes to help you. Read it to a partner, then give some helpful comments to each other.

Phil 2:14-18: Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶ as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour for nothing. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Activity 3:

(John 1:45-46) "Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip."

How should you express Nathanael's reply? Surprise? Agreement? Doubt? Sarcasm?

Activity 4:

Prepare the following passages to read aloud. Find where you need to take a breath and see if it is the right moments. Practice changing your speed, volume and pitch to add the right amount of emphasis. Make notes about the process as you go.

Luke 22:1-23

Psalms 130

Under God, read well and lead those who hear you read well.