

A Guide to Reading Scripture in Public



Having the opportunity to read Scripture in public is a great privilege. For some people, young and old, it is a little daunting. It is a great pity if this is not done well as, after all, the Bible is 'God's Story'. Do you remember the day that Jesus read from the book of Isaiah? Luke Chapter 4 tells us:

¹⁶Jesus went back to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and as usual he went to the meeting place on the Sabbath. When he stood up to read from the Scriptures, ¹⁷he was given the book of Isaiah the prophet. He opened it and read, ¹⁸"The LORD'S Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers, ¹⁹and to say, 'This is the year the Lord has chosen.' " ²⁰Jesus closed the book, then handed it back to the man in charge and sat down. (Contemporary English Version)

If you are asked to read a Scripture passage in front of others, you follow in Jesus' footsteps. The following guidelines offer some advice on preparations to make and pitfalls to watch out for. We trust that the result will be that God's Word will be clearly heard by everyone and that the beauty of its message will impact on them.

Before the day

- 1) Get the details of the passage that you have been asked to read as far as possible in advance. Which Bible translation is to be used? Have you access to a copy of this?
- 2) Check the chapter and verses so that you are clear about the starting and finishing points, and that you have the correct passage.
- 3) Privately, ask God to help you understand the reading. Do a first reading of the passage to see what it is about and spot any awkward words – if unsure, check the correct pronunciation with someone.
- 4) Look at the previous verses so that you can see the context in which your reading occurs – Where does it take place? What has just happened? Who is involved?
- 5) Read the passage again, this time out loud and at a speed that allows a listener to follow the story. Remember, if you rush, people will not be able to follow you as the words tumble out. People may or may not have the text in front of them.
- 6) Spot any long sentences where you might need to pause for breath.
- 7) Remember that someone who has poor hearing may well be seated at the back of the church or hall – this reading is for them too. You can never read too **LOUDLY**.**
- 8) Check if there is a form of words that is normally used before and/or after your reading? Write them down so that you remember them.

On the day

- A. Quietly, ask God to help you in your task so that you will be conscious of His presence with you. Pray that people will be touched by the words you read. Ask that the words will speak to you too.
- B. Arrive early and find out where you are to read from – a lectern or reading desk, for example? Will the Bible sit on this without slipping?
- C. Can you see clearly to read the words if you set the Bible in front of you, taking into account the lighting at that spot?
- D. Decide where you are going to sit so that you can easily reach the required position with a minimum of delay.
- E. Is there a microphone? Check that it is switched on, that is at a suitable height for you and within 18 – 24 inches from your mouth. Too far, and it will not pick up your voice. Too close and your voice will not be natural.
- F. Check for any hazards in your path – steps, loose carpet or cables.
- G. Ensure you have a bookmark or piece of paper to mark your page.

Finally, your time to read arrives

- i. Wait for everyone to settle, especially if sitting down after singing.
- ii. Allow sufficient time after you have announced the passage (if required) for everyone to find the starting point – giving a page number is helpful.
- iii. It may be helpful, if permitted, to give a one-sentence summary of what you are about to read.
- iv. Read at a good pace, **but don't rush**, even if you feel nervous. You are trying to convey the meaning as well as the words of the passage.
- v. Remember, you want the people at the back to hear you clearly.
- vi. When you are finished, remember to add any customary phrase or blessing, and walk carefully back to your place.

Afterwards, thank God for the privilege of reading this special book.

We hope that our hints have helped you to do it well.

- Will you feel encouraged to read a little of the Scriptures each day?
- Would you like to be part of a worldwide partnership that seeks to place the Scriptures in the hands of everyone, regardless of their language, in an appropriate medium, and at a price they can afford?
- The Bible Society in Northern Ireland** helped make this possible for hundreds of thousands of people last year. Contact us for our free *Word at Work* magazine that tells you about this work.

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