



bible readings in church

the MINISTRY PAPERS

beyond the roster

"The roster? oh sure, just put me down for morning tea and maybe the odd prayer or Bible reading or that sort of thing..."

What sort of thing? What are we actually doing when we lead the Bible reading in church? How can we think 'beyond the roster' about this vital ministry?

It's not that rosters are bad. In fact, they're a very good idea. They sure beat being asked on the way into church to 'do the Bible reading', with just a few minutes' notice. They enable more people to be involved in the ministry of the public reading of Scripture. And they give these people time to prepare to carry out this ministry well.

But that's the real point: ministry. Reading the Bible in church isn't some peripheral part of our meeting as God's people. Indeed, the reading of God's Word is arguably the central 'moment' in our meeting. It's certainly a vital part of the ministry we all share in when we come together in Jesus' name.

As you work through this 'bible reading in church' MINISTRY PAPER, you'll be encouraged and challenged about the importance of this ministry: what the Bible says about it; the best way to prepare for it; & some practical 'dos and don'ts'. In this way we'll step 'beyond the roster' into works of service that build up the body of Christ (see Ephesians 4:12).

LEADERS:...before taking someone through this paper, review the two key introductory MINISTRY PAPERS: 'the ministry training church' and 'meeting one to one'.

Our church has two main 'arms': small groups & ministry teams. This **'bible readings in church'** paper relates to the **ministry teams** arm. It is designed to help us all think 'beyond the roster' about such ministry. When you read the Bible in church you are very much part of a ministry team in service of Christ and his people.



read **2 Timothy 3:14-17**

1. What role does Scripture play in the lives of God's people?

2. What should we expect to be happening when God's Word is read to his people?

3. *What are some of the implications of these truths for the ministry of reading the Bible in church?*



read **1 Timothy 4:11-16**

4. What importance does Paul place on the public reading of Scripture in verse 13?

5. *What might it mean for you to 'devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture' in terms of preparation for the task?*



prepared reading

A key application of the call to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Tim 4:13) will be to treat preparation seriously. You’ll need to be very well prepared in order to effectively carry out the ministry of the reading of God’s Word in the meeting of his people. Glancing over the passage a couple of times when you arrive at church is a long way short of what’s needed! This paper outlines some important steps in preparation.



bible reading means bible study..

There is more to carrying out the ministry of Bible Reading in church than just standing and delivering at the lectern on Sunday. There is more than just reading out the words on the page in a big clear voice, as helpful as that is. There is even more to effectively carrying out this ministry than reading and re-reading the passage parrot-fashion as the sum total of your preparation. That’s a good place to start (the reading and re-reading that is). But to really read effectively you need to read with *understanding*. Effective bible *reading* starts with thorough bible *study*.

Think about what happens when you hear a clear and faithful sermon from a portion of God’s Word. If you were to go home and read that passage aloud, you would hopefully now read with more understanding than you had before. Almost without noticing you’d have a sense of important words to emphasise. You’d have a sense of where you might need to pause for a particular phrase to sink in. Or to read a certain phrase a little slower. Or softer. Or louder. It’s not that you’ve become a Shakespearian actor. But you are reading with *understanding*. You’re not trying to add to God’s Word but rather allowing the clarity of its meaning to come to the surface.

The challenge for your Bible Reading ministry is that you need to have arrived at that understanding of the passage *before* hearing the sermon! So here’s a few things to consider as essential to your preparation:

- read the passage a few times and pray for understanding. Ideally you might read it daily in the preceding week so it grows on/in you.
- do the Bible Study that has been prepared for the passage. Make it your aim to understand the flow of the passage and how it fits together.
- focus on grasping the meaning of the Big Idea (from the preacher) and how it is reflected in the passage, so that you can highlight it in your reading (see ‘what’s the big idea?’ on page 3).
- print out a copy of the passage (e.g. from ebible.com) in large print to start marking e.g. underlining for emphasis, line breaks for pausing etc (see the example given on page 4).

“Please Lord, not the genealogy...”

One of our deepest fears as Bible readers is tripping over obscure names or big theological words. Fear not! We don’t have room here to cover all the conventions of pronunciation of Hebrew and Greek names, and not everyone follows the same conventions anyway. The best practice is simply to clarify any tricky words with the preacher. If you and he are at least saying the word the same way, that’s the least distracting outcome for all.

cringing anyone?

It’s strange what we value and don’t value in our church gatherings. We can often be guilty of straining at gnats and swallowing camels. 1 Timothy suggests a supreme value for the public reading of Scripture. Do we value it that highly?

Many of us place a very high value on music, for example, and we cringe if a song is poorly led. We expect that our musicians should prepare and practice to carry out their ministry effectively. And so we should. After all, the role of our singing in church is for the word of Christ to dwell in us richly (Col 3:16). We are right to value music in that sense—that it is a part of our ministry of God’s Word to each other.

The point here *isn’t* to lessen the call for preparation of our music, or any other part of our church gatherings. It should all be prepared well. The point *is*, however, that we are perhaps not surprised when a Bible reading has been poorly prepared, or not prepared at all.

But that should be very cringe-worthy! Not because we want to be slick but because we want to value God’s Word. Strangely, the preparation we assume our preachers and musicians will have done for the ministry of God’s Word has not applied to the actual reading of it.

The reading of the Word is arguably the most important ‘moment’ in our gathering. All that comes before builds towards it, all that follows is based upon it. We need to value the Bible Reading very highly, and prepare accordingly.



devoted reading

You can read below about the importance of a 'Big Idea' to a sermon, and to the whole meeting of God's people. Prepared bible reading is a vital part of conveying that Big Idea as God's Word is ministered. If there is a big idea in this MINISTRY PAPER it's this: preparation matters! It's all part of being devoted to this ministry. The dos and don'ts below will also be a help to think through being devoted to this ministry.

what's the big idea?

There's a well argued case that most people are only really capable of walking away from a sermon carrying one central theme. If the preacher doesn't give one, then the listener will make one up for themselves. No matter how hard the preacher might try to get five separate points across in a talk, generally when asked what the talk was about, a member of the congregation will convey the single concept they took out of the talk.

At church we try to cater for the listener by preparing messages that convey one big biblical concept or one Big Idea, that will be clear and challenging to all who listen. Indeed, not just the sermon but the entire meeting of God's people should be shaped around expressing that biblical concept, to try and ensure the seed of God's word is firmly implanted in the heart of the listener. Communication between all involved, therefore, will be vital. Then not only the words of the preacher, but of the person leading, of the songs selected... every element will be tied into that Big Idea. This is crucial with your Bible Reading.

As you read the Bible you are playing a vital part in a team ministry of teaching God's Word. Familiarity with the Big Idea will be a critical part of your preparation as you seek to read the passage with understanding. It will guide you with issues such as which words to emphasise and where to pause. You'll be equipped to serve as part of a team.

dos and don'ts

in preparation

- DO check the roster for the reference for the reading and confirm this with the church office.
- DO pray—asking God to help you to make his Word clear in the reading.
- DO prepare thoroughly by reading over the passage several times, and following the other preparation advice on page 2.
- DO check tricky words with the preacher and ask for any other suggestions they may have regarding emphasis, pausing, etc.
- DON'T read out the subheadings (they are added by the translators and aren't part of the Bible text).
- DO consider using a printed out (larger font) and 'marked up' version of the reading (as given in the example on page 4).
- DO practice the reading aloud. It's only when we actually speak it out loud that we're genuinely practicing.

on the day

- DO pray again—asking God to help you to make his Word clear in the reading.
- DO arrive early for church to let the meeting leader know you are there.
- DO have a drink of water beforehand, and avoid caffeine drinks (which dry out your mouth). Keep your mouth moving so it's ready for action!
- DO be ready at the microphone by the end of the previous item, rather than creating a distracting pause as you straggle to the front. If you're in doubt, check the program or with the leader beforehand when you'll need to step up.
- DO make sure that the microphone is well positioned for your reading posture so that we can hear you loudly and clearly. DON'T mumble.
- DO start with a hearty "good morning" or "good evening". It will give the sound team a chance to get the recording level for your voice before the reading itself.
- DO announce the reading and page number of the passage in the church Bibles (if you are using a printout be careful to have this info on hand). DON'T feel the need to add other words of introduction. It's normally more distracting than helpful. Check with the preacher if you think it may be needed.
- DON'T dive straight in. DO allow people time to find the passage. DO repeat the reference so people get a second chance to be in the right spot and ready to follow along with you once they've found the actual page.
- DO read the bible reading carefully as you prepared it, (e.g. not rushing because you are nervous, or pulling back from things like emphasis because it feels silly!). DON'T slip into a strange holy voice (special Bible reading voices are just distracting). Read as yourself but with meaning as you prepared it.
- Do keep going. If you do stumble, don't apologise, just keep going.
- DO simply sit down at the end of the reading (there is no need to add any comment after the reading: let the last word be the Bible itself).



sample reading

The paper so far has discussed the need for thorough preparation of your Bible reading. One specific suggestion was to actually print out the reading and 'mark it up'. That might seem like overkill, but it's easy to do and a really fruitful exercise. The example below (with explanatory notes) shows how just a few formatting changes can help with meaningful reading.

notes

- the intro is written out—you're most nervous when starting so having this clearly in front of you will give confidence
- the subheading has been removed (not part of original)
- the verse numbers have also been removed (makes the text clearer to work with)
- spacing lets distinct groups of words belong together easily
- Paul's replies are indented from the Corinthians' quotes
- the Corinthians' repeated mantra "everything is permissible..." is capitalized the second time to say a bit louder.
- notice that the closing quotation mark for the next of the Corinthians' quotes, unlike the NIV, is placed here after the word "both". It's useful, if the preacher will later suggest that as the better understanding, for you to have read it that way.
- bold is used for emphasis and capitals for extra emphasis.
- three dots (...) is sometimes used for a mini-pause. Line breaks are bigger pauses.
- contrasting words are formatted similarly: e.g. permissible/beneficial; everything/anything; one with her/one with him; raised the Lord/raise us.
- the three "do you not know"s are isolated so they can be emphasized.
- the line breaks in the last three sentences achieve not only pausing but slow the reading down for these important concepts.
- once you've finished formatting the text like this do a thorough check that you haven't accidentally removed any words!



big idea

the reading below has been prepared in accordance with this big idea: *Paul is correcting the Corinthians' wrong view of Christian freedom. They are "me" focussed and think their bodies don't matter. Paul is Christ-focussed and reminds them that Christ died to redeem their bodies.*

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Good morning.

Today's Bible reading is 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 on page 1131 of the church Bibles. 1 Corinthians 6. Starting at verse 12.

"Everything is PERMISSIBLE for me"

—**but not everything is BENEFICIAL.**

"EVERYTHING IS PERMISSIBLE FOR ME"

—**but I WILL NOT BE MASTERED ... by ANYTHING.**

"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food—but God will destroy them both".

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

By his power God *raised* **THE LORD** from the dead, and he will *raise* **US** also.

Do you not know...

that your bodies are *members of Christ* himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and *unite them with a prostitute*? NEVER!...

Do you not know...

that he who *unites himself with a prostitute* **IS ONE WITH HER IN BODY?** For it is said, "*The two will become ONE flesh.*" But he who *unites himself with the Lord* **IS ONE WITH HIM IN SPIRIT.**

FLEE from sexual immorality. ...

All other sins a man commits are *outside* his body, but he who sins sexually sins *against his own* body.

Do you not know...

that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

You are **NOT YOUR OWN**;

you were **BOUGHT AT A PRICE.**

Therefore **HONOR GOD** with your body.