

The Ministry of Public Bible Reading

Workshop resource by Simon Camilleri



The Ministry of Public Bible Reading

Reflect: Fill in below what you think makes a bad or good public Bible reading?



FOR YOUR REFLECTION

- What do you think are some of the causes of bad Bible reading?
- What do you think are some of the causes of good Bible reading?
- What do you think are some of the negative effects bad Bible reading can have?
- What do you think are some of the positive effects good Bible reading can have?



A ministry, not just a roster.

“Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” (1 Timothy 4:13)

- Why must we be devoted to the public reading of Scripture?
(Read 1 Timothy 4:1-13 and consider the issues they were facing that lead up to Paul’s instruction in v13)
- What would it practically look like if churches were as devoted to the public reading of Scripture as they are to preaching and teaching?
- What can you do to be devoted to the public reading of Scripture?

The ministry of public Bible reading is...

1. A P_____ ministry: Reading with C_____



1 CORINTHIANS 14:7-9

2. A P_____ ministry: Reading with C_____



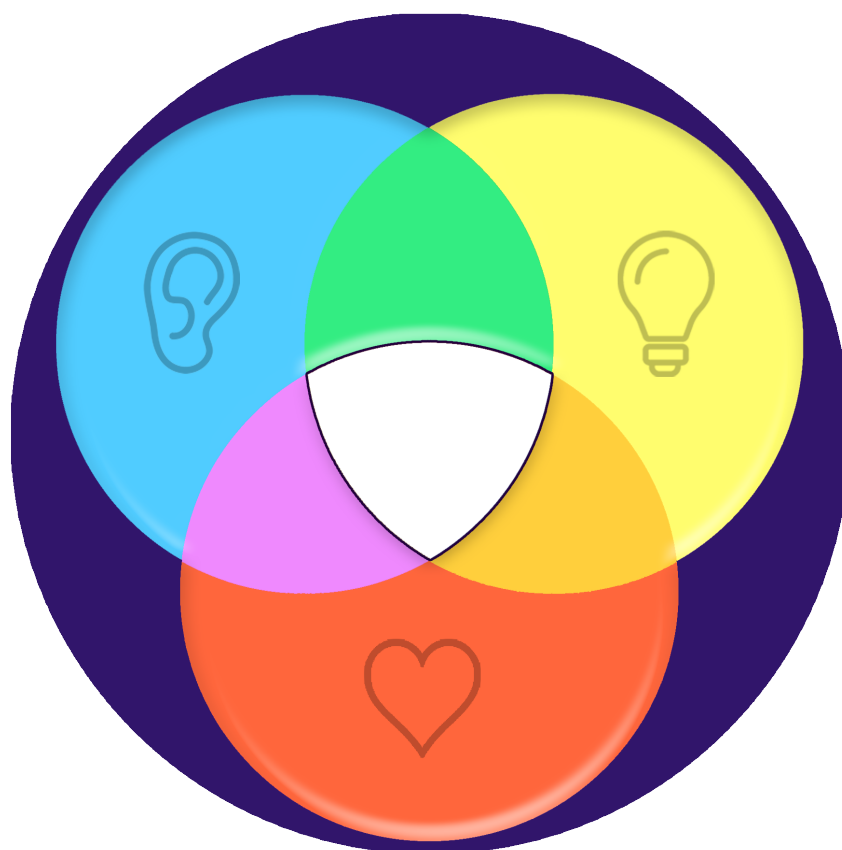
3. A P_____ ministry: Reading with C_____



2 TIMOTHY 3:16, 4:2

4. A P_____ ministry: Reading with C_____

ISAIAH 55:10-11



Reflection:

Which of the four principles do you feel you are strongest in?

Which areas do you need to grow in?

If helpful, draw an X on the diagram above to reflect where you feel you are currently at in this ministry. Use the space around the diagram to write some practical things you want to work on.

Top Ten Tips for The Ministry of Public Bible Reading

1. Pray

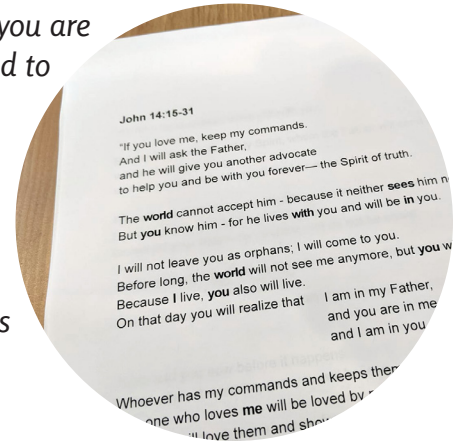
Always approach this ministry with prayerful humility, remembering that this is God's Word and so we need His help to prepare it, to read it and for the congregation to be changed by it.

2. Commit to investing time and effort

As early as possible and practical, find out what passage (and translation) you are being asked to read. Give yourself sufficient time to prepare, to practise and to become comfortable with text.

3. Print out your passage

Copy your reading into a document, number the pages and format it to make it easy to read and understand. Highlight the words and phrases that you want to emphasise. Print it out and use that document to read from. Also, as you prepare, you can write notes on it to assist you to read it well.



4. Practise reading out loud

Read the passage several times out loud. This will help you find verses that you might stumble over. Also, every time you hear as well as read the words, your familiarity, comprehension and love for the text will grow.

5. Approach the preacher

If you are reading before a sermon, you should feel free to approach the preacher for advice or to help you comprehend the text better. They may also have a key point or verse they want emphasised.

6. Prepare & protect your voice

Your voice is your primary instrument for this ministry. Stretching and vocal warm-ups can be helpful, but at the very least, make sure your voice is not strained and stay lubricated by drinking lots of water.

7. Be aware of your body

Your voice is your primary instrument, but your what your body is doing (facial expressions, gestures etc.) will either compliment, distract from or be disconnected to what you are saying. What your face, hands and body is doing should naturally align with the meaning and emotion of the words that you are saying.

8. Love

Reflect on what the passage is trying to do, and let your love for God inspire you to love His purposes for it. Also, love the congregation. Care that they hear God's word as God's message to them directly.

9. Have confidence in God

As best as you can, read with clarity, comprehension and conviction, but in the end, your confidence should not be in yourself or your preparation. Pray, trusting that God will use your reading for His purposes and rest in the assurance that God's Spirit will do His work through His Word to His people.

10. Assess yourself and seek feedback

If you can, watch or listen to your reading afterwards. Take notes about your strengths and what you need to improve. Also, ask a friend or your minister to give you honest feedback to help you grow in this ministry.

Quotes on The Ministry of Public Bible Reading

“Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” Paul the Apostle (1 Timothy 4:13)

“The thing which always strikes me is that Paul says to Timothy, ‘Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching’ and we kind of just skip over the first one as if it’s just the preliminary to the real deal, which is preaching. He’s actually got it there as a distinct ministry of public reading the Bible. And most of your early church people didn’t have their own Bible. So that’s how they heard the Bible. They heard it read.

Reading the Bible matters and when it’s read well, it’s really powerful. There’s lots of lousy Bible reading, but sometimes you hear such a good reading of the Bible you almost don’t want the sermon afterwards, because it’s been a ministry in and of itself. I love it when it’s like that. And that doesn’t just happen. It’s someone who’s prepared to read just like someone who’s prepared to preach. Scripture comes alive when it’s read well.”

Theologian & Author of “Preaching with Spiritual Vigour”, Murray Capill

“Bible reading offers the widest scope for the enrichment of public worship and it is a great pity that the Scriptures are often so badly read... When the Book is well read and made to live for the people, it can do for them what sermons often fail to do: It can be the very voice of God to their souls. If it fails to be that, the reason is usually to be sought in the lack of high seriousness with which many men come to the task. Their whole manner suggests that anyone can read the Scriptures in public: even a child. The people listen with respect but with only a tithe of that understanding or, indeed, tingling eagerness which skilful readers can communicate to a congregation.”

Scottish Preacher, W. E. Sangster (from “The Approach to Preaching” 1951)

“It will make all the difference between right and wrong reading of Scriptures if I do not identify myself with God but quite simply serve Him. Otherwise I will become rhetorical, emotional, sentimental, or coercive and imperative; that is, I will be directing the listeners’ attention to myself instead of to the Word. But this is to commit the worst of sins in presenting the Scriptures... Proper reading of Scripture is not a technical exercise that can be learned; it is something that grows or diminishes according to one’s own spiritual frame of mind. The crude, ponderous rendition of the Bible by many a Christian grown old in experience often far surpasses the most highly polished reading of a minister.”

Pastor & Theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (from “Life Together” 1954)

“People say I shout. I will shout. I will not be a velvet-mouthed preacher. I will not speak the Word of God in a sleepy manner, like your church preachers. I’ll tell you a story. The Archbishop of Canterbury in the year 1675 was acquainted with Mr. Butterson the actor. One day the Archbishop said to Butterson, ‘Pray inform me Mr. Butterson, what is the reason you actors on stage can affect your congregations with speaking of things imaginary, as if they were real, while we in church speak of things real, which our congregations only receive as if they were imaginary?’ ‘Why my Lord,’ says Butterson, ‘the reason is very plain. We actors on stage speak of things imaginary, as if they were real and you in the pulpit speak of things real as if they were imaginary.’”

Evangelist from the 1700s, George Whitefield

“I just love excellent Bible reading! Sometimes I hear a good Bible reading and I think, why am I getting up to preach? When done well, the Word speaks!”

Historian, Author & Apologist, John Dickson

FURTHER READING:

“Unleashing The Word” by Max McLean and Warren Bird

“Devote Yourself To The Public Reading Of Scripture” by Jeffrey D. Arthurs

“For Reading Out Loud” by Clifford Warne, Paul White and Annie Vallotton (hard to find, but anything by Clifford Warne is helpful)

“The Ministry Of Public Bible Reading” article by Simon Camilleri found at: au.thegospelcoalition.org

Visit **www.PublicBibleReading.com** for more resources.

Comprehension Exercise: Using Emphasis

To communicate the correct meaning of a sentence, we need to be aware of which words we need to emphasise. In the following seven examples, you are given a line that gives you some context, which then leads into the statement "I should tell him". Based on the context, identify which word should be emphasised - "I", "should", "tell" or "him". (Credit to Clifford Warne for the inspiration of this exercise)

The best way to identify the correct word, is to read the first line out loud. Then as you read "I should tell him" you should naturally be able to hear which of the four words you need to emphasise. If it's still not obvious, experiment with reading the full line multiple times, emphasising a different word each time you read it.

1. It's so awkward. I don't **want** to tell him it's over. But I know in my heart...
I should tell him.
2. Look, I'm his best friend. If **anyone** is going to tell him, I think...
I should tell him.
3. He is a stubborn man who **never** listens and he **never** changes. Why on earth do you think...
I should tell him?
4. I want my son to know I love him. I could buy him **gifts** or give him a **hug**, but most importantly...
I should tell him.
5. There are definitely others who could explain it to him better than **me**, but the boss said...
I should tell him.
6. Good works **support** evangelism, but if I really want my neighbour to **know** the gospel, then...
I should tell him.
7. That guy's got something in his teeth. I don't **have** to tell him, but common decency suggests...
I should tell him.

The answers are upside down at the bottom of the page

Biblical Example: Read out loud this statement of Jesus from Matthew 5:17

*"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;
I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."*

- Underline which words should be emphasised to communicate the meaning of this verse?

Hopefully this exercise demonstrates how your comprehension of the text helps you know which key words to emphasise, and also why it is important to emphasise the correct word to communicate the correct meaning.

As you prepare a public Bible reading, read through the passage out loud several times. Identify and then highlight or underline the words in each verse that you will need to emphasise to communicate its meaning.

For more resources go to www.PublicBibleReading.com

Conviction Exercise: Verbing

To read with conviction we need to understand the particular conviction that is being expresses in our passage. What is it trying to do? What effect did the author want to have on their audience? What verb best describes each particular verse? Understanding this will tell you the tone you need to use when reading it.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness... Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." (2 Timothy 3:16, 4:2)

As this passage shows, Scripture can have a variety of intentions. It can aim to teach, reproof, correct, train, rebuke or exhort. "Verbing" is an exercise where you identify the appropriate verbs that describe what a passage is trying to do. Here is a list of some of the verbs you might consider:

Affirm	Describe	Inform	Reflect
Amaze	Direct	Invite	Rebuke
Appeal	Encourage	Lament	Remind
Call	Exhort	Mock	Share
Challenge	Foretell	Persuade	State
Comfort	Glorify	Plead	Teach
Command	Humble	Praise	Terrify
Condemn	Implore	Proclaim	Testify
Correct	Instruct	Prophecy	Train
Declare	Inspire	Question	Warn

Look up the verses listed below. What verb/s best describe the intention of each passage? Don't just default to "teach". Be more specific. Feel free to use one or more of the verbs listed above, or you can think of your own.

Galatians 3:1 VERBS: _____

Matthew 11:28-29 VERBS: _____

Leviticus 1:3-5 VERBS: _____

Isaiah 40:28 VERBS: _____

Once you have identified the appropriate verb. Then reflect on what it sounds like when you do that in your own life. For example, what tone do you use when you are *warning* a friend not make a foolish decision, or *instructing* a co-worker how to use a piece of equipment, or *rebuking* your child as they run towards a busy street, or *comforting* someone who is mourning a death in their family? Your tone of voice sounds very different with each verb.



To read the Bible with conviction requires us to reflect on the intention of our passage and use the appropriate tone. If it is supposed to be a word of comfort, then speak as one who is comforting. If it is a warning from God, then make sure that the congregation feels that they are being warned. It's not about "putting on" a voice. In fact it may be the opposite. Some Bible readers speak with a generic, religious "Bible reading" voice that captures nothing of the intention of the passage. Rather than adding to our reading, we actually want to get out of its way and let it speak for itself. Our goal is simply to read God's word being faithful to its intention.