

READING SCRIPTURE

What does reading scripture require?

- a clear voice that projects well
- ability to read well
- essential understanding of what is involved in reading the Bible during worship
- some basic training on how to read scripture worshipfully and effectively

HISTORY

- Use to be that the only person who stood up before congregation was pastor who spoke, read, preached, and prayed. Performed most official acts of worship
- From I Cor. 14, it appears that in the early church a variety of members participated.
- Through the years boys and girls and lay preachers have been involved in worship
- some churches maintain a tradition of having a special office of Scripture reader, called the lector.
- Some churches had a small lectern standing in front of the tall pulpit used by pastor for scripture reading.
- Today, more and more churches are involving men and women, young and old, office bearers and non-office bearers, to read Scripture.

WHAT IS INVOLVED?

- It is a public dialogue between God and the people of God. Words of instruction and counsel, adoration and praise.
- This is reading of God's Words. Not a proclamation or message from President. An act of worship
- Goal is to have the people's attention focused on the text, rather than the fine reading of reader.

READING IS INTERPRETING

- Vocal interpretation. Our own personal understanding of and emotional reaction to comes out in our manner of reading.
- Illustration: Mark 4:40. After calming of storm Jesus said to his disciples, "Do you *still* have no faith?" Where do you place the emphasis? If on *still* you are interpreting the Lord to be saying impatiently, *i've shown you one miracle after another, wonder upon wonder, sign upon sign, and still you don't trust in me!* If on faith, then you are interpreting the Lord to be contrasting fear and faith and saying, in effect, *Your fear because of the storm is caused by lack of faith!*
- Do you say this in an exasperated tone, a disappointed voice, a cool way, as if this were just a question motivated by curiosity?
- Also true of an entire section of a Scripture. To read prophecy as if you are proclaiming God's Word to a rebellious people, an epistle of Paul as if you are reading a letter sent from one believer to another, a psalm as if you are offering a prayer to God, a proverb as if you were giving wise advice, calls for different attitudes and different ways or reading.

MORE THAN A PRELUDE TO THE SERMON

- People can read along if that helps them understand the Word as it is being read.
- If the reading is effective, the biblical words and phrases coming alive as read, the listener need not follow in the scriptures.

PREPARING TO READ

- Read the passage several times aloud. Read some of the scripture that precedes and follows this particular passage.
- Is this a narrative, letter, prophecy, song, law or a vision?
- How does the passage fit into its context? Is it a continuation of an earlier story, answer to question? Where does the main point continue?
- Who are the main characters? How do they interact? Who is speaking to whom?
- What contrasts do you find or what transitions?

- How is this passage structured? Is there a main story line, repeated pattern?
- What is the author trying to say; the point we should remember.?
- **EXAMPLES:**
- 2 Sam. 18:19ff David waiting for report on battle of his army against Absalom's forces. (v. 28) The messenger, Ahimaaz, arrived and "called out to the king. 'All is well!'" (God) has delivered up the men who lifted up their hands against my lord the king" There is a distinct difference between the two words this messenger brings--one is called from a distance and the other spoken quietly.
- Gen. 15:5 God's covenant with Abram. "He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars...'" Then he said to him, 'so shall your offspring be'" The two "saids" indicate that God paused to let Abram look up at the stars. There should be a pause in the reading.
- Gen. 11:1-9 Tower of Babel Marked by key words. Let's or let us, "Name" "scattered"
- I Cor. 13, the "if, then" structure in first three verses. Four vss. of abiding qualities of love. Then 8-12 a series of contrasts. vs. 13, summary.

PREPARING THE TEXT

- Rather than mark up your Bible, you may want to type out, or make a computer printout of passage. This you can clip to inside of an open Bible for reading.
- **PRONUNCIATION** Look up the words you aren't sure how to pronounce. Check a dictionary or ask an expert. Mark on your copy and practice.
- **PHRASING.** Don't read the punctuation that is meant for the eye not the ear. Determine your own phrasing making your grouping of words sound like you speak. (That is a whole another workshop.)
- For example, in written dialogue there is always a comma or colon between the word "said" and what is said. In ordinary speech, however, when we quote someone, we seldom make much of a break between the word "said" and what that person said.
- Gen. 18:25. Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away..." Typically, a reader will pause after the word "said." A more meaningful break is probably after the word "him." Also, Luke 1:59-60.
- Choose the phrasing that best brings out the meaning. Luke 2:14. Break between "earth," "peace," or "men"?
- How about Luke 2:16. If you pause after "babe," instead of Joseph, you place all three in the manger instead of just the baby.
- Or Lord's Prayer If you pause after "kingdom," or "power," and make the rest of that sentence, "and the glory forever," into one single phrase, the impression you leave is that only God's glory will be forever, not the kingdom and power. Better to pause after "glory."
- You may wish to make the phrasing of your passages by a slash indicating a break, or with a single slash for a minor break and a double slash for a major break.
- **EMPHASIS** Marking the text for emphasis by underlining words and phrases that you wish to stress. This is based on interpretation of passage. There are several ways to emphasize, more than raising voice. Emphasis is more effective if you vary the method, like we do when we sing in choir.
- Raising your voice
- Lengthening the word. For example, in "Hosanna in the highest." We can stress the word "Hosanna" by lengthening the "n" sound.
- Pausing. This gives people an opportunity to think about what is being said, implying importance. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior...(Luke 2:11) Try pausing either before and after "unto you," "this day," or "Savior." Notice how that changes the emphasis.
- **COLOR** To add color think about the feelings, convictions, and life situations of the people you are reading about.
- Gen. 18. When Abraham was speaking to the Lord was he frightened, apprehensive, speaking from deeply held convictions about God's justice? Was there a note of

- impatience or tolerance or understanding in the Lord's voice with the Lord answered?
- Luke 2:8-20. What sort of men were these shepherds? Was their decision in vs. 15 a mutual one or did some have to be persuaded to abandon their sheep to check on the promised sign? Did they go confidently or doubtfully? How did Mary and Joseph react to their invasion of privacy?
- You can jot in the margin of the text: "fearfully," "confidently," "joyfully," etc.
- **PRACTICE.** Read the passage aloud, as if reading before the congregation.
- Speak to a distant point
- Have someone listen to you read and perhaps offer some good critique.
- Practice in the church building, if possible. Use the pulpit or mic.

READING EFFECTIVELY - some tips.

- Don't look at the mic; have your mouth about 10 to 12 inches away; it is best not to hold the mic.
- Be physically prepared. A few mild exercises helps you loosen up.
- Stand erect with your weight evenly distributed.
- Look at the people, not over their heads as you introduce the reading.
- Announce what you will be reading.
- Get a good start. It is all right to substitute nouns for pronouns when it will clarify the text. For example, rather than read "Every year his parents went to Jerusalem....say, "Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem" or use "Jesus" in place of "he" (Luke 4:31)
- Read with an air of expectation. This is God's Word. Perhaps you can ask the people to stand, as is the custom in many churches. Give the idea that this is important, which it is.
- Watch inflections. Remember rising inflection asks a question or leaves a thought incomplete. A falling inflection makes an assertion or completes a thought. Up and down inflections gives a sense of being unsure.
- Watch your facial expression. Joyful news should be given with a smile rather than a dour face. Try announcing the birth of Christ or his resurrection with a frown and see how unconvincing that sounds.
- Watch out for mannerisms which might distract from your read. For example, playing with your tie, hand in pocket, bouncing up and down, clearing your throat constantly, etc.
- Make a clear distinction in your manner of reading between those places where the author is addressing the people directly and where the author is quoting someone.
- Make clear transitions between one thought and another, and clear contrasts between different reactions. Luke 2, the distinction between the joyful message of the Savior's birth to the shepherds, and (v. 12) "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared..." or between vs. 18 and v. 19, and again v. 20.
- Of course, if you become too dramatic in your reading you might call attention to yourself, rather than the text.

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God!