

## Tool 7



### Reading in Public Worship

Reading Scripture in public worship is an important moment. Scripture that is read well can prepare listeners to hear more, while Scripture read poorly can move people to reach for their bulletins to see what is coming next. There are some fundamental barriers to reading Scripture that can be addressed and, once removed, can enable valuable contributions to the shape and content of worship. Reading Scripture publicly is different than reading in private; it is itself an act of worship. Here are some tips that can improve both the reading and hearing of Scripture. The task is made easier by the realization that people really do want to hear what you are reading.

1. Practise reading in the sanctuary. This can be done before church, after church or at some other time during the week. Practise reading but do not read to an empty room. If you have a regular rotation of readers, then assemble and read through a month's readings from the lectionary and coach each other. Have a structured time of reading and a time for feedback. Even if the minister does not follow the lectionary, it is a useful resource for developing and honing your public reading skills. Listening to others read can improve your own reading. Remember, it is not a competition to see who can read the best but a structured time to help interested readers read more worshipfully.
2. Practise without the use of amplification. Microphones and sound systems in worship are both a blessing and a curse. They will only amplify what the reader is speaking and can make both good and bad reading audible. When you read in front of a microphone, it may be tempting to change your reading style. Do not read differently in front of a microphone! If it sounds too loud when you read, then move back from the microphone a couple of inches. Practising without amplification enables you to concentrate on some of the other important parts of reading publicly.
3. If your church uses a lectern Bible, make sure your passages are marked before the service begins. If you will be reading from a pew Bible, you may want to photocopy your readings ahead of time in larger print so they are easier to read. You can mark up the passage, underlining important words or phrases for emphasis.
4. Experiment with changing the speed of your reading. Reading faster or slower can create emphasis or tension that helps convey the meaning of what you are reading. Even longer pauses can be important for the impact of a passage.
5. Experiment with your intonation and emphasis.
6. Try to locate your voice. As you read, ask yourself if your "voice" is coming from your nose, your throat or your chest. Where are your muscles tense? Try to centre your public speaking voice as deeply into your diaphragm as possible. You should feel a slight tensing of your lower abdomen. There should be no strain on your throat or neck. You do not have to yell or strain your voice to speak loudly or clearly.
7. Accept that, at some point, you will make a mistake. Everyone stumbles over some words at times. When you make a mistake, simply pause, correct it and continue reading. There is no need to joke about it, to make a big deal out of it or to be embarrassed by it.
8. Listen to how others read but resist copying their style of reading. Be yourself.

9. Most important: Read the passage so people will know God's word matters to you. If it matters to you, it will matter to them.

Any questions or comments? Please contact the Elders' Institute for information.

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