

# READING THE BIBLE IN CHURCH

a workshop for Bible readers

## 1. *Why* we read the Bible in church

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### i. The nature Scripture

The Bible is God's 'word'.

### ii. The place of God's word for Israel & the church

God's word has always occupied a central place in the life of God's people.

#### **Deuteronomy 5:1-5** (circa. 1400 BC)

*'Moses summoned all Israel and said: Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain. (At that time I stood between the LORD and you to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said...'*

#### **2 Kings 23:1-2** (640-609 BC, during the reign of Josiah)

*'Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets--all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD.'*

#### **Ezra 8:2-3** (circa. 458 BC)

*'So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.'*

**Colossians 3:16** (circa. AD 60)

*'Let the word of Christ dwell in you' richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.'*

**1 Timothy 4:13** (circa. 65 AD)

*'Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.'*

## 2. *Preparing to read the Bible in church*

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### i. Understand the reading

We need to understand our passage in order to communicate its meaning effectively. To do this we need to understand:

- **the wider context:** *how does your reading relate to what comes before and what follows (in terms of the particular book of the Bible and the Bible's story as a whole)?*
- **the meaning of words** (eg. Matthew 5:22: *"But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, '**Raca**', is answerable to the **Sanhedrin**"*).
- **the flow of the argument or narrative:** *how are the sentences and paragraphs connected? what is the 'big idea' of the passage?*

**Tip:** As you work through these things do not forget your need to **pray** for the Holy Spirit's help (see 1 Corinthians 2:14).

*An excellent resource is the **New Bible Commentary**.<sup>2</sup> It will often help you to understand the meaning and significance of words, phrases & ideas. It will also help you to understand the context & background for your reading. Also, always feel free to ask someone for help.*

### ii. Practice the reading

We need to practice the reading beforehand so that we can read the passage as well as possible in church.

#### **English translation**

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<sup>1</sup> Or 'among you'. The 'you' is plural and refers to when the Colossians gathered.

<sup>2</sup> Edited by Carson, France, Motyer & Wenham & published by Baker books. \$44.95 at Koorong.

Practice using the *New International Version* (NIV) translation of the Bible.

### **Print size**

The print in most Bibles can be quite small and closely spaced. This makes it easy to lose your place. If you don't have a large-print Bible you can go to [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) and 'cut & paste' the NIV text into your word-processing software, increase the font size, and print it off.

### **Pronunciation**

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Also see: <http://victoria.tc.ca/~ub608/bbwords.html> for instant answers (with an American accent!).

### **Breathing**

Take a deep breath before you begin – it will help to relax you.

### **Phrasing**

This is essential to communicating the meaning. It includes pauses, expression, emotion, stress & emphasis.

### **Pace**

Vary this to suit the meaning. Don't rush! Allow time for the words to sink in.

### **Characterisation**

This may be particularly effective in communicating a reading that has dialogue. Try changing the pitch & pace of each speaker.

\* See insert, 'More tips for practicing your Bible reading'

### 3. *How to read the Bible in church*

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**Tip:** Make sure you arrive at church in plenty of time to speak to whoever is leading. Find out when, in the meeting, your reading will be. The person leading church should have a printed run-sheet for you. This way you can anticipate when your reading is coming up. Also, make sure you sit somewhere with easy access to the front.

#### i. Introduction

##### **Greeting / Announce-wait-announce**

Begin with a greeting. Then announce the reading, giving the page number as well. Pause, look up, and gauge when most people have found the reading. Announce the reading again. Don't be afraid to take your time.

Example: *“Good morning/evening. Our first/second reading today is Luke chapter 12, verses 1-34. You can find that on page 975 of the red church Bibles (pause)... Luke chapter 12, beginning at verse 1”.*

##### **Context statement**

A short context statement links your reading with the readings from previous weeks. Do this if you are confident that you have understood the reading, and are quite sure how it fits in its immediate context.

Example: *‘In the past couple of weeks we’ve been reading through the book of Exodus. We’ve read about God’s promise to rescue his people from slavery in Egypt, and last week we saw how God made good on that promise. This morning’s reading finds the Israelites assembled at Mt Sinai where they will receive God’s Law.*

#### ii. Ending the reading

##### **The ‘traditional’ way**

Traditionally Bible readings have ended with the words: *“This is the word of God”*. It's fine to end like this, but not necessary.

##### **The simplest way**

If you prefer, simply finish your reading and sit down. This can have good dramatic impact!

**Tip:** Whichever way you end make sure you decide *beforehand* how you will do it.

#### 4. *Miscellaneous odds & ends*

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- **Roster:** please check the roster well in advance and make a note in your diary when you will be reading. You can download a copy of the roster from our website. Go to [www.stmarksavalon.org.au/pages/services/rosters.php](http://www.stmarksavalon.org.au/pages/services/rosters.php)
- **Headings:** refrain from reading the 'headings'. These are not part of the original text and are only included by the Bible translators to identify sections. Sometimes they accurately summarise what is to come, sometimes not. Reading them out loud will simply interrupt the flow of your reading. The only exception to this is the Psalms, where the 'titles', if not original, are certainly ancient, and therefore Holy Scripture.
- **Visualisation:** some people find it helpful to imagine themselves in the situation that their reading describes. This can create empathy with what's going and can enhance understanding. Give it a go in your preparation.
- **Warm-up:** it often helps to 'warm-up' your voice beforehand so that you have a rich, warm tone. Also gently clear your throat before you get to the microphone.
- **Eye contact:** if you can occasionally look up this will enhance your engagement with the congregation. Not everyone will be looking at you as most people will be following along in their Bibles. However, some people like to look up and listen to you read.
- **Recovery:** even the best Bible readers stumble over words or get sentences mixed up. That's life! Try not to get too flustered when this happens. Recovery is simple. Just pause, take a breath, and start the sentence again. Remember, this is not a performance.