

# Reading the Bible aloud

Reading the Bible in public (in church, or in a Bible study) is an important role. The way we do it can affect our listeners' whole attitude to the Bible, their understanding of its message, and their acceptance of its authority. The public reading of the Bible is neither a religious ritual nor a chance to show off our skills. What we are reading is an important message from God.

Therefore, our tone of voice, expression, eye contact and body language can tell people that the Bible is important, meaningful and interesting. Alternatively, they can decide that it is hard to understand, out of date, irrelevant and boring.

## **Bible skills**

- Read the passage thoughtfully at least twice. Practice using the Bible translation you'll be reading from.
- Read the context- the text before and after the passage so that it makes more sense to you.
- Ask yourself what kind of literature it is. The Bible is not just a series of religious statements. It contains narratives, dialogues, poetry, songs etc.
- Look for main ideas of the passage.
- Read a commentary on the passage if you have one. This will help you understand the meaning more fully so that you can convey it to others.

## **Speaking skills**

- Speak with your mouth open! ie. so that the words you say are clear and projected outwardly.
- Focus your mind on the people in the back row, so you are naturally projecting your voice to reach them.
- Pronounce correctly. If your passage has words or names that are strange to you, check on the pronunciation. A Bible dictionary may help, or the easiest way is to ask someone.
- Position the microphone right in front of your mouth, a bit under a hand span away. Adjust it to suit you, rather than bending down or reaching up to it. Put the Bible where you can read it without turning your face away from the microphone. Try to position the microphone so people can still see your face, especially your mouth. Keep a finger next to the line you are reading so that you won't lose your place.

## **Dramatic skills**

Volume, speed and tone are the three main variables to consider. We can change all three to emphasize words to distinguish narrative from dialogue, to highlight key sections, and to maintain interest in long readings.

We can use volume, speed and tone to convey different emotions. When astonished or angry, we normally increase volume. To convey excitement we speak faster with a rising tone. For suspense, we reduce volume and speed. For sadness, we use a falling tone.

Emphasis is added by saying the word(s) louder and/or by slowing the speed and separating the words from each other. So what do you emphasize? Emphasize words that introduce new ideas. In the following example, the emphasized words are underlined:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.

Note how 'all' and 'love' are not emphasized when they are repeated.

Emphasize words that bring out contrast eg. Into/out of.

Phrasing is the art of using pauses to break up sentences into meaningful and melodious sections. Bad phrasing can change the meaning of the words. Phrasing helps listeners to group ideas together.

Last hints at reading the Bible out aloud:

1. Take time to think about the passage till you understand it. Don't leave preparation to the last moment. Find a Bible that has a good-sized print.
2. It may help to mark the Bible in pencil to remember the main sections of the passage, key phrases, things to emphasize, places to pause.
3. You need to prepare and practice your introduction:
  - Our Bible reading today comes from 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verses 1 to 10 (for example).
  - Provide the page number of the church Bible and the chapter. Then WAIT and PAUSE till people have found it. Then repeat the Bible passage again in full.
4. Finally practice your reading (with the introduction), aloud several times.
5. On the day, arrive early enough and check out the lectern and the microphone (height, volume). If you're worried about not being heard, ask friends to indicate if they can't hear with a suitable signal.
6. Ask God for his help.
7. Smile and take a deep breath.