



Guidelines for Leading in Worship *at First Presbyterian Church*

by Pastor Dave Weidlich

Especially for Leaders of the Bible Reading, Prayer of Confession...

I usually have the Worship Leader (Lay Reader) read one of the Bible readings. Someone will email the order of service to you on the weeks you're reading so you'll know the specifics for your Sunday(s).

Be Prepared. Read through the prayer and Bible reading silently and aloud several times before the worship service. Make the readings personal by praying and reading through it personally.

Be on time. I would like to pray with everyone involved in worship at 10:15 am (check on the location). Come early enough so you're not breathless and hurried when the service begins.

Know when your part comes in the service and be there. The congregation doesn't want to watch you march from your seat to the podium. Plan to sit on or near the front row on the Sunday when you are leading worship. This will enable you to move to the platform easily and quickly. After you're finished with your parts, you can sit wherever you want.

Please get yourself free of other duties so you can slow down, pray and prepare spiritually for leading worship.

Glossary:

Unison Reading – Everyone reads together with the leader

Responsive Reading – Leader begins, congregation then reads a section...alternating. Usually everyone reads the last part in unison.

Solo Reading - you read while the congregation listens or follows silently

Announce your intentions. Give clear instructions. If it's a responsive reading, let everyone know it is a responsive reading and that you will begin and they should read the bold print. If you want people to read along with you aloud, tell them that's what you want.

Important: 90% of the folks may know where to find the reading and what to do with a responsive reading. That's fine. **You're giving instructions to the 10%** who don't know all the things charter members know.

On the Prayer of Confession, be sure to read the prayer slowly. Allow at least 15 seconds for the silent prayer of confession.

Tell people where they can find the reading if they're expected to read with you and allow enough time for them to find the passage. Invite people to follow your reading in the Bible or the bulletin if the reading is listed there.

On Scripture readings, give people enough time to find the reading in the bulletin and more time to find it in their Bibles. To find the right amount of time, try looking it up with a marker when you get up to the podium.

Please use the Bible translation that is requested - usually the TNIV (Today's New International Version). That is the translation that will appear on the screen. Please read from your Bible. If your Bible is a different translation, take the Scripture portion that is emailed to you and tuck it inside your Bible. (You can download the TNIV New Testament free from www.tniv.com (pdf).

Show that it's meaningful to you. Make a comment about why this prayer or Scripture is especially meaningful to you (if it is). Feel free to give a one-minute statement about what the reading/prayer means to you.

Show it's meaningful to you by the way you read. For example, try these two readings:

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands
Serve the Lord with gladness.
Come before his presence with singing. (Psalm 100:1)

Or

Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God. (Psalm 42:5)

Those two readings ought to sound different when read aloud.

Speak **clearly and s l o w l y**, especially on unison readings. Learn from Paul Harvey, the "pregnant pause" (different than dead air). On unison readings, usually break where you find a comma or period.

Use the microphone. Position yourself in front of it. After that, let the sound techs do their job.

New: Before the Scripture reading, please announce something like "we have Bibles available in the back for those who forgot a Bible. If you don't have a Bible, take one of our Bibles and write your name in it. It's yours from this church. Take it home, read it and bring it with you next Sunday."

Thank you for taking the time to lead with excellence!

Reading the Bible Better for Your Listeners

By Brian Mavis

A dozen years ago I taught a college class called "Advanced Reading Skills." One of the primary texts we used was "How to Read a Book" by Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren. I admit the title is ironic – reading a book on how to read a book (shouldn't it come in video?). But don't let the title fool you; this 400-page book is exceptionally thoughtful and helpful. It should be required reading for all Christian teachers.

The book goes through four levels of reading, with each one being more advanced: (1) elementary reading, (2) inspectional reading, (3) analytical reading and (4) synoptical reading. **Here is the problem: when it comes to reading the Bible during a [worship], 99% of the time it is done at the elementary level.** Let me be perfectly clear. I'm not talking about how you read the Bible privately during your study. Most pastors read at a much deeper level during this time. What I'm talking about is reading the Bible publicly – typically during the early part of the sermon. This reading is usually at the elementary level.

But there is good news. **You can do one very simple thing to take it up to the next level – greatly increasing the listeners' comprehension of the text.**

Before I share this simple thing you can do to advance the reading level and the listener's comprehension, let me define the first two levels:

Elementary Reading: This is how most people read. It's how they read newspapers, magazines and books. It's simple and simplistic. "You just pick up a book and look at every word until you've seen them all."

Inspectional Reading: The reader anticipates what is going to be read by "pre-reading." She looks ahead, checking out the title page, preface, table of contents, index, and skimming bits and parts of the material. By doing this, she can begin to read with more anticipation, alertness, and intelligence.

Now back to the issue of the public reading of the biblical text. **The problem is that you ... know what you are looking for, but the listeners don't.** You know what you are going to emphasize in your teaching, but **the listeners have no idea what to anticipate – every word, phrase, and verse feels the same in terms of importance.** The preacher says, "Let's read from today's text – Matthew 28:16-20." He reads it, but the listeners are listening at the most elementary level – hearing every word, until they've heard them all. They don't know what to tune in to, so they can easily tune out.

So what can you do to help your people listen at a higher level? This one simple thing can help. **Before you read the text, tell them what to listen (or look) for as you read.** For example you could say, "Our text today is Matthew 28:16-20. As I read this passage I want you to listen for each time the words 'all, always, and everything' are used. These are key words that will help us understand the immense importance of this text." **Now your listeners' minds are activated. They know what to look and listen for. You have moved them from passive listeners to active listeners – from elementary readers to inspectional readers.**

You won't be stealing the thunder from the rest of [the] sermon. Instead, people will be tracking with you, and they'll be ready for you to take them to the next level of exploring the text.

© Brian Mavis 2006

You have my permission to reprint this article. I just like to know if you did, so I know what you find helpful. brian@sermoncentral.com