

Scripture Reading at Hope Baptist

*“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”
1 Timothy 4:13*

*“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”
Isaiah 55:11*

You have been chosen to be a blessing to the church through the reading of scripture. As elders we believe that scripture reading is important for the strengthening and shepherding of the flock here at Hope Baptist. We also believe that by including you in this, it may assist in preparing you for a lifetime of blessing the church of God by providing this important function.

Not a Time Filler

The reading of scripture is not a time-filler, inferior to the preaching and singing. It should be given emphasis and it should be engaged with great passion. It should be done with careful preparation. It should be conducted with the care of one who is handling treasure – *“fine gold”* (Psalm 19). As we read scripture, we beautify the Bride of Christ, for the church is beautified to the extent that we bathe her in the precious promises and principles through the reading the Word of God.

Preparation of Heart and Body

For the person reading scripture, a time like this requires careful preparation both of the heart and the body.

First, let's take the **preparation of the heart**. The heart is moved only by what is in the mind. So, your mind must be properly instructed so that it can properly instruct your heart, so that it is in sync with what God is communicating through the text you are reading. To get there will take many readings - slowly. I like to recommend that scripture readers read the passage no less than 10 times, prayerfully. In preparation for your reading/recitation at Hope Baptist, we want you to read it both silently and out loud and in front of your family.

Our technique will improve with passion that is only built through familiarity. When Ezra read the law to the people the narrative says, “So they read distinctly from the book” (Nehemiah 8:8). This is a description of careful reading that should form a pattern for us as we read scripture publicly.

Then there is the **preparation of the body**. By this I mean that you understand the meter and tone and have a sense for how it should be read. This means practicing out loud, to get the right inflections and timing so that it is read with great passion and clarity.

Twelve Keys to Scripture Reading

1. Understanding

In order to read accurately, you need to discern what is the attitude and tone of the author; what genre of literature you are reading and what is the intent of the author.

2. Delight

When our delight is in the law of the Lord” (Ps 1:2) when His testimonies are my delight (Psalm 119:24) then we are useful for the Masters use to exult in the glory of the words of God with a pure and honest heart.

3. Confidence:

Remember the power of the Word of God – it will not return void. *“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:11*

4. Practice:

We suggest that you memorize this passage before you have your time in front of the church. If you have not memorized it, practice in the following manner. Read the passage 4 times silently. After you are comfortable and have a good working knowledge of the nuances of the passage, then gather your family around and recite it 2 times and ask for their suggestions. A key objective is for it to sound like the author is saying it, not like you are reading it.

5. Relationship:

Look into people’s eyes when you can and be aware of the personal nature of the blessing you are bestowing upon the people.

6. Pace:

Slow down and remember that nervousness tends to make us rush. Be aware of the pace and keep it reasonable. Listen to the people who are reciting and if you are getting ahead of them, slow down your pace so they stay with you.

7. Rhythm:

Follow the flow of the sentence structure by paying attention to punctuation marks.

8. Personal involvement:

Internalize what you are reading and feel the impact of the words in your own heart.

9. Precision:

Treat every word carefully by clearly by completely pronouncing the words distinctly.

10. Completeness:

Finish the sentence completely and don't throw away the last words of the sentence by trailing off at the end of the sentence.

11. Volume:

Keep your volume up and proclaim boldly.

12. Humility

Be aware of and overcome the fear of man. Many people are afraid to get in front of a group and read or recite because they care too much about themselves and not enough about the glory of God and the equipping of the saints. They are too concerned about personal embarrassment. It would be a tragedy for any of us to withhold love and blessing for the sake of our fears.

A Holy and Happy Occasion for the People of God

Remember, the reading of scripture is not for entertainment, and nor is it a performance. Instead, it is a holy activity from which God desires to equip and beautify His church.

Deut 31:10-13 makes it clear that long readings of scripture were common in Israel. When Moses is aging (120years old) and getting ready to pass the baton to Joshua he issued a command to gather everyone together every seven years and read the entire law. This means that they would read the Pentateuch: Gen, Ex, Lev, Num, and Deut. There was a fourfold purpose: First, to hear the law. Second, to learn to fear the Lord. Third, to help the people carefully observe all the words of the law. And fourth, for children to hear it. It is strange to modern ears that Moses wanted the little children to sit and listen to 6 hours of reading (you can't read that much in 6 hours...).

Approximately 800 years later, Nehemiah 8:1-12 Records an event in obedience to Moses command, of the actual reading of the Pentateuch to all of the people, from the youngest to the oldest. Here is an actual account of how this was done in the days of Nehemiah after the Babylonian captivity. During the captivity, the people did not seem to carry on the practice of reading the law every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles. I would like to bring out five observations of this event.

Honor was given to the Word: It was given prominence (8:1)

It was a diverse crowd with men, women and children : All ages (8:2)

The time spent was significant: Approximately 6 hours from morning to noon (8:3)

Their respect for the Word was visible: They stood up (8:5)

The joy that was the result strengthened them: “they rejoiced greatly because they understood the words that were declared to them.” (8:10-12)