



# Preparing to read the lesson

**TN1** Training Notes series: Communication

*These notes were first published on the website in January 2001 and last updated in August 2007. They are copyright © John Truscott. You may download this file and/or print up to 30 copies without charge provided no part of the heading or text is altered or omitted.*

**These notes give a brief outline of one section of a training event for those who are asked to read the Bible aloud in church services.**

**Other sections cover the purpose and place of Scripture reading in services, a range of practical issues for readers, technique in using one's voice, and ideas for other approaches.**

---

If you want people to grasp the meaning of the Bible passage through hearing it read, you first need to understand that meaning yourself.

Part of the problem is the failure in most churches to read long sections, focusing instead on just a few verses. The listeners hardly have time to understand the context before the reading is over.

So your own preparation is a crucial part of letting people hear, understand and obey God's word. You may need to help your listeners get into the passage quickly with a helpful introduction or summary. Here are ten ideas to help you as you prepare.

## 1 **Pray**

...that you will understand the passage and discover its meaning for yourself. This is the fundamental key to all preparation.

## 2 **Note the type of literature**

The Bible is not one book, but a richly varied collection of many different types of writing: narrative, history, story, poetry, prophecy, concentrated teaching. Your approach for a section of one of Paul's epistles will need to be different from that for a Gospel narrative, which in turn will need to be different from that for a Psalm.

### 3 **Study the context of the passage**

You will probably only be reading a paragraph or two, and these may make little sense on their own. Take, for example, a passage which starts 'therefore' or one that comes in half-way through a narrative. What has just happened? Where are we? Who is involved? Why is this happening? You may need to guide people in with a very brief introduction, so you need to read round the passage yourself as you prepare.

### 4 **Grasp the mood of the passage**

What is the mood? Is it one of excitement or sadness, of urgency or fun? Moods can change within a passage as in several of the Psalms, or consider crucifixion to resurrection in the Gospels. Your style of reading needs to match the mood. If the Psalmist commands us to praise the Lord, let's do it!

### 5 **Discover the meaning of the passage**

What is the central message of this passage? What is the writer saying? What would be the sub-editor's headline? You may need help here, even from a commentary or someone who understands more of the Bible than you do. You cannot read for others if you do not first understand what you are reading.

### 6 **Visualise your hearers**

What kind of people are they: adults, children, visitors with little Christian background? How will they be feeling at this stage of the service? What are their needs? Do you need to add in more explanation than usual at the start?

### 7 **Consider practical issues**

These include the point at which the reading comes in the service, which Bible version to use, pronunciation of tricky names, how to get to the front, PA/volume, how to open and close, where to sit, your children (if relevant), what to wear. Get in a mess and you direct people's attention to yourself rather than the Word of God. *(The training event has a whole further section on this area.)*

### 8 **Practise the passage**

Read it through several times getting the emphasis, speed, etc. as you think is right *(another section of the training event covers this)*. Practise out loud, possibly to a friend and perhaps in the building where you will be reading.

### 9 **Decide to review afterwards**

Determine to improve. Listen to any recording made of the service, ask friends, learn from mistakes. Listen to and observe professionals (for example, TV news readers).

## 10 **Pray again**

...all the way through this process for putting the passage across well, for not letting yourself get in the way of God's message to his people (by wrong voice, mannerism or emphasis), and that people will want to go out and study the passage for themselves after the service.

These notes are available at [www.john-truscott.co.uk/resources/training/tn1.pdf](http://www.john-truscott.co.uk/resources/training/tn1.pdf). They cover one aspect of a possible evening or half-day training event for lesson readers in any church. For other Training Notes on public worship see TN16 *Interviews in church services*, and TN21 *Ideas for a sermon on administration*. For indexes of all items available on the site, visit the [resources page](#).

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of his running an event for your lesson readers.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN1 under Communication.

69 Sandridge Road, St Albans, AL1 4AG Tel+Fax: 01727 832176 Web: [www.john-truscott.co.uk](http://www.john-truscott.co.uk)