

Reading the Bible and Praying In Public

Relying heavily on the booklet of the same title by Stuart Olyott, 2008.

A. Reading the Bible In Public

“What you believe about the Bible, what you *really* believe about the Bible, comes across in the way that you read it in public. If you read it like any other book, it is because in your heart of hearts you believe that it is like any other book.

Do you read it inaccurately? This is because you do not believe that every single word is important.

Do you read it unattractively? This is because, in your innermost soul, you do not find the Bible captivating.

Do you read it without expression? This is because you are not convinced that the Bible is a message.” (Stuart Olyott, “Reading the Bible and Praying in Public,” 2008, 4).

1. The Bible Is Spirit-Inspired

Every time we open the Bible, we do so in the presence of the Author. Our relationship with that Author, as we read it, is of utmost importance.

Suggestion: Ask God for the help of his Spirit in reading aloud His Word, praying that He will use it's proclamation to do his work in the heart of every hearer.

2. The Bible Is The Word of God

To head the Bible read is to hear God speak.

Suggestion: Read God's Word with reverence, without comment, and in a spirit of worship.

3. The Bible Is Clear

The Church in every generation is capable of understanding God's Word by His Spirit.

Suggestion: Take time to understand the passage yourself before you read it aloud. This will make your reading clear, and expressive. Think also about diction, volume and speed.

4. The Bible Is For All

The Bible should be read as a message for all who are present.

Suggestion: Make eye contact to the congregation as you read. Many will be reading from their own Bibles, but some will not have Bibles and eye contact tells them that this is a message for them.

5. The Bible Is Sufficient

The Bible stands alone as the means by which God works to bring spiritual life into existence, sustain it and perfect it.

Suggestion: The Bible must not be presented as one source amongst many. Make it clear that the Bible is on a different level to any other material we may wish to use on a Sunday morning.

B. Praying In Public

1. Public Prayer Is Public

Though related, private and public prayers are distinct. In public prayer we move from the language of 'I, my, me' to the language of 'we, our, us.' As we pray we pray as a mouthpiece for the congregation.

Suggestion: Pray audibly, intelligibly, at an appropriate speed, with appropriate phraseology, and for a length that everyone can sustain. Make sure you have knowledge of those you are praying for and on behalf of: their spiritual state, their joys, sorrows, encouragements, trials, temptations, needs, preoccupations, and specific events going on in their lives.

2. Public Prayer Teaches

As we lead in prayer we teach something to those present. For those who are young in the faith, the way they hear others pray will become the way they pray. By praying well in public we can give people an appetite for prayer in private.

Suggestion: Prepare carefully, and pray for a range of issues. Keep the global church in mind and pray in a way that reflects our theology. Perhaps pray through an element in the statement of faith.

3. Public Prayer Is Pastoral

Public prayer is a means by which we lead people along the paths of holiness and comfort. Our prayer should reflect the congregation we are praying for and with. It also makes the congregation sensitive to the range and weight of needs in their midst.

Suggestion: Think about who is likely to be present:

- *The discouraged Christian facing hostility, at school, at college, at work or in the family*
- *The mother who spends long hours alone with small children*
- *The businessman juggling the competing commitments of work, family, extended family, and church*
- *The carer with extreme fatigue*
- *The elderly who are lonely, frail and nearing death*
- *The new convert and the doubter*
- *The person going through intense or subtle temptation*
- *The believer without assurance of salvation*
- *The young couple prayerfully seeking God's will for the future*
- *Pastors, missionaries, Sunday School teachers, leaders of church organisations, musicians*
- *The ill or infirm, bereaved, redundant, suffering great loss, crushed with anxiety, or in some great need*

4. Public Prayer Is Fresh

Prayers which are always 'the same old thing' do not glorify God, nor do they enrich those who hear them.

Suggestion: Stay fresh by preparing in advance some of the areas we would like to cover, whilst remaining open to where the Spirit may lead us as we pray. Use biblical prayers as a model for our prayer: The Lord's Prayer, the Psalms, the prayers of Paul. Perhaps think in terms of the categories:

- a) Adoration: contemplating and worshipping God*
- b) Thanksgiving: for who God is and what he has done*
- c) Confession: for our sin, the sin of our church, community and nation*
- d) Petition: requests for ourselves and our church*
- e) Intercession: requests for others*
- f) Renewed Dedication: the acknowledgement that we belong to the God who has created and redeemed us*