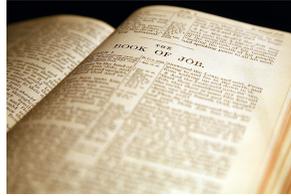


Getting the Most Out of the Public Reading of Scripture

Steve Burchett

Some of the ladies of the first church I pastored started digging around in their purses the moment I announced the passage of Scripture I was going to read. It was a nearly synchronized hunt for a piece of gum. Usually, they offered a piece to those around them. The public reading of Scripture was a nice “break” in the meeting when they could unwrap a stick, sweeten their breath, make their pew neighbors happy, and relax.



Perhaps these ladies were able to find their gum, non-verbally ask around to see if anyone else wanted a piece, and listen to the reading all at once. Maybe. Probably not. They certainly were a distraction to those around them. And this was all happening while God was speaking to His church through His word.

You may not even chew gum, but do you listen when the Bible is read at your church meetings? Here are four ways to get the full benefit of the public reading of Scripture.

Prepare yourself to listen before you arrive.

Do you find yourself fighting to stay awake when larger sections of Scripture are read? Are you sleepy during the meetings because you often don't get enough rest the night before? The movie may be good, but God's word is so much better. Turn it off and go to bed.

Have you considered the negative impact technology may be having on us? We quickly swipe between various social media accounts. We click, click, click through our downloaded music and settle on a playlist, only to change our mind 30 seconds later. Just then, a text message comes in, and as we are responding, the pre-programmed sound for new emails on our phone is heard—beckoning us to check them ASAP. We are scatterbrained and fidgety. Consequently, listening to a whole chapter of Numbers, or even Romans, may *feel* difficult. Beware of what your gear is doing to your senses. Less screen time may be a necessary adjustment in your life.

Ask the Lord to give you understanding.

This may be as simple as saying, “God, help me to hear from You,” as the reader is announcing the text. Or, you might need to pray, “God, help me!” as

you sense yourself drifting off during the reading. If you know your mind too often wanders, pray about this before you even arrive.

Also, share with others your weakness in this area, and ask them to pray for you. You will benefit, and your confession may cause others to reflect on their own listening skills and their need to pay closer attention.

Listen with your Bible open or closed.

What?! It's okay *not* to turn to the passage being read? That may sound nearly heretical to some, but what if the Scripture being read is a different translation than what you have? It could be more helpful just to listen instead of trying to keep up with the differences. Even with the same translation in their laps, I've heard some people confess that they listen better by looking at the reader. This is especially true if they have a Study Bible and they're tempted to look down at the notes!

Some people listen better if they employ multiple senses—hearing and seeing. I'm guessing, though, that the “open Bible” people have to beware of looking down on those who listen without their Bibles open. (“He doesn't have his Bible open, so he must not be interested!”).

Turn to the passage, or don't. Do whatever it takes to listen as if your life depends on God's word, because it does.

Sit up or stand up.

I'm not an expert in physiology, but I know from experience that if I'm slouching like a bored person waiting at the license bureau, I don't listen as well. However, if I sit up, I'm typically more prone not only to hear, but to gain from what is being read. Give it a try and see for yourself.

In some settings, you might even stand (assuming the reader hasn't asked everyone to stand up). In our church meetings, there is a common understanding that anyone is free to rise at any time in order to stay alert. And why not? The Lord is speaking to His church! His word is too important to miss.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God.” (2 Timothy 3:16)