

Engaging Scripture

Public Reading of Scripture

Want to get a quick start on a simple yet powerful way to engage with scripture in your small group? Take 3 minutes to watch this quick video on the Public Reading of Scripture:

www.thebibleproject.com/explore/public-reading-scripture

How would this work in your small group? It's so simple and doesn't require any preparation ahead of time with pre-written discussion questions.

1. **Choose** a text. This could be a gospel, an epistle, or one of the Old Testament books of the Bible.
2. **Read** larger portions of that text during your small group. If you're going through the Gospel of John, for example, you might read out loud 3 chapters a week — or 1 chapter, or 5 chapters. Experiment with how much you read.
3. **Listen** to the text as a whole, rather than a single verse or paragraphs taken out of its original context. You might choose to listen to an audio version of the text from a Bible app or website.
4. **Talk** about it afterward with your group. Typically, small group discussions focus on working through a Bible passage with scripted questions. However, in the public reading of scripture, the focus is on allowing the scripture to work on us. The main question then becomes *how has the scripture worked on you?*

Digging Deeper into the Public Reading of Scripture

The Bible was meant to be read, but it was also meant to be heard. Today, printed copies of God's Word are easily accessible in free, literate cultures. But for most of history, because of their rarity and expense, owning a personal copy of the scriptures was practically unheard of.

So we see Ezra standing before the people of Israel reading the law of Moses aloud in [Nehemiah 8](#). Paul's letters would have been read out loud to the gatherings of believers as well ([Colossians 4:16](#), [1 Thessalonians 5:27](#)). In fact, during these ancient times, it was common even for those who did have opportunities for personal reading to read aloud to themselves. The silent reading that many are so used to today was virtually non-existent throughout history.

To hear someone read the Word is a different experience than to simply read silently to yourself. A well-prepared and gifted reader can bring out meaning in a text through voice inflection, rhythm, and intonation. A talented reader can present the Word of God to a group or congregation so that the listeners experience the Bible in a rich and powerful manner.

So why is scripture reading often treated as something of an afterthought? Writers and pastors are asking this question, and many suggest that we give the public reading of scripture a more prominent role in our gatherings.

What would happen if readers were encouraged to really study a passage, seeking the background and meaning of the text that could be expressed in their voice and body language as they read it out

loud? What if the reading of Scripture was treated as more than a setup for the sermon? It's powerful when a congregation or small group has the regular opportunity to audibly experience together significant portions of God's Word. As God tells us in [Isaiah 55:11](#):

“So is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

God's Word has great power according to his will. In addition, we read in [1 Timothy 4:13](#) Paul's instruction to “...devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture” (NIV). The biblical basis for public Scripture reading among believers is strong! Who knows what God will do through an emphasis on the public reading of Scripture in your church or small group?

Adapted from an article by Phil Collins, Ph.D., 2014. [Taylor University Center for Scripture Engagement](#).

To learn more about this ancient Christian discipline of scriptural engagement, check out:

www.biblegateway.com/resources/scripture-engagement/public-reading-scripture/home