

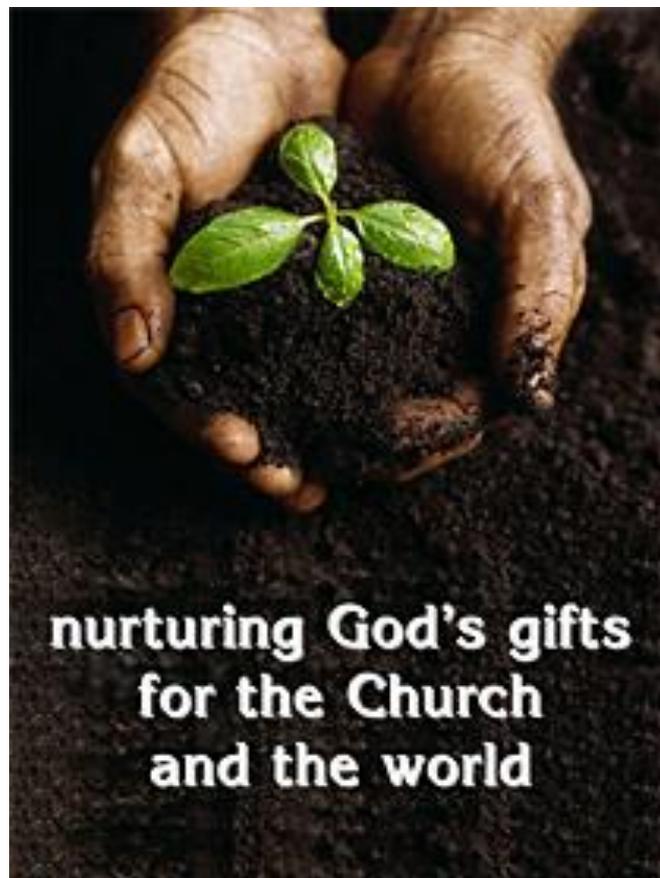


 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Diocese of Southwell & Nottingham

**Saint Michael and All Angels
Bramcote**

Reading and Leading Intercessions in Church



**nurturing God's gifts
for the Church
and the world**

Reading the Bible in Church

Reading the Bible in worship is a valuable ministry in the Body of Christ.

It is important to recognize that Bible readings have a dynamic and creative part to play within the whole service, which is in no way undermined by the fact that numerous modern translations are available today which can be easily be read at home or on the way to work.

Some key factors

- The Bible readings link the congregation to Christian tradition
- The Bible readings impose upon the worshippers the duty of listening
- The readings enable the service to become a proclamation of the saving power of God in Christ

The most effective readers will always be those who give the impression that they are themselves totally captivated by the words which they are reading. The reader should always try to **catch the mood** of the passage as well as the message. Different parts of scripture suggest a very different treatment in order to express descriptive, poetic, dramatic and intimate passages.

Preparation is vital

Please read the lessons beforehand and rehearse any pauses and inflections – you may well find it helpful to read each passage at least 10 times. Check pronunciations of names or unfamiliar words with one of the clergy - doing so at least 10 minutes before the service starts. Make a note to ask someone if you have any questions about the meaning of the text.

Find the passage

Please arrive early and check that the Bible on the lectern is open at the right place(s) and that you know where your reading occurs in the service; always ensure that you place a marker in the lectern Bible. Do ask someone to assist you before the service if you are not sure where to find your reading and/or to ensure that you can be heard clearly in different places around the church.

Movement

Always be in position ready to start **before** the previous item concludes. No movement should be rushed - Church services should exemplify peace, patience and dignity. If your reading follows a hymn, always go to the lectern **during** the last verse.

At the lectern

- The microphone is always switched on - **NEVER** tap it to check!
- You do not need to adjust the microphone for your height
- Wait until everyone has sat down and there is quiet – about 20 seconds
- Take a deep breath
- Speak slowly and clearly, **keeping your voice up** – do not mutter

Introduce the reading

When reading at a service of Morning Prayer or an Informal Service, please introduce the passage by saying “**Our first/second reading is from *BOOK*, chapter *999* starting at verse *999*. This can be found on page *999* in the chair Bibles.**” It is always a good idea to repeat this after a few seconds.

When you finish the first reading say “**This is the word of the Lord**” and when you finish the second reading say “**This too is the word of the Lord**”.

When reading at a service of Holy Communion, please follow the prescribed liturgy as detailed in **Common Worship**.

You may wish to introduce a passage by **simply** and **briefly** setting the context. This is particularly helpful when reading complicated passages, or passages which start mid-way through a specific story or theme.

Read the reading

After introducing the reading, allow a distinct pause. In presenting the reading itself, **speak slowly, firmly, and enunciate**. The most common error readers make is to rush. You may change tone to indicate transitions from narration to direct quotations, but this is reading aloud, not drama. It is best to keep your eyes on the text, so as not to suggest ‘performance.’

Pause

At the end of the reading, **leave a short pause** before saying the response and returning to your seat. It is more dignified, and helps cue the congregation to be ready for their response.

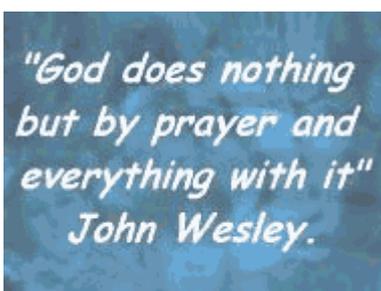
Don't worry about any mistakes - we all make them once in a while.

Leading Prayers in Church

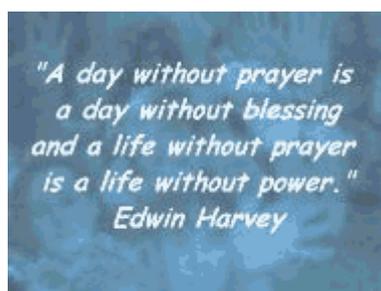
Some thoughts for those who lead our prayers and intercessions in Church:

1. There is an important difference between private prayer, and leading corporate intercessions. Whilst you are leading the intercessions, **you are leading God's people in prayer**, rather than praying on their behalf. Thus the way that you pray will be different from your own private prayer. In this way, the corporate act of intercession is the sum of the individual thoughts and prayers, combined with the words and prayers spoken from the front.
2. For this corporate prayer to happen effectively, the congregation will be praying along the lines that you lay before them, and extending them as individual hearts and minds engage with the topics for prayer. It is important that they **hear what you are praying**, so those leading intercessions need to be audible, and to speak clearly and slowly.
3. A **clearly defined structure to the intercessions** will help people to pray. The most common structure in Anglican worship is: prayer for the Church, for the World, for our own local community, and ending up with prayer for others. If the intercessions during worship have a vaguely similar structure each week, it will help our church members know where the prayers are going, and free them to pray and respond to the Spirit's prompting. You might also like to pray for the church's leadership and for home and overseas mission.
4. A congregational response is a good way of **defining the structure**, and bringing silences to an end. If you are using a congregational response, it is a good idea to introduce and rehearse it clearly at the beginning – especially as there may well be newcomers attending our services.
5. **Using silence in your prayers can be very powerful.** Silence in corporate worship allows a transition from corporate prayer, where we join in common petitions, to private prayer, where we spend time individually with God. Often it is a good idea to direct people's prayers into the silence, either as a part of the prayers - "Father, we now bring before you in the silence of our hearts those who are known to us to be in need" or in directing the congregation - "We'll keep a short time of quiet when we can pray about our response to the situation in Africa."

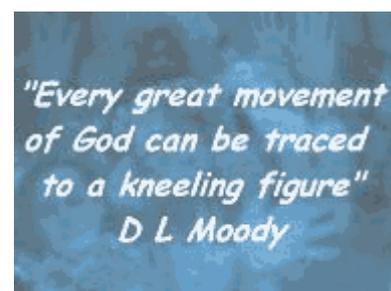
6. **Watch your language!** Leading prayers does not require a degree in poetry and prose, but is possibly most effective in simple, clear everyday language. God is not impressed by complex phrasing, and long words, but His interests lie in what our hearts really desire. Try to use simple language which avoids Christian jargon and acronyms.
7. It's important to be **up to date with the news**, both national and local events, and also the current status of those who will be prayed for who are sick. Before leaving for church, check the news, and make sure that you arrive sufficiently early to check with the service leader for any recent bereavements or other news that should be included.
8. **The length of your intercessions should reflect the service type.** The role of those leading prayers is not to cover everything, or the service will last all day! It is best to pray generally for the service theme in one sentence, then focus on one or two specific areas. **Aim at 5 minutes.**
9. **Avoid the temptation to teach during prayers.** Prayers are from the people to God, not vice-versa!! Also be extremely careful when praying about subjects which may be sensitive to members of the congregation, such as divorce, etc.
10. **Never pray horizontally!** No matter how tempting it may seem, always avoid the temptation of pointing your prayers towards a particular individual, group or situation.
11. **You will need to prepare thoroughly.** Whether you use a script, or just notes is up to you, but in either case, it is unlikely that you will be able to do justice to the responsibility of leading God's people in prayer without spending some quality time ahead of the service. Preparation does not limit your ability to amend your plans, building in appropriate links with the service theme. This preparation should probably include a time of private prayer, praying through the topics that you will lead prayers for.
12. **Always be in position** ready to start **before** the last item concludes.



"God does nothing but by prayer and everything with it"
John Wesley.



"A day without prayer is a day without blessing and a life without prayer is a life without power."
Edwin Harvey



"Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure"
D L Moody

Leading Prayers within a Group

Some guidelines for encouraging prayer.

Pass a Bible around a group sitting in a circle. Start and end with one of the leaders, who can open and close with a brief prayer. On receiving the bible, each group member has the option of saying a prayer aloud, saying a prayer silently, or passing the bible straight onto the next person. This can be done gathered around a lighted candle or some other focal point.

Praying around the World. Gather the group around a large atlas, or world map, with an arrow pointer made out of card. Encourage each group member before the session to find out somewhere in the world that needs our prayers, and to write a brief prayer. They then briefly explain the situation, point the arrow at the right place on the map and pray the prayer. It then passes onto the next team member.

One minute prayers. Gather the group in a circle, and each member has 1 minute to pray (silently) for the person on their left and right. Finally, they have one minute to pray for someone who is not in the room. This method encourages people to pray for one-another.

The prayer box. Encourage each member of the group to write down a short prayer on a slip of paper and to then post it in a box. The group can then split up into threes and fours to pray through a random 3 or 4 slips of paper. This can be extended by passing on a set of pieces of paper to another group.

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Some Tips on Speaking in Public

We can all talk well, but few can talk well in public without some guidance.

Please note the following:

- Nervousness makes us speak faster, and decreases our volume because our chests tighten and our breathing becomes restricted
- Do all you can to be well-prepared and relaxed
- Don't rush to the place from which you are speaking
- Remember the right pair of glasses
- Write your notes clearly on numbered pages
- Write your notes with spaces between the lines for notes
- Produce your own volume - don't rely on a microphone to do so. Microphones merely enhance your volume, they do not create it!!
- People and clothing absorb sound, so your voice when practised in an empty church will need to be louder with a congregation
- Voices take time to travel, and the larger the building the slower you must be to prevent the sounds being jumbled

Being heard is all about breath control and voice projection. There is a guaranteed way to reduce breathing and voice-projection to their minimum. You will have seen it often: hold your script tight to your waist, tuck your chin in and keep your head down.

The answer is very simple.

- **Look straight ahead.** This frees your chest to breath, unlocks your throat, and allows your voice (which is simply air plus noise) to escape as from a trumpet.
- **Breathe.** This is recommended for living generally, and especially for speaking in public. Near-failure to do so (because of nerves) will deprive the voice of one of its ingredients, and will result in strangulated croaks! Nervousness reduces breath so reduces volume. A slow deep breath before each sentence is a good idea. It checks the tendency to rush, and provides air for the voice to use for the forthcoming sentence.
- **Lift your notes up.** Keeping your head up and facing forward, lower your eyes, so that you are looking down your nose. Now, bring your notes up so that you can read them, but not high enough for them to get in the way of your voice. With your eyes looking down your nose you will also be able to see if your chest is **breathing fully** at each new sentence, because it will expand. Don't start a sentence until it has.

- **Keep checking again and again** against the tendency for your head to lower, your chin to tuck-in, your breathing to decrease, your volume to diminish, and your script to sag lower and lower. This can result in the top of your head addressing the microphone!

What about the use of names?

- Some people are very touchy about this - often for the wrong reason! Praying for people is a helpful act of love, provided that we avoid unnecessary information about the individuals concerned - there is usually no good reason why we need to mention (or imply) specific pastoral or full medical details. "Praying intelligently" is all too often an unhelpful euphemism for "being nosey".

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Biblical and Topical Meditation

The purpose of biblical and topical meditation is to clear our minds of all physical distractions, and to focus our thoughts upon what God may be saying to us through a specific Bible passage or life experience (work, family or community).

To do this, first write down the main features of the passage:

- For whom was the passage written and when?
- What are the main events - who did or said what, where and when?
- What is the passage trying to get across? What is its message?

Next, using your imagination, try to picture yourself as an active participant in the passage - for example (i) a member of the crowd when Jesus preached the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5), (ii) the Samaritan woman who drew water for Jesus and was promised living waters in return (John 4), (iii) a relation of the man who was healed having been lowered through a roof (Mark 2). Write down how you responded emotionally to each of the main events in each of these stories:

- How did I feel after reading it? (Happy, sad, worried etc.)
- What did it feel like to become a participant in the passage?

Finally, using both the facts surrounding the events and your reactions to them, sit quietly and listen to God. Turn each of your thoughts into a prayer. Expect to hear God speaking to you personally - it may be a sentence, picture or feeling. How we respond to God depends very much upon who we are as individuals. Again, write your thoughts down - as well as what you believe God may have been saying to you. It may help to use headings such as:

- How must I change as a result? Prayer, after all, is essentially about deepening our relationship or friendship with God.
- What must I do as a result? Our prayers can often lead us to act in some specific way, and we should be open to all possibilities.

The above approach can also be applied in other ways - for example, our reflecting upon a particular life experience (what might God be saying to me?), or else our reading of a newspaper article (what is God saying in this situation?). Using a form similar to that detailed below may prove to be useful.

Verse	Facts	Feelings	Prayerful Response

The benefits of adopting this approach (whether as an individual or as a group) are too numerous to mention, but may include the following:

- We are encouraged to look beyond the simple facts of a passage (who said what to whom, when and why) in order to enter into the story and thereby experience how it may have felt to have been an active participant. When this is the case, we will often have a much clearer understanding of peoples motivation and reaction to a particular course of events. At the same time this is obviously where our imaginations comes in, so it's very important to realise that whilst there are very few right or wrong interpretations our benchmark or starting point must always be Biblical truth. The aim is therefore to bring our personalities, gifts and experiences to bear on a passage, and to hear God speaking to us personally through it. The facts of a passage remain the same, but how God speaks to us through them can differ from individual to individual.
- Having looked at the facts of the passage, together with our emotional-cum-intellectual response, we move towards a deeper prayerful response - "***What does it mean to me, and what can I do about it?***". If we stick with facts and feelings, it's all too easy to believe that we have little to offer in situations that go beyond our competence. However, if we seek to respond prayerfully, the perspective moves away from us to God - which is where it should always be in the first place!
- We discover (or re-discover) that prayer is just as much about listening as speaking, and that its chief purpose is always to bring about a change within us - "***... to transform us into citizens of the Kingdom of God by the constant renewing of our minds***".
- We support each other, and discover how the benefits of bible study and prayer are heightened when one individual builds upon anothers contribution - "***I first began to see what God might be saying to me because of what you said.***" By bringing ourselves to Bible study and prayer, and by sharing the results of our efforts, we not only learn more about God but also experience more of his love and care for us as individuals and as a Church family. God is always present and to be found within his creation. We need to listen constantly to what he is saying to us (using our intellect and emotions to the full) and to respond to what we hear in prayer. John Simpson (The BBC foreign affairs editor) recently ascribed many of the sweeping changes in South Africa to "***... the deep sense of love and forgiveness (Christianity really) found in many of the people.***" The basic lesson to be learnt from this, is that whilst very few had been able to do anything, many had been praying.

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