Short Guides to ...
Bible Reading, Bible Study, Public Preaching, Public Prayer, The Lord’s Remembrance
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Why read the Bible?

“To the Bible men will return, and why? Because they cannot do without it,” wrote Matthew Arnold, the Oxford Professor of Poetry. How much more true this is of the believer, re-born with a spiritual life from above, which needs spiritual food!

But if we are still asking, “How important is reading the Bible?” hear the Lord Jesus answer, “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut.8:3). Moses wrote this after nearly forty years in a wilderness, where he knew the value of bread and water. The Lord quoted it when He had been forty days in the wilderness without food. Peter advised, “Crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (1 Pet.2:2 NIV). Where could we look for ‘spiritual milk’ purer than the Word of God?

Then if we wish to grow, and keep in good health as Christians, we must read daily. The Psalmist knew the blessing of this, even though his Bible was only the Old Testament:

“Blessed is the man ... [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night” (Ps.1:1-2 NIV).

How often, and how much, should I read in a day?

Many have found that the most practical habit to keep up is to read twice a day; and for most, this means early in the morning, and either early evening or before bed. These are probably the
times when most can count on being undisturbed. Whether evening or later can be decided according to when we feel most awake! If you’re involved in shift-working, best ask advice of a brother or sister with experience of those demands.

Many have also been refreshed by spending some of their lunch break on spiritual food, even at the cost (small, they would say!) of embarrassment from the world. If we followed the example of Daniel, taking time to pray at midday, we might wish to include a short reading, so as to allow God to speak to us more immediately.

**How much?**
This will depend on three factors: the simplicity or richness of the passage we read; whether we like reading by nature; and how eager we are to be nourished or grow. But a chapter per sitting makes a good rule, since the chapter-divisions were devised for human convenience. If we read too little, we are liable to lose in understanding. Many a question a particular verse may raise is answered later in the chapter, or in the next. Further, a whole chapter will often provide more variety than a shorter passage and allow us to find a key message for the circumstances of the day. We may note here that some have found the New Testament prepared them more for the demands of the day, whereas the Old was more rewarding in the evening.

As for **how many minutes**, this will matter less if we invest free time in Scripture study and prayer as a pursuit, thus making up the balance. A great leader in the Fellowship said he would read
for twenty minutes in the morning and twenty in the evening. Twenty minutes for a great man, however, in the disciplined years of maturity, may have to be 30 minutes for me!

Then, if we take longer, we might find the family and other duties crying out for attention. It certainly is wise not to be hindered by puzzling over a difficult verse; best leave this till study-time—preferably the same day; or when you can ask for help.

**Prayer and ‘The Quiet Time’**

Now to consider how reading and prayer might fit together. It seems clear that the power of prayer to cleanse our thoughts and prepare us to listen to God calls for some minutes at least before reading. Men of God have also commended reading as a prelude to the daily prayer time. Again, quietness before God is commended (Ps.119:48) so that we may commune with Him and He with us—to capture the experience that Adam and Eve had sadly lost in Genesis 3:8: “... the sound of the **Lord** God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”

How else may we still the fret of Martha’s anxiety over many things, so as to sit at the feet of our Lord with Mary, and choose “the good part” (Lk.10:38-42)? In the working life this will call for special arrangement and some sacrifice. This ‘oasis’ must surely be helped by beginning with reading and prayer beforehand.

So the pattern emerging is:

a.m. and p.m.: Brief prayer to ‘tune in’, and ask the Spirit to
teach us, then reading and a fuller prayer-time. Thereafter, or by arrangement: ‘Quiet Time.’

The final rules as to time spent are: **disciplined regularity; and quality before quantity.** Then we may find in our reading the thrill of the poet of Psalm 119:

“**I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil**” (v.162).

**Where to begin**

One of the special pleasures a mature Christian can have is to be asked by someone young in faith, “Where would I best begin in the Bible?” A sensible question, in view of the 66 books! The usual suggestion is one of the Gospels, and the favourite is Mark, as the shortest. Here the young disciple may most easily find his Saviour and Lord, and hear wise ministry clearly relevant to the needs of everyday. He also can enjoy the clarity and attractiveness of a story, which ends with the vision of the resurrected Christ. Then what more natural sequel than the Acts?

Meanwhile the Old Testament can lay a foundation in appreciating the majesty of God, His holiness and His love; the obvious starting point being Genesis, again with the natural hand-holds of a story-line. As time goes on, however, and the spiritual concepts of Scripture provoke many questions, a guide of some sort is very helpful, such as the introductions and outlines for individual books given in such classics as the *Scofield Bible* (available now with the NIV) or the *NIV Study Bible*. 
It may be wise to leave schemes with daily commentaries till teaching classes and the study of Fellowship general literature have given a steadying framework of guidance. Evangelical daily commentaries are of course invaluable as a tonic, and might well be an encouragement, while a properly functioning church of God should be at hand to give advice where questions arise.

A word of caution about Internet sites that offer commentary on the Bible. Some are sound in their way, but check how old they are; it’s easier and cheaper for sites to use a Bible version or commentary that is free of the 50-year copyright law. At times they might be explaining difficulties that only arise from centuries-old versions that have been overtaken by more recent textual discoveries and advancing scholarship.

Others are the work of enthusiastic individuals who are not working with an editing team. All commentaries also begin from a point of view and church association, so it’s wise to find out what this is, and avoid its dangers: e.g. one from a Unitarian outlook that rejects the deity of the Son of God and the Holy Spirit.

What to look for
In Luke 24:27 and 44 the Lord Himself showed, or spoke of, how something of Himself was to be found spread through the Old Testament Scriptures—“the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms,” which last included the historical and poetic writings. (This does not mean that you find Christ in every verse of every book: the last chapters of Judges, for instance, settle that idea.)
Would any disciple, then, be content to read his portion and miss its relevance to Christ? Granted, this is not always easy to detect; but here the Spirit within us will help us sooner or later to find that revelation. Perhaps at some later reading we will see Him, and will be all the more captivated by having had to wait.

But the Word often has a **cleansing** work to do first: “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your word” (Ps.119:9). Ephesians 5:26 speaks of how Christ gave Himself up for the Church the Body, “cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.” While this was the believer’s cleansing once for all, the same Word clearly helps to purify our thoughts and hearts from the dust and soiling of our path through this world. Further, by storing up verses in our memories we can quickly be warned in a spiritually dangerous situation by the Spirit’s recall of a verse that sheds divine light on our way (Ps.119.11).

Again, the living Word teaches us by **example**. “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom.15:4). Here and in 1 Corinthians 10:11 the Old Testament is commended as a source of instructive example, and that part of our Bible should never be neglected.

The day’s reading can also be used by the Spirit to give us **guidance** about the events of the coming hours, though we may often find we are in fact drawing on the stored-up wisdom of
previous days. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps.119:105); so that we can the more readily ask as in Psalm 143:8, “Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul” (Psalm 119:98). Verse 100 also promises wisdom from our reading, if we behave accordingly.

**Difficult chapters**
Do you remember (or still dread!) the dismay with which you worked through a chapter of names, and tried to find some spiritual food in it? Or the gloom of lamentation, or dire judgement? Or an obscure prophecy? But perhaps you also remember the times when praying for help with this problem brought a rewarding answer. Let us look more closely at the chapters of names.

In Genesis 5, after wondering at the length of the lives of those days, and the generations that would be able to talk together, we may find that the verses that stay with us are 22-24, where we may reflect with much profit on a man who “walked with God,” and did not die in the usual way, but “God took him.” The evening’s study might take us to what Jude says about Enoch, using the marginal references of a good bible. In Numbers 33, recording the stages of Israel’s journey to Canaan, it might become rewarding to think about those places that attract comment, e.g. Elim, “Where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees.”

A quick reference back to Exodus 15 could remind us of the impatience of Israel over the bitter water, how it was made
drinkable by the addition of the tree God pointed out, and then the blessing of the oasis that lay next stage ahead. Complaining; the ministry of Calvary; and the refreshing of the Spirit—these might become just the message we need, let alone the similar contemplation of other nuggets of comment awaiting us through the chapter.

By the time we reach the extended genealogies of 1 Chronicles, we may have learned to look out for the gems that sparkle with light if we pray over them in our quiet time with God. Apart from the clear message that God prizes the individual, there is the character of Jabez, the leaders who searched out rich pasture for their flocks, the lesson of Reuben’s rights as firstborn, the men trained for battle, the gatekeepers of the Temple, the bakers of the “presence bread” (look at the margin note), the musicians “responsible for the work day and night” (1 Chr. 9:33) — and much more.

We are reminded of the little girl who asked, “Why do you tell me all these Bible stories, Dad? You’ll spoil the book for me when I read it myself!” But do read the poem Amy Carmichael wrote out of her thoughts about 1 Chronicles 4:23 and “the potters who ... stayed there and worked for the king”, ‘In Any Office’ from Toward Jerusalem.

Meanwhile any lingering question about the importance of the Bible’s lists of names is answered when we note the number of times their meaning in the original languages is used by the Spirit for instruction. The names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as
expounded in Genesis 17:5, 15, 21:6, 25:26, and 32:28, leave us in no doubt about the value of their meanings. They are a first sign that large tracts of Scripture will unfold further riches if we study the meaning, and placing, of names. Of course, it will be a considerable study, since we will find at once that authorities like Dr Strong and Dr Young often give differing meanings.

This brings us to a great principle in all Scripture-reading: that much of the deepest of all books will only become available to the student prepared for careful labour. The Lord commended some for searching the Scriptures (Jn 5:39); while the wise king said, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings” (Prov.25:2).

Then will come the baleful judgements Jeremiah declaims against Israel, and against surrounding peoples—for much of 52 chapters plus 5 of Lamentations! Perhaps the greatest help in wrestling through such reading is to appreciate that the God of Heaven is sharing with us the aching hurt of the way His beloved, chosen people have treated Him, and the final appeal He is making by His messenger, “rising up early and speaking” (Jer.7:13 AV), before Jerusalem was laid waste. God means us to feel the burden! He also wishes us to realise the nature of sin, and of His utter holiness.

Yet by chapter 6 there come the first notes of promise: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls” (v.16). There does seem to be a deliberate design in the structure
of most of the prophets; books that demands self-examination before the promises of God’s mercy and restoration. The disciple can but learn to wait for the passages that thrill with Israel’s future glory and rest. In this way the Holy Spirit teaches us the unchanging character of God—both light and love, first pure and then peaceable, like His wisdom from above (Jas.3:17).

It can, however, be a lifesaver to the reader new in faith to have a **simple outline** of the prophetic books that explains their design, and the specific purpose of their messages. Some reading-schemes, such as Dr C.M. Luxmoore’s (available from Hayes Press), provide an illuminating verse from elsewhere to accompany each chapter. But when all else fails, here is the value of **reading the Old and the New Testaments in parallel**, so that there is always a clear and digestible passage in the day—even if only a verse or two!

Another help is the carefully selected group of verses culled for each day in our ‘Golden Bells’ calendar which, we may add, is an excellent basis for the family reading that raises the tone of home-life for all who make room for it.

**Using what we have gathered**

Finally, a word about the application of all this reading. Satisfaction in keeping on track will grow if we use what we find by talking about it to friends, drawing on it in discussion while witnessing, and giving to God in worship and prayer. Conversation, whether with Christians or unbelievers, will be purified and adorned if we contribute what God has said about
the subject in hand; or if we simply pass on something fresh from such a living spring. “O man, I beseech you, do not treat God’s promises as if they were curiosities for a museum; but believe them and use them” (C.H. Spurgeon).

And for the writer, the pleasure of this study will be redoubled if you find it helpful to write to him via the publisher, sharing your successes or problems. May you daily meet God as you open His book.
Father of mercies, in Thy Word
What endless glories shine!
For ever be Thy name adored
For these celestial lines.

Here may
the sons of deepest want
Exhaustless riches find,
Riches above what earth can grant,
And lasting as the mind.

Here the Redeemer’s welcome voice
Spreads heavenly peace around;
And life and everlasting joys
Attend the blissful sound.

Oh, may the heavenly pages be
Our ever true delight!
And still new beauties may we see,
And still increasing light.

Divine Instructor, Gracious Lord,
Thou art for ever near;
Teach us to love Thy sacred word,
And view the Saviour there.
(A. Steele)
If you have found this booklet helpful, you may be interested to know about other books in the series, which are available for free download at www.churchesofgod.info/free-books
ABOUT HAYES PRESS

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Is study for every Bible reader?

From Bible study, Daniel worked out the year of release from captivity. From their study, we judge Simeon and Anna knew that Christ would come to the temple in their lifetime, and so were there to hold Him as a baby in their arms. A Temple-poet was so deeply impressed at what he gained from the words of God that he wrote a poem of 176 beautifully patterned verses about his meditation.

For reasons like these, J.C. Ryle, preacher and theologian, said, “We must read our Bible like men digging for hidden treasure”\(^{(1)}\). That is, we will be enriched beyond measure if we read with single-minded, untiring devotion, as of those who search deeply, and find wonderful things.

But is systematic Bible study a rewarding aim for every disciple? Is it not enough to read a chapter a day? I think our personal answer will depend on what success we have in that daily reading. If we have met God in His word, will we not wish to listen more for His voice, and understand what He says more clearly? Or if we have not yet managed to find Christ “in all the Scriptures” (Lk.24:27), are we not drawn to search a little more for how those other parts testify of Him? We may remember also that the Jews in Berea were commended for the strength of character they showed in “examining the Scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11). If daily reading is working properly, it will leave an urge to follow up a topic or enquiry through a book, or Bible-wide, whether we are
naturally studious and do so intensively, or are ordinary readers, and take a quieter pace. Certainly, study will speed our progress from “milk” to “solid food” (Heb.5:12-14), provided we strive to practise what we find.

Study is also the safeguard against the natural inclination to **build on a verse or passage isolated from its setting**, and thereby give it a false meaning. For example, the Lord advised His disciples when witnessing to kings and governors, “not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict” (Lk.21:14,15). Someone might regard this as an instruction not to prepare for giving a gospel address or a talk to youth—and find no such help forthcoming! Whereas a careful study of the setting shows it belongs to times of extreme persecution where there would be little freedom to consult a Bible, or time free of harassment, and the need to speak in a position of intense pressure.

The student finds also in his wider reading that even in the Old Testament, the advice of the book entitled ‘Preacher (see Eccl.12:9-10) is different, because the context there is a prepared lesson or address. Again, Peter says for everyday witnessing, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet.3:15).

The same danger arises on a broader front, since the outlook
of a whole Bible book needs to be compared with similar themes in others found in other books. Ecclesiastes, for instance, deals with life as observed naturally “under the sun”, that is, its view at many points is that of human wisdom, recording with devastating power the message of disillusionment with the passing pleasures of this life. There are certain points (e.g. 5:19-20; 12:1) at which the reader is guided to a deeper spiritual understanding that teaches us to ask for God’s help in finding the meaning of life. But when Ecclesiastes has taught us not to trust in this world’s prosperity, we are almost forced to take refuge in a neighbouring book like Psalms to seek more of God’s answer to our spiritual need.

Thus we do well to undertake the Bible study to gain a balanced over-view of any Scriptural subject, tracing it through the Old Testament into the New. Further support for this point may be seen in 1 Corinthians 10:6,11.

**Finding Time**
A little study is of course better than none, but an hour snatched at random in the week will not take us far, and an isolated burst of lengthy study will likely make us put off the next spell for as long as possible. Any study benefits greatly if we reserve time regularly for it. Some may be able to keep, say, a particular night in the week for this, sometimes using it to prepare for an address or class (though probably finding that some further hours have to be worked in somewhere). But when beginning a family or changing jobs upsets the
routine, it will prove well worth the effort to defend at least an hour or two in each week for deepening our knowledge of the ways of God. (And I have heard this said by young mothers!).

“If Your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction” (Ps.119:92).

When study becomes hard exercise, it can be helpful to ensure that something relaxing or easier to enjoy is worked into the timetable afterwards, rather than give up in discouragement.

**With prayer and thanksgiving**

It will of course be time well spent if we begin with prayer for the Holy Spirit’s teaching. This helps us to recognise the positive action that should flow from any study of the living Word, whether to adjust our inward attitudes, or to take some outward action like settling an old disagreement, or setting ourselves some goal in service. It helps also to continue to ask for the Spirit’s leading when we meet a difficult problem—or find things flowing with suspicious ease!
Prayerful meditation avoids:

1. strengthening our own prejudices
2. hiding from unpleasant truths
3. pursuing ‘pet’ themes only
4. developing blind spots in familiar passages
5. giving up when a passage becomes obscure.

Where to begin
From the range of possible approaches, perhaps the most immediately attractive one would be the Character-study. This is as inviting as the opportunity to meet a new friend (or even to learn from someone who was a failure!), or to get to know an acquaintance more deeply. We can develop an exciting sense of spiritual companionship, while we learn from God’s dealings with the person. We are free to choose from Old Testament or New; and if from Old, we may in most cases look forward to seeing how the New provides the best commentary of all.

Here is a simple plan of enquiry:

(a) Background circumstances
(b) Life before God’s first ‘dealing’
(c) The effects of the first personal experience of God
(d) God’s purpose and work for the character
(e) Qualities of character formed; weakness overcome? e.g., were this person’s natural abilities used notably by God after conversion or calling?
(f) Influence on others
(g) Failures and successes, and the reasons for them.

We might then try a **Book-study**, which has several attractive features. We can choose from a range of lengths; a range of difficulty; or according to the likely relevance to our current circumstances. Again, we may choose from Old Testament or New.

It would be wise, however, to look for an outline guide if we are ‘beginners’, such as those provided in the *Scofield Bible*, the *NIV Study Bible* or *ESV Study Bible*. Better still would be to ask an older brother or sister to work with you or advise—fruitful in friendship as well as learning! More experienced students will enjoy working out their own summary-outline as they go along, and adjusting its shortcomings as understanding matures.

One of the Gospels always makes a profitable beginning, and will lead us sooner or later to comparison with the other three. A book like Romans or Galatians, however, will yield most if we already know the Old Testament books of the Law quite well, e.g. from having read them more than once in daily reading, since we will not appreciate the Jewish veneration of the Law (and its danger of depending on personally earning favour with God—as old and as new as humankind) unless we have come to value its richness ourselves.
Other Types of Study

Now we might choose from a more demanding range: a theme or topic; a word-study; some of the Old Testament types of Christ; or prophecy.

For a theme-study, which in theory could lead us through all 66 books, we would be wise to choose a group of books, e.g. the books of Moses, to give practical limits; or follow, for example, personal holiness through a sample-book from each of: the Law, the histories (Ruth to Esther), the poetic books, the prophets; a Gospel, the Acts, a Letter by Paul, and a non-Pauline Letter. This would of course be a study in quite some depth!

A lighter course might follow ‘holiness’ and ‘sanctification’ and related words through a Concordance, selecting only the occurrences that are likely to illustrate a distinct aspect.

For a more intensive word-study, consult the excellent examples of these by Mr. James Martin, which are presented in a very readable style in volumes of Bible Studies magazine (Hayes Press), from the 1940s to the 1960s. What we are looking for here is the flavour that belongs to a particular Hebrew or Greek word, compared with its synonyms. Each carries its own subtle (or marked) variations of sense, and this can be used with special effect by the Holy Spirit’s guidance of the writer.
For instance, Romans 10:17 says, “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Here the Greek translated ‘word’ is ῥῆμα, which is used in the New Testament for the spoken word especially, reminding us of the necessity for oral witness and preaching.

Our method would be to choose a passage where, for example, the word ‘power’ occurs more than once, and find ‘power’ in the concordance list of all occurrences of a Greek word that is translated with that English word. We might first profit from looking at the range of verses where the English ‘power’ translates the Greek δύναμις = ability, compared with those where ‘power’ translates ἐξουσία = authority, and noting how this affects our understanding of the passage we first chose.

Then we could look at other English words used to translate δύναμις elsewhere. For this, turn to the list of Greek words near the end of Dr Young’s concordance, which is the best for this kind of enquiry.

Here is part of the list:
ability - 1  might - 4  miracle - 8  virtue - 3

The figure shows the number of times δύναμις is translated by the English word in the A.V. It is interesting to note the eight places where the translation is ‘miracle’; though, as we would expect, the commonest rendering is ‘power’ (77 times).
If ‘virtue’ drew our attention, we would benefit from looking at its derivation in our English dictionary, where we could find it once was nearer to its original sense in Latin, viz. ‘power’ or ‘strength.’

We need hardly add that, with prayer, such an enquiry should result in fresh light from the Word that would enrich our worship, prayer, witness, and fellowship.

Another exacting but fruitful search is the types of Christ to be found in the Old Testament. This ranges from characters like Joseph, to the provisions of the Law, where Christ and His work is seen in the service of the priesthood, and in sacrifice and offering.

We may search the material structure of the dwelling-places of God on earth among His people for pictures of Christ as “Son over God’s house” today; and the imagery of the prophets, such as “the shadow of a mighty rock in a weary land.” For the types form one of the richest sources of finding Christ “in all the Scriptures.”

Nor should we miss the treasury of the poetic books, with their description of their sufferings of the Lord, and the glories that should follow.

To finish this brief sketch of a large field, we note the importance of recognising possibly four distinct layers of
truth here:

(1) the immediate meaning of the Old Testament text for the times in which it was first written.
(2) the fulfilment of prophecy for Israel in the days of the Lord’s first coming, and perhaps also for the Gentiles, including foreshadowing of Christ.
(3) elements of prophecy that concern Israel as a nation for which God still has unique purposes.
(4) elements that are related directly to New Testament believers in Christ, and to His gathered together people.

There is general agreement that (2) and (3) are the largest elements in prophecy. Lastly, we observe that one passage can contain all four layers, some of which have already been fulfilled, e.g. Isaiah 9:1-7, where we read:

(1) of the eventual defeat of Assyria (vv.4,5)
(2) the birth of the Messiah
(3) His millennial reign
(4) the kingdom of God and of His Christ in eternity (v.7b).

**Essential questions for every passage**

Now to draw up a ‘plan of attack’ that will keep us on profitable lines in any area of the Bible. We suggest five main questions:

(1) What did this passage mean to the writer or speaker and to his first audience?
The more we dig in this direction, the more we will be consulting language dictionaries, and works on the history of Bible times, and historical geography.

Two cautions may help. First, beware of assuming that the vegetation and wildlife of Israel today is identical to that of Bible times. Rivers may also change their course through history, and between summer and winter!

Second, while the archaeology and mapping of ancient Israel is a fascinating study, there are a large number of places that cannot be identified with certainty by scholars. Therefore we conclude that the meanings of Bible names are often more important, and carry far more spiritual profit, than working out their location on a map.

We can also usefully subdivide this question with the old box of tools, ‘Who, What, Where, When and Why?’

(2) Make a list of the main points in the passage. This will keep in mind the overall structure the writer is developing, and help us to find our way more quickly when we return to the chapter later. Good for memory too!

(3) Have I found Christ reflected in the concerns of this passage?

One route to meditation on our Lord is to ask in what way
the topics of the passage would interest Him when they were read in the synagogue.

(4) What is the relevance of this portion today?

Essential stimulus to spiritual growth and action.

(5) Where is this verse or passage commented on elsewhere in the Scriptures?

The best commentary of all, as we noted above. “Nothing can cut the diamond but the diamond; nothing can interpret Scripture but Scripture” (2). Scholars today still say that the next best is the marginal cross-references of the Revised Version, on which later systems are still based.

The five questions will take time, but will yield the fruits of thoroughness that Martin Luther spoke of: “Pause at every verse of Scripture and shake, as it were, every bough of it, that if possible some fruit may at least drop down.”

Helpful Checks
For the last lap, here is a bank of profitable checks on our findings.

(1) If the Spirit caused so many more pages to be occupied with the Old Testament books, let us not miss the value of looking there for the foundation of God’s treatment on any subject. Pastors and teachers have also long taught the
worth of studying especially the first mention of a topic. In general, the book of Genesis offers a very important field for beginning your study.

(2) A great deal can be gained by comparing modern with older translations. It is still true, however, that the R.V. offers the most consistent use of English words to translate the original equivalents, and so gives directness to our study. It also tends to avoid simplifying a Greek expression in order to make it easily recognisable to modern or western readers.

For example, “the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father” is a richer concept than the easier rendering “the Thessalonians who belong to God the Father” (Revised English Bible) suggests (1 Thess.1:1). Following the RV use of English renderings usually yields rapid access to key passages on a chosen subject. But modern translations can often force us to look especially at familiar portions with fresh eyes.

(3) It is essential to observe the rule of faithfulness to the context or setting of a verse or word. This will help us, for instance, to distinguish between the imagery of building up the Church the Body of Christ and that of building in the House of God.

The Lord bless your search. You have now read through an overview of some guidelines that our spiritual fathers have commended to us. Let the words of the veteran of preaching and teaching urge us on: “Do your best to present yourself to
God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Tim.2:15).


(2) Thomas Watson, in A Body of Practical Divinity: Consisting of Above 176 Sermons on the Lesser Catechism, Thomas Watson, 1692, p.16
Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me,
As Thou didst break the bread beside the sea;
Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord;
My spirit longs for Thee, Thou living Word!

Thou art the bread of life, O Lord, to me,
Thy holy Word the truth that saveth me.
Give me to eat and live with Thee above;
Teach me to love Thy truth, for Thou art love.

O may Thy Spirit, Lord, so quicken me,
That He may touch my eyes, and make me see;
Show me the truth concealed within Thy word,
Then in Thy book revealed I’ll see Thee, Lord.

Bless Thou the bread of life to me, to me,
As Thou didst bless the loaves by Galilee;
Then shall all bondage cease, all fetters fall,
And I shall find my peace, my all in all.
(Mary A. Lathbury)
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Introduction

This booklet has been written to provide a basic introduction to the skills of preaching, both to older and to younger audiences. The author’s chief qualification is to have listened to decades of addresses, with a growing persuasion that, while to be gifted for this work by the Holy Spirit is vital, there is an essential place for teaching the required skills to those enabled by divine help to put them into practice. There are pitfalls that should be pointed out before unhelpful habits become ingrained past remedy.

The Spirit of God directs a preacher during his preparation and delivery into harmony with His own ministry to those who will hear. He does not do our work for us, and He uses those who are willing to learn from mistakes! The fact that He can work in spite of the preacher’s failure must not be made an excuse for poor practice, unworthy of the Lord’s message. The Old Testament preacher ‘pondered and searched out and set in order ... The Teacher searched to find just the right words’ (Eccl.12:9-10 NIV). Paul made it clear that Timothy should not neglect this exercise (1 Tim.4:13,15; 2 Tim.2:15).

A wide range of studies written by outstanding preachers, courses in general public speaking, and guides to giving youth talks have also been consulted, and what follows in this booklet will show an obvious debt to these sources. It is assumed that the student preacher accepts that he will not succeed unless he has first
prepared himself to receive God’s message. We cannot over-emphasise the importance of daily prayer and Bible reading to give focus and freshness to our public ministry. In addition, any who would guide others, however simply, needs to study God’s guide-book to become soundly grounded in true understanding of its themes. Then we need to observe and listen to people, young and old, to understand how they think and talk, to find out what concerns and motivates them, and so to persuade their minds and reach their hearts. May the Lord of the harvest use these first notes to bless you in your service for His kingdom.
Chapter 1

BASIC HELPS IN GIVING A TALK

Arrangements
It’s always wise to check with organisers, especially nearer the date:

- The time and place;
- The duration;
- The aim of the talk

To ask also about the likely audience is neither fussy nor conceited. It reassures those who have asked you to speak that you are taking the task seriously, and care about the work that goes into the event.

Gathering Material
- Avoid false starts by focusing on main points to be conveyed, relevant to your aim. You never need to ‘cover’ the whole subject: the listeners will get into that later if they want.
- It’s usually easier to prepare your beginning and ending last; i.e., strengthen, or brighten or even simplify it, to gain or hold the confidence of the audience. For a spiritual message, a small number of Scriptures, or one main passage can be properly ‘sown’ and explained. If you can, emphasise, or repeat (wisely), or print on card one of these to help memory.
Don’t worry about not being original or brilliant! They asked you because they want you to be yourself, as guided by the Holy Spirit. Just pray that you’ll get within range of your best.

Making notes
Some speakers write out their script. They’re sure then that they’ve thought it through. This is especially good for the beginning and ending. The drawbacks are:

(1) Written sentences can get too far away from spoken language, becoming wooden and stilted.

(2) It takes practice to memorise the script, and patch up a gap forgotten while speaking.

Others ‘talk about’ a series of headings and sub-headings, trusting to their familiarity with the topic. Most use a mixture of both methods, e.g. choosing words carefully for the technical points, or at a key-point in persuading people, and using headings elsewhere. For a short talk (unlike a speech in Parliament!) you finally use headings and sub-headings only. You know your subject, and should only need prompts. If you have time, memorise your beginning and ending.

Estimating how long you’ll take
Time a slow reading of a written script; you’ll likely take a quarter of that again. Only practice will tell you how long ‘talking about’ headings will take. Either way, aim to use less than the time allowed. Leave them wanting more.
Delivery

- **Speak out and speak distinctly.** You will use more energy, and speak a little more slowly than in conversation, even if using a microphone.
- Public address equipment doesn’t replace *projecting your voice* so that all can hear without strain. But if your voice is strong, don’t hector the folk! Softer tones are important for sensitive points—shouting these would be crude.
- Make a note half-way through your headings to *SPEAK OUT* again. Pause there, and take a drink, or move your head and neck back a little, to relax. Then smile at somebody!
- Serious parts don’t need a sad, droopy voice. Try to vary the **tone** from heading to heading.
- **Look at various parts of the audience.** What if you had to sit unnoticed through it all?
- Hold notes, or a Bible, to *avoid distracting hand-movements.* Avoid too many gestures, though some are natural and will help emphasise points.
- **Pray (privately) before you start.** *An opening prayer should be brief,* and should not refer to people that someone in the audience might not know.
- Finally, remember that *nobody normal ever manages all this list!*
Chapter 2

GIVING A TALK WITH MORE EXPERIENCE

Speaking to a number of people is an honour and an opportunity. There can be no excuse for mismanagement of the comparatively few occasions when an audience is gathered to hear the Word of God. So if we are giving a spiritual message, it is worthy of our finest effort to prepare and practise the skill needed:

- to ensure that a relevant message is properly conveyed (Eph.6:19-20)
- to give a clear signal (1 Cor.14:8)
- to exploit the distinctive elements of the speaker’s background, personality, education, experience, physique and voice (Acts 7:22; Isa.49:2)
- to exercise the gift of Christ by His Spirit (Eph.4:11; 1 Pet.4:11; Rom.12:7).

Preparation

Study the main points of your subject. What is the chief point or purpose? What will be most important or interesting to your audience? To find where these coincide requires three things:

1. prayer
2. early preparation to allow careful review of your material.
3. where possible, a wise estimate of the likely audience.
All that you have gathered will matter to you, because you gathered it. But do not let any part of it obscure or weaken the impact of your main point. Anything that might do this, or take you past your allotted time, must be firmly omitted. Keep it for possible use another day.

Now plan your notes to **highlight the main points**.

- Find ways of illustrating them so that they are both clear and likely to be remembered. Use everyday situations, or famous events from history. Look at the Lord’s example in the Gospels.
- Find ways of emphasising them. This is especially valuable if you can use a Scripture which summarises your point.
- Try repetition from time to time, in an interesting way, e.g. pointing out a different word or phrase each time;
- Try using a *small* number of Powerpoint slides. Too many break your eye-contact with the audience, reducing impact; or a display board — less dependent on technology; making a slogan with rhythm, alliteration, etc.

On your page of notes, you have possibly starred or numbered your main points. That’s fine for you, who can see them there. How will you get this emphasis across to your audience?

**Structure**

An audience recognises and appreciates a sense of planning and progress in the talk—a **beginning, middle and end**; preferably an ending that sums up what they recognise from the earlier stages of the talk.
The **opening** should begin where your audience are in relation to your subject. It matters to you already for various reasons; but where can your audience latch on?

Try one of these:

- a practical illustration of why your topic is important
- an incident from practical or spiritual experience (any audience is curious!)
- a famous saying, or statement from a famous person
- a topical/headline snippet
- a humorous story (with some profit) reassures people you won’t be a bore.

But if you can’t think of something like this, just state your subject and quickly outline its direction. The audience will be content that you’ll get on with it in a business-like way. Some will even prefer this ‘no frills’ approach, as long as you don’t sound flat, dull or depressed. You are allowed to be enthusiastic!

**Verbal illustration** of course has an important place throughout the talk, and repays special study and practice.

**Save visual aids till later** in the talk. At the beginning, you have the advantage of a fresh voice and profile to hold attention, so if using Powerpoint, have a title slide for some time before moving on.
Ways to keep an audience listening

• **Fresh ideas:** new light on a Scripture, or a new way of thinking about an old problem. Sound as though you’re addressing the needs of this and next year, not yesterday.

• **Careful research:** Not all will follow every technical point, but they respect somebody who knows his facts, and can evaluate them soundly. This includes finding out what today’s people think and do, and why, as well as study of the Scriptures.

• ‘**Highlight**’ doesn’t mean exaggerate. Avoid the temptation to overstate, or pretend. Someone may later find you out. The preacher should have no need or room for being less than truthful.

• **Memorise some Scriptures** you mean to use. It shows that you care about them, and will repay you elsewhere anyway. It also cuts down the need for people to find the place.

Delivery (and practice beforehand)

• Practise **variety of voice**. Try out your vocal resources: volume and softness, richness and clarity, challenge and appeal; local accent, dialect and Standard English. Play these stops appropriately, for interest and expressiveness.

• In **oral reading** decide where *the key words* are in a sentence, and give them time and emphasis. Look for *climax* in a passage, especially in narrative, and work towards it, with a controlled rise in pitch and volume; sometimes also variation of pace. The sensitive reading of the Scriptures is vital. Try to make them speak freshly, not as if time-honoured and over-familiar.

• Build in **change of pace** and work towards each key-point in your address as a sort of mini-goal. In 30 minutes you would allow 5
minutes for hymn & prayer, and another 5 for over-run. You would likely have three points of emotional intensity, whether of searching meditation, challenge or appeal. These should get special attention to timing, pace, pitch, volume and tone. (‘Tone’ is the mood of your voice, e.g. scathing or soothing."

Habit is extremely strong, so you have to work consciously against it, changing pace and pitch from time to time, and relaxing the neck and face muscles. If you have won the company’s attention, you can heighten it by making them wait. Pitch and pace demand energy: not constant hectoring, but controlled vigour varied with more reflective or informative spells. You must sound as though you care about getting a response from each listener.

Visual contact
• Study the wise use of gesture. Keep it natural, and varied. Also move position from time to time. This changes the play of echo around your voice, and gives you a fresh profile. But if gesture and movement are overdone, they become distracting and irritating. When you’re feeling strong, ask someone to tell you about your favourite mannerisms! Remember to smile at suitable points.
• Consider the use of a visual chart, Powerpoint or other display, to reinforce a key text, to mark progress, or revise some point. But don’t leave a visual inactive for too long; and don’t display too much at one time. Slides if overused become a distracting barrier. Listeners prefer to do some thinking for themselves, and dislike being manipulated too obviously. Older people are usually less impressed by comic drawings.
• Where you expect (or should be expecting) **visitors who are not regular Bible readers**, use Scripture passages that are easy to find. People usually like to be seen to open the Bible as others do, not just ‘sit back and listen.’

• **Watch the audience.** Try to give everyone a personal look. This will help you respond to their mood. They will also think of you as having noticed that they were there.

**Language**

The Lord used the everyday Aramaic of His time and place. Though some points in your talk will require sacred language for sacred matters, we need to practise using language accessible to people with little Bible background, or even little acquaintance with religious or literary terms.

**Time-keeping and finishing**

Even people who will happily stand around for half an hour afterwards just chatting do not readily forgive a speaker who exceeds his expected time. (The expectation is more important than the actual period.) It’s always better to err in stopping ‘early.’ Cut something out quite ruthlessly if need be—even the ending, if it comes to that. If you stop in time, they might ask you back!

**Your ending** should give a sense of having reached the goal—a satisfying closing point. It should either be a proposal you have worked towards—for example, an appeal for a specific action or attitude; or simply sum up the main point of your subject. If this has several aspects or sub-points, make sure they are stated as briefly and memorably as possible. By this stage they should not need
careful re-statement or explanation. It’s important not to produce something new or totally unexpected in your ending, since the audience are less fresh, and in their eyes you are also less fresh.
Chapter 3

Oral Reading and Delivery in Detail

Nehemiah 8:2-3 reminds us of the importance of clarity and feeling in the public reading of Scripture. The high regard we should have for the word of God is sufficient reason for giving time to practising this art, and aiming to make our performance more worthy of its subject than is often the case. Reading to the sick or elderly (who are often deaf in some degree) is also a great service, and deserves our best effort.

Preparation

Read your chosen passage or texts aloud, deciding on the following features, and where you might forget, mark the margin or text with the signs suggested:

(a) The **structure** of a passage or sentence:
   - for natural pauses, e.g. stages in narrative; changes in topic or mood: use ...
   - mark a climax with < or use underlining
   - for a key-verse that it would be effective to read twice use x2

(b) Decide on the appropriate **tone and pace**.
Avoid the old depressing habit of an unvaryingly slow pace, and a rise and fall in pitch at the end of every clause, which is often thought to sound reverential. For some statements of passion or
lament, a briskening pace is even called for, followed by a pause, e.g. David’s lament for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam.1:21-22). The simple detail in a narrative, or an explanatory aside, or the excitement of quick action should never be dragged out.

In contrast, Isaiah 53 with its series of surprises and deep feeling needs well measured pauses between clauses and between verses, and generally a contemplative pace that dwells on each thought. But variation is also needed, else those effects will be lost; e.g. v.3 finishes more quickly, approaching a dismissive manner.


**(c)** Use a **pause mark** if you read music or an accent < above the most important words—but just a few. Any of these emphases suffers if overdone.

**(d)** Practise at home **how to stand**. Avoid stiffness or affected posturing, but express by an upright, attentive stance that you expect from the audience full attention and respect for the reading. You will learn later to adapt towards a less formal approach when appealing for understanding, or inviting audience-participation from a youth-group.

**(e)** Practise how to **develop volume** without harshness or strain. The normal tendency is to raise pitch. This obscures vowels, making them sound too alike; leaves no flexibility for expressiveness; can make you sound angry; and so becomes monotonous or
embarrassing.

Avoid this by practising volume at the deepest pitch you can produce. Then allow pitch to rise when you wish it to, i.e. for emphasis. Then consciously drop pitch again while maintaining volume. (This is also good practice for reading to deaf/elderly people, who lose the distinctness of signals at high pitch.)

All this is another reason for well-placed pauses, allowing you to breathe and regain pitch control. Nervousness tightens throat muscles, and the energy needed for voice-projection will soon teach you to pause!

**Delivery in more detail**

- Before being called to speak, steady yourself and help relaxation by breathing steadily—not too deeply, but enough to keep yourself in control, and oxygen reaching all parts!
- Check in advance where you are expected to mount a platform, avoiding wires, etc.
- Hold your Bible, or if hands are shaky (quite normal!) hold the lectern lightly until you can relax one or both arms—but not with a hand in a pocket.
- Look out for faces you know all round the hall, and read/speak as if for that person especially—but not for too long.
- Take a drink at a natural pause, e.g. when you move from one passage to another. If you have a slip of paper in place, you’ll have more time.
- If reading out of doors, e.g. at a camp or a funeral, it pays to write out your passage/verses on cards, so as to cope with
adverse weather.

Amplification

- You owe your audience and the organisers wise use of equipment provided. Remember *no-one will be interested in remarks about microphones*: They just want you to get on with your message.
- On a platform, it is very hard to tell how the amplified signal sounds out in the hall. Look out for people straining to hear, or ask them to make a sign if they aren’t hearing well. It can be a good idea to make a note to ask again half-way through your talk. If privileged to speak in a hall with a gallery, give special attention to those in the gallery and those under it at the back.

Free-standing microphones

- These are less often used now, but don’t ignore the possibility. These are usually set to function best at about 5 or 6 inches from your mouth; any closer and sound is distorted, breathing is picked up, etc.
- Use the reading of a hymn to gauge the best position. Then stand well back for the singing! Take note of any previous speaker’s stance and its effect on the system, and try to learn from his mistakes or good practice.
- If you are taller or shorter than the previous speaker, switch off the microphone (to avoid it squealing) and raise or lower it. If you prefer to ask the chair or the person monitoring the equipment, everyone will appreciate you consulting the expert.
Tie-clip type
Around 2 to 3 inches below your tie-knot should be best. Especially avoid jacket-lapel brushing the microphone. Unless you have practised with the clip, read your hymn without it, and then use the period of singing to don the clip.

Radio mike
A transmitter will sit in your top pocket or belt. The on/off switch can be quite small, so lay books down when switching off, to avoid fumbling at an awkward angle with the wrong hand.

With all of these, you still need to project your voice. It always sounds loud enough to you, but you’re not the audience!
Chapter 5

Giving a Public Testimony

With current trends in society hostile to the gospel and the discipled life, there is a decreased pool of testimonies to draw upon, and it’s vital to bring out the greatest value of such a moving witness for the benefit especially of unsaved friends whom we invite to gospel occasions. We focus here on the positives that deliver such value.

The core of a testimony

Central to a convert’s story is how and why they were moved to personal faith on the Saviour, and to commitment to discipleship and service in the churches of God. Previous experiences will always be very real to the speaker, but too much time given to detail of these, and of changes in lifestyle after conversion, robs the talk of the vital factors that brought about the change. This deserves time at least equal to the other two parts. It’s probably also in two stages: finding a personal relationship with Christ; and then deciding to follow Him as Lord. Both matter to others who may be under conviction from the Spirit of God about these steps for themselves.

The circumstances and background of the speaker’s life may not resemble that of the listener, whose problems and concerns may be quite different. What matters most to the visitor we have described
are the factors in salvation that apply to all mankind:

- the effect of the living word of God
- recognition of its truth
- forsaking of sin
- trust in the cross work of Jesus
- the call to discipleship
- and the prompts to decision along the way.

The whole story is a witness to the power of Jesus’s life, death and resurrection to engender faith in those who hear, and to draw us after Him; so we fail our Saviour if we omit the central events of our decisions.

The power of Scripture

Often in spite of the best efforts of the preacher or personal one-to-one witness, the great gospel verses that were instrumental in the speaker’s conversion can be forgotten or omitted, and less relevant ones brought to the fore. Verses that focus on the need for and transaction of salvation can be commended as anchors for faith to the convert later, by wise friends, or by overseers who interview him/her for baptism, because a story of feelings and emotional experience alone is a poor foundation compared with the clear statements of the Word. Such verses then are well worth including in your story.

A strong witness can answer with Scripture such questions as, “Do you really think salvation is for someone with your degree of sinfulness?” Or, “Can you lose your salvation with bad behaviour
afterwards, letting the Lord down?” Or, “Are you saved for ever?” Or, “Don’t you have to show a clean record for a period before you will be acceptable to God?” “Is it important to belong to a church” “Does it matter to God which church you attend?” We could list several more FAQs, and the best answers come from Scripture. The living Word has power in itself, and is an essential tool for the faithful witness (1 Pet.1:23-25).

The call to discipleship
Everyone in the Bible record who placed faith in Jesus was also called to follow the Lord and offer Him a life of service in fellowship with other believers — ‘saved to serve’. Often today this step can be delayed while the convert adjusts to the new lifestyle. But the next definite step is clearly to be baptised, as the Lord commanded through His apostles (Matt.28:19-20); and then to be added to a church of God (Acts 2:41-42,47), with the added significance of being added to the Lord (Acts 5:14).

So why miss this life-changing experience from your story of faith? What stirred you to offer your life to the Master, and seek the fellowship and support of a church, will be an instructive challenge to others who are being called to stand for Christ against the social flow. Again, Scripture is our unchanging guide, no matter through whom it comes. It’s good to make clear the verses above that show how the first churches were formed.
The responsibility of mentors
Just as Saul was guided and cared for by Ananias after his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9:10-20), so God has mentors to show you the way. Those who brought you to Christ, or to the meetings of the church, and the elders or shepherds there should be fulfilling the Lord’s command to ‘make disciples.’ There should be a series of classes in the basics of Christian service, one-to-one or in a group of those new in the faith. If this is delayed or overlooked, ask and remind them!

That will then make a reassuring end to your testimony, since everyone values caring friends.
Chapter 6

Working with Youth

The Message

1. Prepare the ground
We can expect little Bible knowledge today, so open up the soil with topics like the following:

- Man’s place in creation
- God the creator
- The complexity of creation
- Evidence of the order & balance of an earlier time (Don’t use those words!)
- The limits of the human mind—vastness of eternity, space
- Conscience
- Man’s need for Someone beyond himself
- Moral standards, arising from our sense of justice, not just from social training.

There is a lot to grasp here, before the Gospel has much meaning to the hearer.
2. The Gospel

- Man’s failure and self-choosing
- We cannot adequately help ourselves
- God’s judgement
- His way of escape through Jesus

Stress Christ as Creator, Lord, leader, with all authority in heaven and on earth; His power over spirits. (Some young people may have met serious involvement with cults and demonology.)

3. The Material

**Bible narrative** is unfairly neglected today, but it offers: action; social instruction; character; a pictorial presentation of truth; structure (but you may need to learn how to tell a story.) Teach along with a **key text** and Illustrate the theme also with stories of today that show relevance to situations important to youth.

**Topics of interest to youth**
(Note: use of these does not hinder presentation of the truths of the gospel, which should be taught whether popular or not.)

Growing up, Birth and death, Family relationships, Physical excellence, Skills & achievement, Adventure & Heroism (although this is an unfashionable word!) Animals and Birds (especially up to age 11/12), Fairness, Honesty, Kindness vs. Injustice, Cheating, Cruelty, War, Building, Property, Wealth, Government, Authority,
Careers

For older youth:
Handling money, Overcoming temptation, Setting limits, Peer-pressure and media, Be Your Own Man/Woman, Health and Diet, Clothes and Appearance, Morals, Music

4. Presentation

1. It’s vital to decide the AIM of a talk/lesson, and then cut out anything irrelevant. You have limited time to get ONE main point across.

2. Build in a structure especially if not using a story. Indicate from time to time where you have reached in your plan. Don’t depend too much on worksheets. You should do the teaching first.

3. An object for illustration is most useful further on when attention flags. Use members of the audience to help.

4. Arrive in time to check or mount facilities.

5. Stand back from front rows, else by rolling their heads back, they can still see only your waistline, and feel neglected. Seat a group to face you and a wall, not the other groups.

6. It is valuable to teach memorising of a relevant verse and reward co-operation.
7. In planning a term, keep up variety. Use singing as a break as well as an introduction. It may not be so popular with teens. Keep checking which tunes or words they really like.

8. Something to make and take home makes a link with parents and home; a reminder of success. Give the less able something simpler to do, so that it’s finished in time.

9. Be there early to give a personal welcome, and build relationships with talk about the young people’s week.

10. Work at contacting the home. Parents like to talk about their children. Keep this up during the summer recess.

11. Continuity is essential. A relationship with the children is what brings them, and needs to be nursed from week to week.

5. Discipline
It cannot be stressed too often that discipline depends on your message, as above, and your relationship. You have to earn respect—and affection, if possible. With some bruised children this can take a lot of time. Don’t give up on them, as others may have done in their lives.

• Discipline begins with yourself—care with appropriate clothes; good time-keeping; keeping promises (how many promises did the Lord fail to honour?); self-control—of anger or exasperation or tiredness; honesty; love for the unlovely.
• It depends on **how much you care** about your message and aims. Your talk and material must earn respect and interest.

• **Aim to make friends** but don’t become too familiar or a ‘doormat’. This also implies firmness and fairness in setting bounds and standards. Make friends with wise gifts, but the gift they need most is *you spending time with them*, outings, games, etc.

• **Look ahead and be a leader.** Avoid confrontation. Cultivate using language to make a child ashamed of misconduct, not to decry character.

• If speaking to a group, ask **helpers** to look after and sit with a group or row. Don’t let workers bunch together at the back, or get distracted with furniture, etc. The children claim first attention always.

• Isolate or divert **trouble-makers**. Try to employ an attention-seeker in some way that cannot be abused. Otherwise sit between them, etc.

• You can withhold **extras/rewards**. Final sanction is exclusion, preferably with someone to help enforce it. This is of no use if not **consistent and fair**. Don’t allow the passage of time to overthrow an exclusion set for the next week(s). Visit parents to ensure the right story gets home.

• **Report bad behaviour** to other workers so that you all agree to
hold the line. Some of more experience might advise a better way to handle a particular case. You’re best to accept that!

• When programming a youth night, consider giving your talk near the beginning, so that trouble-makers don’t keep missing the message or get the fun and then make an excuse to leave early.

6. In the minibus or car
Remember to abide by your church Safeguarding Policy. For example, the UK Churches of God Policy requires a male and a female present where at all possible. The driver must concentrate on driving, and make this clear to the young folk, despite what provocation you may get. If they get noisy or cheeky, stop the vehicle and take charge again. Remind them that the youth-night is a voluntary service that you can cancel, or exclude them from.

Make clear that persistent offenders won’t be picked up next time (and see that this promise is kept by you and any other leader in charge next time; the team must support one another.) If the back seats in the bus get rowdy, ask the other worker to sit farther back and engage with them.
Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
   In living echoes of Thy tone;
As Thou hast sought, so let me seek
   Thine erring children, lost and lone.

   Oh, teach me Lord, that I may teach
   The precious things Thou dost impart;
And wing my words that they may reach
   The hidden depths of many a heart.

   Oh, fill me with Thy fullness, Lord,
      Until my very heart o’erflow
In kindling thought and glowing word,
   Thy love to tell, Thy praise to show.

   F.R. Havergal
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The Practice of Public Prayer
A Short Guide

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“Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.” (Acts 12:5)

So even while the church joined in petition, an angel of the Lord stood by Peter, brightening his cell, and awaking him to chains falling off and gates swinging open. The church thought about an angel too, but were amazed to find that the man they were praying for was actually there at the door!

Perhaps one of the greater weaknesses of the assembly prayers is that habit has accustomed us to forget their power, so that we maybe no longer attend with the expectancy and concern of saints who are in touch with their living God. We may need to revive the spirit of the early churches, who, when they heard that the apostles had been charged by the Council not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus “raised their voices together in prayer to God,” (Acts 4:24) till the place was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God with boldness.

Things had not changed in the apostle Paul’s mind when he appealed from prison for the prayers of the Philippians (Phil.1:19), the Ephesians (6:19), the Colossians (4:3) — and how many more? He could tell them too of the results achieved, as assemblies through the Fellowship joined in supplication for his witness (Phil.1:12).

So we are in grave danger if, even while exercised about personal prayer-power, we lose sight of the role of the assembly prayers. Praying together demands unity, and we must guard against any weakening of this, whether through neglect of the church meeting, or of other forms of prayer-partnership. So important is our grasp of the power of concerted prayer that we take some space first to note how it is commended to us in the teaching of both Old Testament and New.
The power of concerted prayer
When David thought of prayer he compared it to the incense of the evening sacrifice (Ps.141:2). The Tabernacle was first and foremost a form of united service on behalf of a people. This is echoed in the wonderful description of the "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" in Revelation 5:8; and cp. 8:3. The intercession of a people together, with one divinely acknowledged centre, is the theme of king Solomon on the great day of dedication of the Temple (2 Chr.6, 1 Chr.28:12). For believers who would serve Christ as Lord today, the essential place of assembly prayer is laid down among the chief services in which the first church of God “continued steadfastly” (Acts 2:42 RV).

The Letter to the Hebrews further advances our understanding by describing our approach as to "the throne of grace", where the Son of God, as great high priest, enables us to "... receive mercy, and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb.4:14-16). That He acts here especially on behalf of a people together is made clear in Hebrews 2:17. Here our prayers are blessed with His understanding, His advocacy, and the savour of His name.

So we devote the rest of this booklet to a study of how we can perfect the practice of this great service, and avoid the pitfalls that can be all too familiar.

Practical approaches
Heading our list of possible improvements is the importance of coming to the meeting with a burden, and with matters for thanksgiving. It makes a great difference to our contribution if we have become personally exercised about specific matters, and have thought about them before we come together. Sometimes those whose private and family prayers are alive and well filled begin to forget just when in the last few days they prayed for some concern, but they can be certain it
has not been neglected. This brings an intimacy and an appreciation of the problem that is a help in itself, and lends conviction to the way in which the subject is expressed.

Coming with a burden deals swiftly with inactive gaps, and deepens our involvement when we realise that several others have been living with the same concern. We know then that the theme is not recurring just because it was mentioned in the opening announcements. After all, is it natural that someone’s need should go unmentioned by us before the Lord, and be brought out of store only at the meeting? David wrote, “Evening, morning and noon ... He hears my voice” (Ps.55:17).

We might ask, then, whether a prayer session is deficient if some of the points brought before the group have not been mentioned thereafter. It is unlikely, however, that those points have been forgotten, or are being neglected by most present. Once announced to the saints, they will surely be prayed about in private, and as the Spirit leads, they will doubtless be given fuller expression at later meetings. But it’s important for those who lead in prayer to be exercised about paying due attention in that same session to the matters that others add to the prayer-list.

Then, we cannot overestimate the value of thankfulness. Paul wrote, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ... And be thankful” (Col.3:15), and he said the saints should be “overflowing with thankfulness” (2:7). Long before, Israel found that when, going into battle, they began to sing and to praise, the Lord dealt with their enemies (2 Chron.20:22). It is good when announcers ask for matters for thanksgiving, and when all the saints give themselves to the appreciation of the lovingkindness of our God. Out of this comes a balanced perspective.

So we come to the sometimes neglected fact that the great prayers of Scripture begin with adoration of God, and contemplation of His
greatness. It’s heartening to read again how Jeremiah followed this pattern, even when the Lord’s instructions left him in a quandary (Jer.32:17-23). Compare this with the structure of the prayer of the saints in the first prayer-meeting recorded in detail in Acts 4. Thinking about the great God of heaven, who is our Father, cuts our problems down to size! Then came meditation on the intervention of God in past years. Finally came the immediate request.

We will learn to curb impatience to get on to the circumstantial detail that we are too prone to regard as the real meat of praying. This is one lesson that Elisha taught his servant when he was overwhelmed by the power of the besiegers, till he was shown the horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha (2 Kin.6:15-17).

Another basic is to accept that consistency and faithful attendance are essential. Too often we expect God to take up our cause when we have become excited about it. Rather, the Lord can work most fully with “remembrancers” who do not cool off and give up. The Lord Himself told the parable of the widow and the unrighteous judge to teach the power of perseverance, and it was one of the earliest of His lessons to His own (Matt.7:7). So if we find the prayer meeting ineffective, let us be careful to ask if we have waited on the Lord sufficiently — until we are ready for Him to give.

Often the Lord chooses to wait, perhaps because what we are asking for takes time to work out; and perhaps more often because we need to do more ourselves, and achieve a better condition before He can bless.

“And therefore will the LORD wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgement; blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isa. 30:18, RV. — a verse much of which is sadly lost in the NIV).
The Lord can use most those who abide at His hand ready for His use. The church were in the right condition to respond to the Jews’ threats with immediate prayer together because, among other things, they had continued steadfastly in the prayers, were practised, and were united in this.

The conduct of the meeting

Now for the practical detail of the meeting itself. How can we help ourselves to concentrate, when we have perhaps arrived after a tense and tiring day at work? Or an equally exhausting day of the special tension of loneliness at home, where every decision has to be taken on your own? Or an evening vibrating with the demands of children and husband, all to be met by Mum, of course? Here are some suggestions:

1. Try to remember what the Bible says about the topics brothers mention in their prayers.

2. Ask God to speak to you, through what the brother is saying, and personally to you during the pauses.

3. Link your own burden with the words of the hymns, as well as with what brothers who lead may be saying. Sisters who come with their unheard contribution don’t find the pauses too long. They’re more disappointed in brothers who talk too long!

4. Think about the great priest through whom we are making approach to the throne of grace.

5. Listen for answers in verses quoted, or in the ministry or Bible Reading. Does the Spirit not often bring verses to your mind in response to the problems being expressed?
6. Try listing in memory the topics that have been covered, as you would if you were reporting the content of the meeting to someone kept at home.

For those who lead
This brings us to the responsibility of brothers who speak in audible prayer to keep before them the fact that they act on behalf of the whole gathering. Here is a short list of reminders:

1. Think of how the concerns of others, especially sisters, and the youngest, can be included. The Lord sees their hearts, and will never neglect their burden, but brothers should not forget them.

2. Take account of what others have brought, so that time is not consumed returning over the same ground, when other brothers are waiting to move on to new subjects, unless you are genuinely constrained to pray for the same urgent need that others have mentioned. It does help to do this in a fresh way, with further development of thought. What fresh stage has someone’s illness reached? The announcer, or any close to the patient, can help by finding this out, or passing it on, with respect for confidentiality and avoidance of graphic detail.

3. Speak out for all to hear comfortably. Try to vary the pace and pitch of voice, to help listeners concentrate, and to be more expressive. Avoid the habit of using a steady, unchanging pace to allow you to think ahead.

4. It is an appreciated courtesy when praying with others to make language and ideas as fresh and stimulating as possible. It is no weakness to speak to one theme at a time, and get up later to present a further theme on your heart. Try listening for your own pet phrases, or ask someone else. You may be surprised that they can tell you them at once! Newcomers don’t understand why we need to mention the name
of the Lord so very often.

5. ‘Speaking truth in love’ applies here as in conversation. It is of course more arresting to mention the intimate detail of someone’s circumstances, but let us guard against unwise or hurtful betrayal of confidence, when we are being trusted by others to handle their concern with sensitivity.

6. Read your hymnbook between meetings, instead of relying on a scanty memory to produce hymns. The saints deserve freshness and true thoughtfulness in the range of hymns used. Time spent with these flowers of spiritual experience is never time wasted.

7. We all are encouraged if someone wants to talk to us with appreciation about the topics of our prayers. When did you or I last ask a sister if the prayers covered the points that were a concern to her? That’s a more rewarding conversation afterwards than the petty detail of the week’s routine.

8. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Heb.11:6). Faith requires personal holiness also, since the Lord will not hear, if we do not deal with our sin (Ps.66:18; Matt.6:15).

8. The prayers will be enriched, and made more significant for all, if the announcer encourages all to contribute something to their list, whether they form one list of points, as is more suited to a large company, or all mention their concerns in an informal spell before the prayer session.

Special occasions
When a friend’s illness becomes acute, or a local disaster occurs, or any other major event, prayer is given fresh focus by meeting at a separate
time for earnest supplication and intercession. Leaders can be encouraged in this exercise by request from others in the church.

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The Lord asked if there would still be faith on the earth when He returned. Let us do all we can to ensure that when He comes to the air for us, we will have maintained the assembly prayers with the order, and the expectancy, that He would recognise as from Himself.

When crowds came flocking to the weekly prayer meetings in Olney, Buckinghamshire, England, John Newton asked Thomas Cowper to join him in writing hymns for them, which later became famous as ‘Olney Hymns’. One was, ‘Oh for a closer walk with God!’ Another was, ‘What Various Hindrances We Meet’:

What various hindrances we meet
When coming to the mercy seat!
Yet who knows the worth of prayer,
But wishes to be often there?

Prayer makes the darkened cloud withdraw;
Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw;
Gives exercise to faith and love,
Brings every blessing from above.

Restraining prayer, we cease to fight;
Prayer makes the Christian’s armour bright;
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.
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Foreword

This short guide is written in increasing awareness of departure among believers from weekly observance of the assembly meeting, known as the Breaking of Bread or the Remembrance, devoted to communion together with our Lord. The simplicity of the example set by Him is also less valued, and now replaced by many with other features. The Remembrance as we see it enacted in the Bible has become precious, perhaps even rare, in our day. So it seemed timely to write again on a subject already excellently treated in *The Breaking of the Bread* by J.M. Gault, in the series on church truths issued by Hayes Press.

This booklet deals more fully with the practice of the observance, aiming to meet the reasoning of those who argue for something less demanding, in our view, than is set out in Scripture.

I would like to record indebtedness to the teaching of dear Jack, among many able exponents of the Word who have sought out and practised the Lord’s pattern for us.

*Martin Archibald*

2019
Chapter 1

A COMMAND FROM THE LORD

“Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk.22:19)

The true simplicity of the Lord’s example in gathering the apostles to His table (1 Cor.10:21) began to capture the attention of believers through the years leading to 1829, when at least two groups began meeting in Dublin to keep communion without a clergyman officiating. Meanwhile A.N. Groves had set off for Persia, resolving to disregard the warning from The Church Missionary Society that he was barred from observing communion with converts because he had declined to be ordained. The spiritual delight and courage of those men and their friends in recovering the practice of the Lord and His apostles is an antidote to the fading grasp of the purity of the Remembrance sadly evident in evangelical circles today. Generations of followers of Christ have since found their humble, obedient approach to the worship of God in so remembering His Son to be richly rewarded in their spiritual lives.
So our first point about the practice of the Remembrance is that it is a direct command from our Lord Himself. If that were not enough for the willing-hearted disciple, we have the Gospel accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke reinforced by Paul’s guidance to the church in Corinth (1 Cor.10 and 11), confirming that the example of the Lord was still being upheld in the second half of 1st century A.D., as an observance of the highest importance. That is shown by mentions of practice elsewhere in the New Testament, and by exposition of its significance in the Letters. What Paul wrote was also received directly from the Lord Himself (1 Cor.11:23). We shall aim to interpret those passages soundly, as sufficient guidance and authority for practice by believers today, and try to catch their heart-warming life for the reader’s encouragement and blessing.

Clearly the keeping of the Remembrance cannot then be just an option for a disciple, no matter how sincere (s)he might feel about not being ready or worthy to take part in something so sacred. In fact Paul urged those whose spiritual condition was weak to examine themselves in private before God, and set right what might be wrong, so as to be present and take part (1
Cor.11:27-34). Surely we cannot neglect the fact that regular meditation on the life and death and resurrection of our Lord, and the exercise of offering appreciation of Him, is a prime way of absorbing the spiritual values of His body and His blood, symbolised in the bread and wine upon His table? What better way is there to restore our spiritual health than to feed upon Him, recalling His teaching in John chapter 6?

**How often and when?**

Some would say we have no instruction in Scripture about how often and on which day to observe the Remembrance. It is most probable, however, that the reason for this is that these points were so readily passed on orally and by example that there was no need for it being written in the expensive medium of papyrus. This holds for other meetings of the churches, for example the assembly prayers or planned gospel preaching. In any case, should it take more than a few mentions for the disciple heart to have guidance enough? We may collect all we need quite briefly:

- **The occasion was plainly a regular one**, since the converts of Pentecost “were continually devoting themselves ... to the breaking of bread ...” (Acts 2:42
The day on record was the first day of the week. When Paul reached Troas in his third missionary journey, Luke writes: “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread” (Acts 20:7). Why wait for that day, while they were staying for seven days (v.19), if it were not the customary one for the Lord’s supper?

Another marker is the instruction to the church in Corinth to set aside money for collection “On the first day of every week ...” (1 Cor.16:2). This was also “... what I told the Galatians churches to do” (v.1). It was a regular meeting point (so we should ask why), and a most suitable occasion for offering a monetary gift for the Lord’s work.

Lastly, there is the touching note that John, in detention on Patmos because of his faith, was in the Spirit “On the Lord’s Day ...” (Rev.1:10). Was the most likely point in the week when the apostle would be especially ‘in the Spirit’ the customary time for observing the Remembrance, as in the days of his freedom? Why else had he kept close record of the days of the week, and recorded this one, if it was not to sustain his spirit during lonely exile by remembering His
Lord—the habit of his life after Pentecost? They couldn’t stop him doing that! And shall you and I settle for less?

**When in the day?**

It appears that all that matters is that the time of day should be suitable to the circumstances of the church. Thus in Troas they gathered in the evening, as we deduce from the fact that Paul continued his discourse after the breaking of the bread till midnight (doubtless because he thought it was his last time with them). A good reason for meeting in the evening was that several of the church would be in service, probably as slaves, and not be free till then.

Today we probably accommodate further appointments such as a time for children, or a time for prayer or ministry when most of the church can be together, but give the Remembrance first place, as the high point in collective service to God.

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Chapter 2

PREPARING

Knowing our God

Suppose you have a problem so important that you decide to make an appeal to the Prime Minister or the President. It would be common sense to find out the procedure most likely to offer success. Then as you form the wording of the petition, it would help a great deal to know the character of the person who you hope will read it. Now think of choosing a present for someone you love. Wouldn’t you think carefully about what (s)he would like best?

So it is with offering to God—at a more exalted level by far! We won’t have real success unless we pay attention to what God says of Himself in His book, and how He says we should make our offering. We would do well to learn as much as we can of the character of God, and about Him as He has revealed Himself in action. The writer to the Hebrews makes the basic point as he speaks of faith in God that “... anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb.11:6).
From this basic requirement so much more will follow. Sounds as though we shouldn’t just wait till Sunday to meet with God! True worship will flow from:

- Daily reading in the Bible and prayer
- Looking for God in daily life
- Finding Christ in others
- Hearing the Spirit’s voice

Worship in daily life

The Letter to the Hebrews deals with serving God as a priesthood, and gives us special insight into where this takes place. From the first chapter we learn that God has revealed Himself in His Son, so insofar as we get to know our Saviour, we will be helped to know the Father. Jesus Himself taught this to Thomas and Philip and the others listening, as we read in John 14. Unless we have been walking with the Lord in daily living we will have little to say before Him at the worship meeting. But we’ll find that as we become aware of God’s goodness and glory day by day, our hearts will be moved first to thank Him there and then, and next to make some return as we gather with His people in the sanctuary in heaven. If we speak to God in appreciation through the week, we’ll be less self-conscious about putting words
together that may be worthy of our Saviour and Lord while others listen.

The story is told of a man who when driving cross-country saw the sky spread out before him with the glories of the setting sun. He found he wanted to pull in to the next layby to give thanks to God, and did just that. If we realise it’s infinitely worthwhile to spend time with God through the week, we’ll find our offering in company with the church greatly enriched. And what of the pleasure God receives from a life lived in this way?

“Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight ...
O God, my God.”
(Ps.43:3-4)

**What shall I bring?**

When the new king was to be crowned, one of the sons of Korah who led the Temple singers began the Psalm: “My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my
composition concerning the King” (Ps.45:1 NKJV).

Time and effort were generously given to composition—"the things which I have made” (RV), because this was for the King. Thoughts worthy of him were gathered and set in the most expressive language. As we have seen, for today’s worshipper that will flow from reading about our King, and walking in His steps:

● As I read in the Old Testament I might ask what Jesus would think as He heard this read in the synagogue, or as He recalled Scripture from memory while He walked the roads with His own.

● What did those who lived with Him say about their Lord when the new books were written?

● How have I seen Him in action in the lives of others in this past week?

● What thoughts of the character of the great God of heaven and earth have been impressed upon me in the past week?

● Prayer for the Spirit’s help in gathering thoughts worthy of the Lord always helps.
Of course these are just starters. We would not try to dictate here how fresh thought and feeling might be distilled from what happens in the life of the believer, as it was in the great hymns collected for us in *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs* Part 1 (1971), and its *Supplement* (Third Edition 2016), designed for the Remembrance. The reader who would like more detail will be rewarded in the address given by David Webster in Renfrew titled *Appreciating Father, Son and Spirit in Worship* (January 2007), obtainable at https://soundcloud.com/theymaybeone/1114a.

**Some lessons from the first offerers**

Today’s worshipper may learn from what the faithful in Israel had to do when moved by the goodness of God to bring an offering. From the early chapters of Leviticus we find he had to select and prepare the finest of his flock or herd or harvest. He had to bring it to the gate of Tabernacle or Temple and accept the advice of the priest about how appropriate it was for the purpose, though the wise offerer would already have taken time to listen to the teaching sessions provided by law.

He then himself was to kill the creature so carefully nurtured, with his hand on its head, divide it into its
parts, and watch the priest set it in order on the altar, while its blood was sprinkled there. He dare not present himself before the Lord on a feast day with nothing to offer (Deut.16:16).

It *cost* the man and his household a great deal in effort and in kind. That is still the best route to reaching the reverence and heart-exercise that belong to this high service to God. It’s all for a King!

**The purpose is the worship of God**

It may be that we forget that the aim is not to rehearse the history of God’s dealings with Israel, and other people in the Bible record, though that of course is a fruitful resource. Nor is it to thank God for how He has solved problems for us through the week. *The purpose is the worship of God, and to remember our Lord.* We should reach beyond thankfulness for salvation and other blessings to *appreciating God for who He is,* rather than only for what He has done.

Again we learn from Leviticus Chapter 1 that the burnt or whole offering distinctively pointed to *the person of Christ, and His devotion to the Father,* rather than Jesus as a sacrifice for sin. It is a high point in worship to reach something of *what Christ meant to God,* and by
the Spirit’s help we should aim to touch it.

There is a further important passage of counsel for us from Paul about preparing, which we leave to the next chapter.
Chapter 3

SERVING IN THE PRIESTHOOD

The character of a holy priesthood
There is a further lofty dimension that affects the way we should prepare for the Remembrance, so rich that it deserves a chapter to itself. The Remembrance is the occasion for the service of the holy priesthood described in the Letter to the Hebrews, and in Peter’s first Letter Chapter 2. This feature of today’s order is of course foreshadowed in the first things that God taught Israel as He took them out from Egypt to be a people for Himself. To the people assembled in the awesome shadow of Sinai He said through Moses: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant ... you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex.19:5-6).

Though the priesthood was vested in the family of Aaron with the tribe of Levi as assistants, the whole nation was intended to take character from this special relationship with God.

This is echoed by Peter in his first Letter. He stresses through Chapter 1, and into Chapter 2, that saints in
churches of God should behave as children true in character to the Father they appeal to in prayer. They are still responsible to the early command: “Be holy, because I am holy” (1:16), and are also under obligation: “... now that you have tasted that God is good” (2:3). In this setting he then writes, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2:5).

That building places the willing disciple in alignment with the chief cornerstone, who is Christ—bringing both blessing and responsibility. Then Peter describes the other aspect of priesthood:

“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood ... that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (v.9).

We saw in Chapter 2 that to be able to speak in praise before the throne of God, we have to live near to Him day by day. So also the service of a holy priesthood in the sanctuary above must be matched by conduct and witness towards our neighbours that is ‘royal’—that is, worthy of our King. That is another way of giving praise to God, and it needs to be real in our lives, as part of the
purpose for which we were saved from our sins.

**Connections with the Remembrance**
This takes us again to the Letter to the Hebrews, where the author urges believers to be thoroughly involved with the service of the priesthood in the holy place in heaven—yes, wonderfully true: that’s where we reach in spirit!

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened to us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near ...” (Heb.10:19-22).

Whereas the high priest alone under the Old Covenant entered through the curtain shielding the most holy place in the Tabernacle, bearing the blood of the sin offering on behalf of all the people, now we are invited as priests to enter the sanctuary above, through Christ. We reach there “by the blood of Jesus” and “through the curtain, that is, his body.” And on the table at the Remembrance is the wine and the bread, symbolising the blood and body of our Lord, as given in death for us at Calvary. Here, then, is a two-fold, precious link between priesthood service and the ordinance
commanded by Jesus.

Other features also show how appropriate the occasion is for our highest collective worship. Again in Hebrews we read:

“Through Jesus ... let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Heb.13:15).

Paul had written about keeping the Lord’s supper, “... whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor.11:26). There we see another link for the priesthood—with confessing His name, before God, and before those who know that this is the way we use Sunday morning.

**Examining ourselves**

We have seen that we may learn a lot from the requirements placed by law upon the worship of Israel, not least a sense of the sacredness of the occasion, in the presence of God. Paul had to correct the Corinthian church in his first Letter, because they had lost sight of the spiritual purpose of the Lord’s supper, and those who had money enough were making it into a feast for the flesh. He warned them that they were already being
judged by God through falling ill, and gives us all guidance to avoid this disgrace. Following 1 Corinthians 11:26 quoted above, he wrote:

“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup ... So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other” (vv.27-33).

That covers our conduct and attitude from before the meeting through to afterwards! We will do well to examine our conscience in the days before, in case there is some issue with a brother or sister to resolve. The Lord Himself warned us to forgive one another before offering (Matt.5:23). Waiting on one another is not to accommodate habitual latecomers, though we should be considerate of any who might have been hindered through no fault of their own. This waiting is courtesy towards one another. The bad example in Corinth had descended into pushing ahead of others to eat and drink.

The right attitude would be to be thoughtful about the needs of all assembled, sitting where we may help the
passing of the emblems without undue fuss, the first person to partake waiting till the brother who has given thanks at the table sits down, and other good manners. Of all places where we ought to show humility and grace, isn’t it most fitting in approaching the throne of God?

So to be practical, an example might be that a brother who is fluent with words, or any saint who is gifted in music or song, would at times ask the Lord’s help to avoid making a personal performance, or becoming dominant, so spoiling the occasion for others as well.

**Worship that builds up others**

One kind of offering was provided for in Israel’s law that encouraged the offerer to bring his family with him so that they could have fellowship in the courts of the Lord. It was called the *fellowship offering* (‘peace’ in the older versions of the Bible), and its detail in Leviticus 3 and other passages repays study. A large part of this offering was returned to the offerer to share with others on the chosen day. It was of course much more than a meal together: properly it was a prompt to think about their relationship with God while gathered in that sacred place. The principle that an offering to God can nourish others spiritually is picked up again when Paul
writes about thanksgivings in 1 Corinthians 14:

“If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving since he does not know what you are saying? You may be giving thanks well, but the other is not edified” (vv.16-17).

Paul has been dealing with the operation of the spiritual gift of speaking in other languages, which was a sign of God’s presence to the several different nations represented in a Corinthian gathering. But if no-one made available the companion gift of interpreting, some in the meeting would not understand the language of the brother speaking—so he would be praising with his own spirit, not, as intended, with all. From this very instructive passage we draw these points:

● The brother who gives thanks is acting on behalf of all in the church present, so we speak in the plural — ‘we’ and ‘us’, not ‘I’ and ‘me’.

● Thanksgiving should be expressed in language that all may readily understand, even if the speaker is gifted with richer vocabulary and knowledge than most. Thought should be taken also for visitors who may
have little or no acquaintance with the Bible and religious terms; e.g. ‘built up’ is easier to understand than ‘edified’. The important thing is not how distinguished the expression can be: it’s that all understand and can share in it.

This considerateness can include **choice of hymns**. A newcomer will be helped if nationally known tunes or words are chosen, at least early in the flow of praise. For example, ‘Gathered in the name Lord Jesus’ has the tune Austria, used in many other churches. The visitor is already noticing the absence of the expected choir and organ or instruments, so is helped if the tune is recognised.

- All who attend can expect to **be built up or edified** in their spiritual outlook and character by the Remembrance; as the Israelite offerer’s family and servants could enjoy fellowship with him in the presence of the Lord. **The experience is designed to be communal, not just individual.**

- Notice the mention of the **‘Amen’ as a customary thing** in New Testament worship also.
Encouraging one another

We may powerfully affect the conduct of the meeting, and the spirits of all present, by our own attitude. Thus the passage in Hebrews 10 (see p.18) highlights the importance of drawing near to God “with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith” (v.22). Not only does that help us come prepared with the best we can offer, it affects the spirit of the whole meeting, because we will show our involvement in body language, in how we sing, and in how we speak to one another afterwards. We should make the effort to include those whom we would not naturally mix with; thinking of words that build up, not storing up some criticism.

The whole chapter repays careful reading, but we note the meaning of “having our bodies washed with pure water.” That echoes the instruction to Israel’s priest that before any service in the courts of the Lord, he must wash himself at the basin of water provided. For us the cleanser is “washing with water through the word” (Eph.5:26): that is, reading the Bible and taking care to purify our own thoughts and ways as it directs us. Further, our Lord laid on us responsibility to wash one another’s feet, cleaning away the defilements of this world. That calls for careful sensitivity, and wise judgement about when our attentions might be a help.
rather than interference. It takes courage, and listening for the Spirit of God to allow Him to guide.

The passage in Hebrews leads on to all-round care for one another in this cold, ungodly world:

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (vv.24-25).

How else does priesthood affect the observance?

The Old Testament offerer had to bring his offering through the camp, or along the streets of the city to the Temple. It was a public exercise, just as today brothers are equipped by the Spirit within to offer a thanksgiving or a hymn aloud in the presence of all. It isn’t enough to sit in our seats quietly meditating throughout. If we all did that, there would be no sharing of thought at all—or the vacuum would be filled by one man talking to connect the silent thoughts of all the others.

How very much poorer that must be, and how prone we would be to opting out altogether when our thoughts
wander! It certainly does not answer to the description “the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Heb.13:15), and we do not have authority to restrict that phrase to the singing. Those passages in Hebrews 10 and 13 resonate with “Let us ... let us ... let us ...” The Word of God calls for **worship that is collective**, the work and responsibility shared by a priesthood together.

Yet it would all be an empty shell if there were not **deep personal exercise**. Again we learn this from the personal cost for the Old Covenant offerer. It seems to me that this further supports the thought that God wishes to see us each involved in bringing an offering, as well as each receiving the bread and wine; sisters as well as brothers. While brothers lead the assembly in verbal thanksgiving, all participate in the singing, and in the amen that marks our assent to each offering (Ps.89:52; Ps.106:48; 1 Cor. 14:16). The spiritual tone and renewal that this demanding exercise brings is a feature of the remembrance that many sadly miss when they opt for other forms of communion.
Chapter 4

CONSIDERATION FOR ALL

“And do not neglect doing good and sharing”
Serving together demands consideration for all. This is a recurrent theme in Scripture about worship, as in Hebrews 13:15-16: “a sacrifice of praise ... And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

We have already remarked on the insistence of “Let us ...” through Hebrews 10 and 13. Collective service makes continual demands upon us, to think of how others are affected, whether they belong to the church or are visiting. Here are a number of ways to help others enjoy the meeting.

• Thought and effort beforehand to encourage others to be there, and perhaps help with a lift, is time well spent. Picking people up is of course very tying, week by week, so it isn’t healthy if someone who could make more effort leans unnecessarily on the provider. Care should work in both directions!
• We repeat the point that the language of those who lead the worship should be understood by all, since this is vital.

• Everyone is helped to concentrate if each thanksgiving or prayer is kept short. Another gain is a sense of progression and life.

• Personal conduct should encourage reverence, and love worthy of our Saviour. This covers how we stand and how we sit. Remember how you would behave if attending an interview at work. Of course that is infrequent, but should God receive less respect?

• Keeping in time with the leader of song makes for unity. If my voice is strong, or I’m keen on music, my chief thought should be to harmonise with others, not dominate. It is written of the Son over God’s house: “... In the presence of the congregation I will sing your praise” (Heb.2:12).

What an opportunity to listen for His voice, as it was when, before leaving the upper room, the Lord and His disciples sang a hymn!

• If like the apostle John we are “in the Spirit on the
Lord’s day,” we may rely on Him to blend our thoughts together. It can be specially rewarding, however, to keep an offering until the themes of others make a link, so that there is some coherent sequence of thought, without awkward leaps. This of course only comes with practice, and in earlier days it’s best to rise and offer, unhindered by what others might think of us.

**The precious contributions of sisters**

Nowhere in the New Testament is there any suggestion that only brothers bring an offering. For the positive, we might read as early as in 1 Samuel 1, when Hannah came with her sacrifices to the Tabernacle at Shiloh, and poured out her longings before God; even though the head of a household offered at that time for all the others, especially necessary when an animal had to be killed and its parts divided. How precious were Hannah’s offerings and prayers to God—the more so when the priests were ungodly men! Hannah’s devotions were silent, yet deeply felt, and the outcome of much thought. In the view of the writer of this booklet that’s how it should be with sisters today.

Perhaps you agree wholeheartedly with that. Have you, then, ever asked a sister after worship if her thoughts had been expressed by anything the brothers said, or in
the hymns sung? Surely God expects us to show that level of interest in what our sisters carefully gather week by week, though He is the first to hear and see? Of course, it would require tact and a suitable opportunity to ask, but it’s a real pity if the richness of sisters’ thoughts goes unnoticed by most, if not all—including other sisters.

**The offering of sisters affects the meeting**

If you have brought a meditation on Christ, that fact can show in your attitude, and certainly encourages close attention to what others have brought—especially if you will not have opportunity to present it aloud. Such involvement affects our neighbours, and comes out in our singing, raising the tone of the whole meeting. Bringing to God will also put feeling into saying amen to the thoughts of others. Those who minister publicly, and all who can do so by a private word in season, would do well to actively encourage our sisters in bringing an offering. For all these things we brothers may be more indebted to our sisters than we have ever shown by a word of interest or thanks. Shall we resolve to reduce the debt before our Lord comes?

**Providing for visitors**

Let’s finish by trying to put ourselves in the seat of the
visitor for the duration of the meeting. (S)he has mustered a lot of courage for the first occasion of entering the hall, or of attending this service after coming to some community event. There have been questions at the door for a newcomer about spiritual background, and, we trust, some explanation of the order of the meeting. Then I sit down with Bible and hymnbook plus Supplement, in the seat indicated (perhaps not beside the friend who has invited me). There is a palpable hush, and there will have been covert or quite open scrutiny of my entry.

Eventually things begin. Even if the fact that most of the men contribute has been mentioned (possibly not), the way each proceeds, and the rarity of two getting up together, is very strange! So are most, perhaps all, of the hymns—unfamiliar words and tunes for most these days. The sheer number of prayers and hymns, with perhaps no ‘sermon’ designed for the audience, is rather unexpected. Why are all the women wearing hats or other types of head covering indoors? And they keep their eyes shut for so long! A great deal seems to be made of what happened to people in Israel ... Do I want to come back?

So it may be that we don’t explain very well. Remember Paul expected that someone could come into a worship
meeting, and be so impressed by the ministry that followed that he would say, “God is among you indeed!” (1 Cor.14:23) A leaflet that gives a fair amount of reading for the hour will help—but not in small print, please; some visitors read little in life. An introduction sounding as though we will talk normally to others about social topics will help conversation later. A longer passage about the conduct and purpose of the Remembrance, explaining why only members receive communion, with perhaps a reference to a Bible passage, e.g. Matthew 26, would be appreciated. (Someone who seldom visits a church will not keep eyes closed through all the prayers.)

Choosing hymns that are nationally recognised—the tune at least—will help many, especially since there are no instruments. It would be good to have a short Bible reading, with short comment, in the last quarter of an hour, to give a break from sustained attention with no eye-contact.

An experience designed to revive spiritual life
The fact is that the Remembrance is a demanding spiritual and mental exercise that needs to be mediated in some degree to people probably not used to church-going, and unused to sustained listening without visual
stimulus.

For the believer, however, who is pledged to service in churches of God, it should be a spiritual tonic, and prized as a unique opportunity to reach the presence of God and gather with the great company around His throne. We may be very sure that to keep it as the Lord directed brings great pleasure to Him, and will bring much blessing to all who uphold it in its purity in our time.

As an opening to the week, may the Remembrance purify and equip us to be channels for God’s blessing to a needy world, till our Lord shall come again.

When we join to praise the Father,  
And His Son has filled our eyes,  
Who perfected every offerer  
By His loving sacrifice,  
How our thoughts of one another  
Will reflect our gracious Lord,  
And our hearts be made more Christ-like  
By the Spirit-guided Word!
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