

PERSPECTIVE

JULY 2023

THE NEED TO READ

On the Public Reading of Scripture



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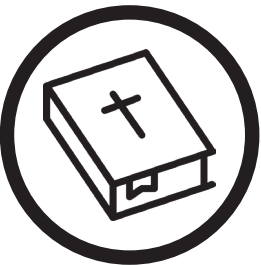
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Dane Ulett



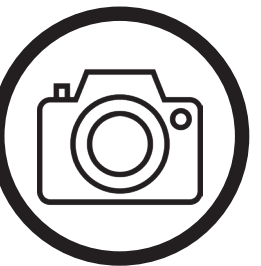
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The Need to Read

On the Public Reading of Scripture

As the saying goes, “Reading is fundamental.” From a secular view, reading is essential to establishing a solid education. It is a gateway to learning. This is true for Christians, too! God has mercifully given us his Word so that we can know who he is, his attributes, and who we are in light of his glorious revelation in Scripture. Reading the Bible is fundamental to our worship of God. As we read the Bible, especially when we gather in corporate worship, it glorifies God and edifies us for our good, our growth in holiness, and our love for God.

Sadly, Bible reading has become a private practice for some. It is something that one does in his or her “quiet time.” In most churches today, only a few verses, or perhaps a short chapter, are read before the preaching of the Word. When was the last time you heard multiple chapters of a whole book of the Bible publicly read aloud from beginning to end? This may be a rare experience today, even at Mount Vernon, but the public reading of Scripture is a time-honored practice. The public reading of Scripture when God’s people gather to worship him is described and commended throughout redemptive history. God commands we read his Word in public with devotion. Paul told his young disciple, Timothy, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” He should practice it and be committed to it because, in so doing, God will save the hearers. We are to care about the public reading of Scripture. We are to be engaged with Scripture.

PUBLIC READING OF SCRIPTURE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Let’s look at the practice of Scripture reading in the Old Testament. Why should we care about the reading of Scripture in our corporate gathering? In part because it has always been an essential practice for the people of God. The first place in the Bible we find the public reading of Scripture is at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus 24. The Lord had just delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. They are no longer enslaved and now have a new identity. So, Moses gathers the people together and reads the Scripture aloud: “Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people” (Exo. 24:7). Moses reminds them of where they came from, who they now are, and for what they are called to live.

Mt. Sinai is just the first example of the public reading of Scripture. We find other examples of this practice. In Deuteronomy 31, the Lord commands his people through

Moses to read the entire law at the end of every year “before Israel in their hearing” (Deut. 31:11). They were to gather men, women, children, and sojourners to hear and to learn to fear the Lord. They were called to remember the covenant. But how? Through the public reading of Scripture.

When the people arrived at the Promised Land, Joshua gathered the people, and they listened to the Scriptures read aloud to remember where they came from and for what they were called to live (Josh. 8:34–35). Sadly, after Joshua died, there was a famine of God’s Word through the neglect of public Scripture reading. As a result, a whole generation arose who did not know the Lord or the work of salvation he wrought for his people (Judges 2:10). However, centuries later, King Josiah rediscovered God’s Word. God used him to bring about a reformation that began with public Scripture reading (2 Ki. 23:1–3).

Unfortunately, God’s people eventually turned away from God and his Word, and a famine of Scripture plagued the land once more. But upon their return from exile and under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the practice of the public reading of Scripture reappeared. They read for hours “from early morning until midday” on a special “wooden platform” (Neh. 8:3–4) where they “read from the Book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading” (Neh. 8:8).

In short, when Israel was faithful, they devoted themselves to the public Scripture reading. This became a core part of Jewish life. It was done weekly in the synagogue. Jesus even participated in the public reading of Scripture!

PUBLIC SCRIPTURE READING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus began his mission as the people gathered for the weekly Scripture reading. He read from the scroll of Isaiah and then proclaimed to everyone that these words were about him. Jesus simply practiced the same ancient exercise that began with Moses and continued through Joshua, Josiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. According to Luke, in the synagogue, Jesus “began to say to them, today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, read the Word aloud to the people.

It should be no surprise that the public reading of Scripture was normative for the early church. We can praise God for this cherished practice since most people then were illiterate, without copies of the Scripture themselves, and learned from the public reading of Scripture. Consider Paul’s words to the Church at Colossae: “And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the Church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the

letter from Laodicea” (Col 4:16). Notice Paul instructed them to read the entire letter, aloud and in public. Similarly, Paul exhorted the Thessalonians: “I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers” (1 Thess. 5:27). Revelation, the last book in the Bible, begins: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near” (Rev. 1:3).

Brothers and sisters, do not underestimate the power of the public reading of Scripture. Yes, we are called to daily Bible reading. However, reading it by yourself and *not* aloud can be challenging. Ironically, we can be easily distracted by this practice of “quiet time.” Based on the example of Scripture, the command of Scripture, and our own experience of reading Scripture, something powerful happens when we hear God’s Word read aloud among fellow worshipers. It is really easy. You just need to listen. As “the time is near,” and we enter uncertain times, we must devote ourselves to *this* in our corporate gatherings. *This* is what God’s people have always done. We need to remember God’s story through the public reading of Scripture.

HOW SHOULD THE PUBLIC READING OF SCRIPTURE BE DONE AT MVBC?

The public reading of Scripture is an essential element of Christian worship for the people of God. It is arguably the most foundational element of corporate worship because all others (prayer, praise, preaching, and the sacraments or ordinances) are in response to the hearing of God’s Word. The private reading of Scripture should not replace the public reading of Scripture.

It is wise for us at MVBC to be attentive to the role the public reading of Scripture has in our services. We should continue to make the Word of God prominent in our services. We should, perhaps, embrace having even longer passages read more frequently.

God’s voice must be clearly heard. Remember, our corporate gathering is a conversation with God and his people. Therefore, the Word should be heard numerous times. It should be heard at the call of worship, at the call to confession of sin, at the assurance of God’s pardon, at the invitation of the prayer of praise, at the pastoral prayer, and at the benediction. Even if a specific text isn’t cited, those praying usually include direct words of Scripture.

Of course, the preached Word or the sermon determines at least one passage to be read. This passage is sometimes read before the sermon, or it may be embedded in the sermon. Usually, a supplementary passage is read to reveal that God’s Word is unbroken and comes to us through

progressive revelation with fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

We should also remember that Scripture may be sung to each other, and this is where the parallel practice of antiphonal Scripture reading—the practice of reading Scripture aloud to one another alternately—can be employed. This type of Scripture reading is wonderfully done with the Psalms. The effectiveness of Scripture reading can be increased when the congregation is meaningfully engaged. Peter calls us a priesthood of believers. For this reason, antiphonal readings are precious as we minister to one another through the public reading of Scripture.

Another way to increase the effectiveness of God’s Word is to stand for the reading of Scripture. Standing can increase our awe of God. Though not necessary, it’s a physical reminder that our God is glorious, and he has spoken!

Finally, do not dismiss or ignore the introductions to the Scripture reading. In other traditions, someone will say, “Hear the Word of the Lord” or “Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.” Why do they do this? To remind the congregation that the words they are about to hear are not just *any* words but *God’s* Word. In so doing, they focus the attention of the hearers. Similarly, a Scripture reader may be inclined to close with a statement such as, “The Word of the Lord,” “Thanks be to God,” or “The Word of the Lord endures forever.” Again, such responses are not required, but they can help reinforce the conviction and awareness that it is the Word of God we just heard.

CONCLUSION

It should be clear by now that the Bible has much to say about corporate Scripture reading. Private meditation on God’s Word cannot replace the public reading of Scripture; it is essential to our worship of God. Just like the corporate reading of Scripture ministered to the Old Testament saints and the early church, it aids our spiritual formation.

Justin Martyr described this practice in the second century: “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in the cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then when the reader has ceased, the president [presiding officer of the service] verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these goods. Then we all rise together and pray.” Justin described a people committed to the public reading of Scripture. We’re commanded to do likewise. May we be faithful to corporate Scripture reading at MVBC so that we honor our Lord and grow in our spiritual formation!

— Dane Ulett

Believer's Baptism

Sign of the New Covenant in Christ

Edited by Thomas R. Schreiner & Shawn D. Wright

When was the last time you were at a company party and a co-worker initiated a conversation about baptism? When was the last time you were at church and had a conversation about baptism? Baptism is an element of Christian worship that is just there. We are all familiar with it, but perhaps have not sought to dig very deep into its significance. We know it is coming when we find that the floral arrangement in front of the baptistry has been moved, and we can see the blue-green water. Do you find yourself thinking more about how long we have used the same silk flower arrangement than about the purpose, meaning, significance and message baptism portrays? *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* will change all of that.

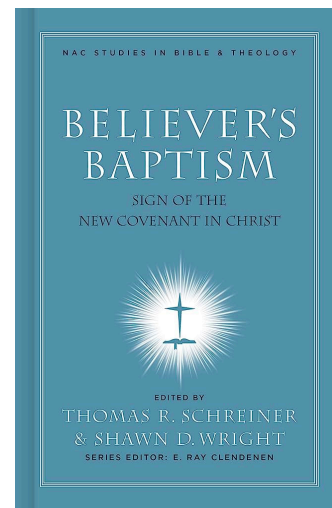
The significance of believer's baptism for our faith and practice is hard to overstate. Many unintentionally over or under-emphasize different elements of baptism, which can distort our understanding of foundational elements of our faith and the gospel. In this collection of essays, the authors use surgical precision to move us through biblical texts and stories to understand the importance and implications of the proper practice of baptism.

Believer's Baptism helps us see the sources and problems with other forms of baptism. The authors systematically define, explain, and deconstruct the arguments supporting paedobaptism by explicitly focusing on the errors and inconsistencies within paedobaptist traditions. In *Believer's Baptism*, editors Schreiner and Wright lay out three critical lessons:

- First, understanding the relationship of genuine faith and repentance to baptism helps us understand what is occurring and being pictured in each element.
- Second, a proper understanding of the continuity and the discontinuity between the old and new covenants is essential to correctly understand the place of baptism in the New Testament.
- Third, infant baptism requires the belief that the sacrament confers some level of grace that benefits the infant. It may be short of the efficacious nature of Catholic baptism but more salvifically significant than the Baptist view.

The book concludes with an excellent pastoral chapter from Mark Dever that is wonderfully encouraging. You will be well fed to invest the time to read all 352 pages as a unit or pull out any of the essays as a stand-alone study. This book will point you to the beauty and majesty of our salvation in Jesus Christ. As Dever rightly concludes, "And yet in all this, baptism is not the point. The great nineteenth-century English Baptist pastor, Andrew Fuller, said that 'the sign, when rightly used, leads to the thing signified'" (352).

— Recommended by Denny Crosby



Excerpts from the Book

1

"The trauma of death and resurrection, which baptism symbolizes, is hardly conveyed when things are too neat and convenient. Such is the case with a new-fangled baptistry in which the minister does not even enter the water but, standing beside a plastic shield, simply reaches over and submerges the baptismal candidate who is seated on a reclining chair."

— "Forward" p. xvii

2

"In truth, the baptismal question is a major test-case for one's entire theological system since it tells much about how one puts the entire canon together."

— "Relationship between the Covenants" p. 160

3

"The evangelical paedobaptists we have surveyed argue that infant baptism is clearly **inferred** from the biblical text."

— Emphasis Mine, "Logic of Reformed Paedobaptists" p. 253

Let the Children Worship

Written by Jason Helopoulos

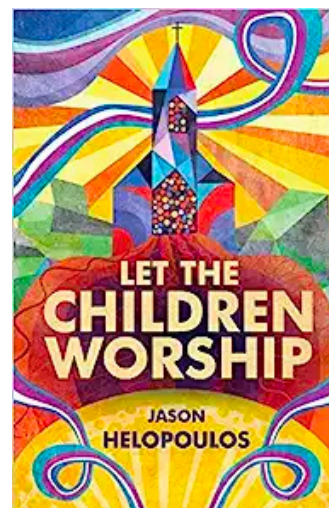
Next Sunday, look around! Be encouraged by the vertical and horizontal singing of other members (truths to God and truths to you). But next Sunday, try looking around and DOWN... precious souls sing, wiggle, fuss, bow their heads and drop their crayons as we gather and worship our King Jesus! As Baptists, we understand why the youngest in our pews are not yet fellow church members. However, our entire church family does well to prayerfully remember and consider the children around us, longing for them to encounter God each Lord's Day.

Let the Children Worship, by Jason Helopoulos, is a needed resource to guide us as we seek to help our children participate in and understand our worship. Helopoulos is a pastor and father who wants to equip Christians to welcome children into our services and help them see God as glorious. He begins by simply covering the why and what of corporate worship. Next, he helps us consider children as they join us in these gatherings. This book clarified how much children can observe and benefit, week after week, year after year. I appreciated the practical wisdom and comforting (even humorous) testimonials from the author and others. How often do parents feel like Mrs. Spencer, who hoped no one heard her sing, "My hope is built on nothing less than, put your shoes back on!" (87)?

Any MVBC member will benefit from this short book, though his target audience is church leaders and young parents. We are ONE family. If you long to see MVBC's kids love Jesus, desire to model faithful Christian worship, and want to prayerfully help families around you as they seek to grow in training their kids, this book is for you.

One thing to remember as you read: Helopoulos does not write this book from a Baptist perspective. The author is a Presbyterian brother, so some of his beliefs and descriptions about children do not align with ours. With that in mind, there is still much wisdom to glean from *Let the Children Worship*. After reading, I am eager to gather with our church family this upcoming Sunday to worship the living God. I'll do so more mindful of the impact of that gathering on the hearts and minds of the children in our midst.

— Recommended by Jamie Butts



Excerpts from
the Book

1

"I love to look around the sanctuary... Different ethnicities, races, and colors of skin are observable. Men and women sing together. The old saint in the wheelchair, the single young man, the recently widowed mother, the four-year-old child, and the teenager all united in song to God. Blessings flow down; praises go up. Is there a sight on earth more glorious?"
— "Introduction" p. 10

2

"We recognize the benefit of steering our children clear of harmful things—disobedient friends, busy streets, uncovered electrical outlets, and R-rated movies. Why wouldn't we equally desire to steer our children towards beneficial things—the read and preached Word, corporate prayer, and the sacraments?"
— "Blessings and Benefits" p. 41

3

"Use transitional moments in the service to whisper in your child's ear how much you love a certain verse in a hymn, need to remember to pray for the sick person mentioned, or feel convicted by a certain application. Sometimes I whisper a short question in my child's ear about the sermon—something that will pique their curiosity or help them to listen for an answer. It keeps them engaged and allows them to see you participating intently in the service as well."

— "Wisdom for Parents" p. 56

TAKE UP & READ

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the
Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

July 1	1 Samuel 26	July 17	Psalms 102
July 2	Psalms 54	July 18	Psalms 99
July 3	Matthew 8:18–22	July 19	Psalms 100
July 4	Matthew 8:1–17	July 20	Psalms 101
July 5	Matthew 8:23–24	July 21	Hebrews 1:1–12
July 6	Matthew 9:1–13	July 22	Psalms 103
July 7	Deuteronomy 6:1–9	July 23	Psalms 102
July 8	Matthew 9:14–38	July 24	Isaiah 2
July 9	Matthew 8:18–22	July 25	2 Chronicles 26
July 10	Psalms 81	July 26	2 Chronicles 27
July 11	Deuteronomy 30	July 27	2 Chronicles 28
July 12	Deuteronomy 31	July 28	Acts 1:1–11
July 13	Deuteronomy 32	July 29	Isaiah 1
July 14	2 Corinthians 5:6–6:13	July 30	Isaiah 2
July 15	Psalms 80		
July 16	Psalms 81		

*Sermons in bold

NEW MEMBERS



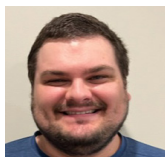
Andrew
Folmar



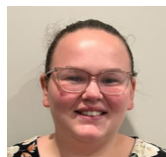
Richard
Fowler



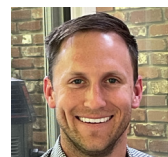
Lindsay
Fowler



Parker
Jenkins



Claudia
Jenkins



Zach
Kahrs



Collins
Kahrs



Cole
Landrum



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH