

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Speaking to One Another – a mini series

Scripture: various

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: April 3rd, 2005



PP 1-3

“Speaking To One Another...” Testimonies, Readings and Prayers in Public (Part 1)

Introduction As I talked to my friend who is an artist this week, he was sharing how churches in Europe “do” church very visually, much more than most churches in America do it. How *we* do church is very much more verbal. We’re into words so much--the *spoken* word. He said in many old cathedrals the visual is real important (i.e. Salisbury Cathedral in England, dedicated in 1258), mainly because most people who worshipped in those old places could not read and there were no Bibles anyway. So people would learn the stories of the Bible by the pictures and statues. (A pity when you think of it, because how would you communicate the Book of Romans in pictures?) We are very verbal though

PP 4,5

Web sites, e-mail, Instant Messages, Xanga Live-journaling, newsletters, printed sermons, *Powerpoints* for the songs and for outlines, books, tapes, magazines, CDs, even claims to speak in languages that we do not know...

What do all these have in common? They are all devices or avenues of *verbal* communication; things on which we rely to communicate. We tend to be far more verbal about worship than any of the other senses: visual, auditory, touch, taste and smell. Perhaps that is because we weigh in heavy on faith, not on sight when we worship. We do not see the need or the properness of creating a sense of God’s presence. We believe it on faith alone. We are going to do a short series on several aspects of this subject which will be largely practical in nature. I pray and hope it will be a blessing and a help to you.

PP 6

We want to say some things about three verbal ministries, in particular:

- **Giving testimonies** (by which we mean a kind of telling your story about something that has happened to you or around you in which you really saw or felt or experienced the grace of God and His present ministry to you.) It doesn’t have to be something really dramatic, although it might be. But its goal is to

glorify God in a way which edifies your brothers and sisters in Christ. I am not implying that everyone should do this, or that it is supposed to always happen at pre-programmed times. But when we use testimonies they can be a powerful tool in the Spirit to encourage people or even mark their lives. We will say more about this later...

▪ **Reading Scripture** out loud during worship (by which we mean that time when one or maybe two people from the body read the Scripture passage for the day.) I think that although brief, this is one of the most important and potentially wonderful times in our whole worship service. God has already promised to bless this time, I believe and we need to learn to do it with excellence.

▪ **Praying in public** (by which we mean as in during worship). This is a thing which I often wonder what the Lord thinks about it... It is talking addressed to Him of course, but so often I feel we lose sight of that. We should think about this since we believe in the priesthood of all believers and that public praying is not just a thing done by a professional class of clergy. We will talk more about these three aspects of public worship later...

So, much of our meeting together is verbal. We are really a verbally-driven faith. And before we get to the specifics of giving testimonies, reading Scripture and praying out loud in public, I want to spend some time talking about some general principles for speaking and talking to one another in general, as Christians.

PP 7

First, we revere the Word of God as the all-governing Rule for our lives. This is because we see that God is a communicating God and in His grace, He has communicated His Word. As Francis Schaeffer said,

PP 8

He is not silent. The reason we have the answer is because the infinite-personal God, the full Trinitarian God, has not been silent. He has told us who He is. Couch your concept of inspiration and revelation in these terms, and you will see how it cuts down into the warp and woof of modern thinking. *He is not silent.* That is the reason we know. It is because He has spoken. What has He told us? Has He told us only about other things? No, He has told us truth about Himself -- and because He has told us truth about Himself -- that He is the infinite-personal, triune God -- we have the answer to existence.¹

And He has not been stingy in giving us His Word. We love His Word and that is why we love the Bible so much. We do not worship the Bible in itself, but we worship Him who gave us the Bible. And so we are very much of a spoken and verbal faith. And it affects how we worship. Our theme verse for this little mini-series will be Colossians 3:16 where Paul wrote

PP 9

¹Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, Ch. 1

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (See also Eph.5:18-20)

In this passage you will notice that the apostle tells the Colossian Christians to allow or to accommodate the very words of Jesus to permeate our thinking. The implication is that they are not going to dwell richly within us magically, by themselves. No, the things that we know He said, we are to become deeply influenced by. And this is personal—it is your choice. You cannot expect your parent to do it for you, or your roommate, or your spouse or your pastor or elders. Warren Wiersbe points his finger at us and says, “Many saved people cannot honestly say that God’s Word dwells in their hearts richly because they do not take time to read, study, and memorize it.”² Well, we want to be otherwise. We want to have the very words of Jesus in our hearts, on our decisions, calibrating our choices and priorities. We want to *know* the words of Christ and that involves reading them, studying them, talking about them, memorizing them. Well, this is what you must do if we want Colossians 3:16 to describe you. You and I need to let the *word of Christ dwell in us richly*. We want to wisely teach His word and even be willing to challenge each other a little by admonishing each other if need be, and then by using our songs to join thankfulness and gratitude with teaching and admonishing. Songs probably make tough themes more palatable, I notice. I find it a whole lot easier to consider a meaty or a challenging idea to me if it comes as a song, don’t you?

So we are going to talk a little about verbal ministry, the kind we do in public with each other. This is for Christians. This is for those who love the word of Christ and who want to maximize how we spend our time together in the body of Christ.

There are first of all some principles about “spoken ministry” or speaking and communicating verbally that we want to talk about. I am speaking other than about the formal preaching. I’m talking about what YOU do, and of course these general principles apply to me individually, as a Christian, just as much as to you...

PP 10

Spoken ministry principles

1. **Job One: Edify.** To “edify” means to build someone up. The opposite would be to tear down, to discourage, to be critical and negative. To build up doesn’t mean to flatter or to butter up or to falsely compliment someone. It does mean to speak in ways that encourage and inform the other person in healthy ways. If I talk about the news, let’s say, am I always emphasizing the negative or the hard things? Does that influence the other person to be cynical? Does it

²Tom Constable. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Col 3:16). Galaxie Software.

lessen their sense of hopefulness or cool off their optimism? Does it *embolden* their sense of hopefulness and their faith that God will act. Does my speaking to people focus their attention on the promises of God and the good things going on in the world that evidence God's providence and grace? Or do the things I say remind people that the church is a good place to be in, that there are chances here to get courage, and wisdom and warmth and love? This edifies. This builds up people's faith and their sense of the Lord's presence. There are many verses in the Bible on this principle and it applies in church and at home and in small groups and all over the place!

PP 11

Matthew 7:12 – treat others how you like to be treated.

I Cor. 14:12, 26, 40 – people being built up is the bottom line.

Eph. 4:29 - same thing!

Col. 3:16 – teaching, admonishing, using music to spread a sense of gratitude

I Tim.5:20 – Part of being built up is to be warned from the mistakes of others. This may seem somehow politically incorrect but it is a clear truth about using what we talk about to strengthen each other against falling into traps of sin.

2 Tim.4:2 – This is a very compact verse with lots in it. Note that our communication should be tempered by patience!

Heb. 10:24,25 – Our primary goal should be to talk to each other in ways that motivate each other to do good works. We can't do this if we're not with each other in assembly. And as we see the day of Christ's return approaching more and more, we should redouble our efforts to positively motivate and stimulate each other.

I Cor.13:1; I John 4:20 – avoid hypocrisy. Nothing is more contradictory or sadder than when Christians talk one way but live another with each other. It is the biggest irony on the planet!

Verses on Verbal Communication

Colossians 3:16 (NASB)

¹⁶Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Matthew 7:12

¹²“Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

1 Corinthians 14:12

¹²So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek to abound for the edification of the church... (14:26) ²⁶What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification... (14:40) ⁴⁰But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.

CONTINUED

Ephesians 4:29

²⁹ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, that it may give grace to those who hear.

1 Timothy 5:20

²⁰ Those who continue in **sin**, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful *of* sinning.

2 Timothy 4:2

² preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

Hebrews 10:24, 25

²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

1 Corinthians 13:1

¹ If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

1 John 4:20

²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Speaking to One Another – a mini series

Scripture: various

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: April 17th, 2005



“Speaking To One Another...” Testimonies, Readings and Prayers in Public (Part 2)

“talking a lot” skit...

Introduction In our faith, we talk a lot. We use words all over the place. We express our theology, our love of Christ, our care for one another in words. Frequently. We like to talk about what we’re excited about. We are a very *verbal* faith.

Once in a while we get encouraged by some specific deed that someone does for us—someone does you a favor, or helps you in some accommodating or physical way. But more often, what we *say* is the primary means of encouraging and uplifting one another. The Bible anticipates this for us and we see many exhortations and instructions in it which guide us on how to speak to one another in ways that “edify” or build up each other. We are taking Colossians 3:16 as a theme verse for this, which says, ***Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*** One of the ways we can really sense Christ right here within and among us, says Paul, is in how we undertake spoken ministry; in this case—teaching and admonishment, coupled with a music ministry. And the Bible gives us other principles about “spoken ministry” and verbal communication. I’m not really talking about preaching today but more something more “usual” about you—I have in mind more what YOU do with each other verbally, and of course these general principles apply to me individually, as a Christian, just as much as to you...

Matthew 7:12 – treat others how you like to be treated.

I Cor. 14:12, 26, 40 – people being built up is the bottom line.

Eph. 4:29 - same thing!

I Tim. 5:20 – Part of being built up is to be warned from the mistakes

of others. This may seem somehow politically incorrect but it is a clear truth about using what we talk about to strengthen each other against falling into traps of sin.

2 Tim.4:2 – This is a very compact verse with lots in it. Note that our communication should be tempered by patience!

Heb. 10:24,25 – Our primary goal should be to talk to each other in ways that motivate each other to do good works. We can't do this if we're not with each other in assembly. And as we see the day of Christ's return approaching more and more, we should redouble our efforts to positively motivate and stimulate each other.

1 Cor.13:1; 1 John 4:20 – avoid hypocrisy. Nothing is more contradictory or sadder than when Christians talk one way but live another with each other. It is the biggest irony on the planet!

More spoken ministry principles Let me lay out a few more general principles about spoken ministry and then we'll look at the specific ministries of how we might give public testimonies, read Scripture out loud and pray publicly. I have a wide grid for this and I would love to see more and more people learning to minister verbally to each other in these ways rather than only a few, well-practiced speakers. The first principle, you will remember, was **edification**. Build people up. Use what you *say* to build people up. It is "Job One."

2. **Attention retention – "Job Two" is do NOT bore them!** My professor Howard Hendricks says "bore them with sports, bore them with history, business stuff or talk about cars but do NOT bore them with the Word of God." He meant that the Word of God is the most special and precious and powerful thing we have in the Christian life. Let's not disable it by making it boring. It is worth the trouble to think hard about making it digestible and interesting. This is why the translations we use are so important. We win nothing if we use a translation that bores people because they do not understand it. And style and delivery should keep people's attention too. If we do not hold people's attention we have lost the battle.

3. **Attitude** – Why sabotage your own message? Your attitude, just as a Christian, let alone someone trying to communicate, should be *humble* at all times and *non-threatening* most of the time. Attitude comes up in,

Philippians 1:15-18 (NASB)

¹⁵ Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; ¹⁶ the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷ the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.

For us, I believe there should not be too much "you" in the message. People are very good at picking up attitude! If they don't think you have their best interests at heart or if they think you or I are saying what we're saying to promote ourselves or win some theoretical argument, or some other agenda, they will probably turn us off. I'm not always sure how to *control* my attitude or if I

even am self-aware enough all the time to *know* what attitude is coming across but I know this: If the listener doesn't believe I care about them and that I want to edify them, they're not going to hear what I say no matter how cleverly or loudly or lengthily I say it.

4. **Voice** – Critical in this area are volume, speed and articulation. Yes, these take some practice and work to master but once again, if the hearer is going to benefit by your spoken ministry they need to hear it and understand it.

Voice in speaking is an area of interest to me, and not just in preaching. I am interested in people's accents, the tonal quality they have, their dynamics (ups and downs in volume, inflections), how they use pausing and other elements. I think effectiveness in speaking is effected by management of voice.

- a. Learn how you sound. Listen to yourself on tape and ask others how you sound to them.
- b. Do not try to overpower people by talking over them. This just sets off a competition for who can talk louder, faster, more clever, etc.

5. **Vocabulary** – The words we use are very important. They must be understandable and they should be edifying. I sometimes slip up on this second aspect. I do not blame it on my parents, but I grew up in an environment where words were used very destructively. It was the mortar in the walls! Words and word combinations can really be used to enhance the message. Learn what words work with people and at the same time, learn what words distract people. Too much "high" vocabulary puts people to sleep but too much vernacular or slang vocabulary insults people. It's also a good thing to know and use certain "high-energy" words that get a lot done for a small amount of talking, for instance the words, "sacrifice," "self-centered," "desperation," and "loving-kindness."

Other words though, are buzzwords and clichés and although some of them may be biblical they may have little meaning today just because we over-use them. This would be expressions like, "praise the Lord," "love," "I come to the garden to pray," and "I prayed about it." Words are important and we can have a more effective verbal ministry if we think about the vocabulary we're using.

6. **Eye contact** – This is important but not exactly relevant in the applications of testimonies, readings and praying publicly. Let us just say that eye contact can be useful for personalizing the few minutes you are in front of people--people don't like to be stared at or zoomed in on, but they don't particularly like being ignored either; or a speaker who is so impersonal that it seems by their gestures or posture that they couldn't care less whether you, the listener, is there or not.

7. **Light-heartedness, Humor and Being Real**– I think people are far more likely to listen to you or to concentrate on your spoken ministry if they are disarmed and relaxed. If you are a kind of heavy-hearted person, people will respond to that. If you are light-hearted they will respond to that too. It's not about us of course when we are ministering but we can learn to make our communication more effective if we are not so severe and serious every minute. Some humor or light-heartedness can really be enjoyable to listen to. Being real is the important thing. So very often I have listened to people give testimonies, or read Scripture or pray in public and I wonder, "Are they being real, or are they playing some role or part that they think the public talked should play?" People really respond to "realness."

Giving Testimonies

Testimonies are real opportunities to personalize your witness for Christ. They are a great chance to honor His work in your life and give Him credit for changes in your life that have occurred. What a testimony is, in our context, is where **one of us—or perhaps a pair of us together—share something of how God has blessed us.** A good testimony holds the listener's attention because it focuses them on Christ and on His power and goodness. We need to hear this. Personal contact and "touching" each other's experiences with the risen Savior keep our faith from becoming too intellectual or theoretical. I need to hear from you that God and Jesus Christ are working in your life. We need this from each other!

Now, keeping in mind all of the basic principles for spoken ministry that we have already shared, here are some especially related to giving a personal testimony.

1. **Kinds** – There are many kinds of personal testimony. Most common is the tale of how you found Christ. I love to hear those stories, don't you? Then there are stories of trusting God for some need: basic provision, a life partner, a job, a ministry. Then there are stories of answered prayer, where someone has labored in prayer faithfully, waited on God and then saw their prayer answered. There can be testimonies of how God used you, although in these the danger is to take the glory, even in subtle ways. There are also testimonies of God's leading, how He moved you from place to place, from ministry to ministry, always working out His plan, not ours. Finally, there might be testimonies of witness, even before a hostile audience and this is what we see a lot of in the Book of Acts.
2. **God centered** – Every GOOD testimony majors on the Lord, gives Him the credit and the honor. While it will hopefully be completely candid, it will not reflect bitterness about the Lord's methods or timing. It will transmit His joy, never despair or depression.

3. **Personal, sincere and accurate.** This gets back a little to ATTITUDE. People are very good at picking up on insincerity or phoniness. Not that people are *trying* to tell a bigger or more exciting tale than is real, but we are still broken and sometimes unconsciously attempt to embellish our story to make it more impressive. The best testimonies are personal and real, even maybe intimate in some ways. But they are accurate. The best examples for this perhaps are those testimonies that Paul shares in front of hostile crowds...
4. **Length** - They might be short and to-the-point or if they are really thought-through well, they might be more lengthy and detailed but God being glorified is the main thing. The best long testimony I ever heard (about 45 minutes) is from Darlene Deibler Rose, a missionary lady who served on the island of Sulawesi, New Guinea¹. I have heard thousands of good short testimonies. I long to hear more!
5. **Encourage and motivate** - Giving a testimony is not so much about you—although until you become accustomed to doing it, it is natural to be a little self-conscious perhaps. But it is about the Lord, for His honor, and it is an opportunity to encourage and stimulate and motivate your brothers and sisters in Christ. They need to see in YOU, that you are more than just a church-goer. That provides little encouragement. We need to *hear* from you that life is worth living, that there are victories over sin, that people DO respond to the Gospel and all the Gospel stories are not just in old missionary books. We need to provide live, up-to-date testimony that “Jesus is the answer, for the world today. Above Him there’s no other, Jesus is the way!”²
6. **Faith-building** - I believe that one of the things the Lord does with testimonies is to build our faith. When I hear that so-and-so actually WENT on a short-term mission trip, DIDN'T die, DIDN'T get beriberi, actually WAS used of the Lord and grew themselves in their faith, very obviously, it builds MY faith. When I hear that so-and-so endured a great trial and didn't cave in, or crack up, and actually came out of it praising God, it builds MY faith.

I hope it is evident that it is my agenda for us to be a testimony-generating church. We should have many and frequent testimonies from the members of the body. We sing that Jesus is alive... let's testify personally that it is so! And they should not always be from the same people...

¹ <http://www.heronco.com/clients/darlenerose/index.html>

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Speaking to One Another – a mini series

Scripture: various

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: April 24th, 2005



“Speaking To One Another...” **Testimonies, Readings and Prayers in Public** **(Part 3)**

Nehemiah 8:1-12 (NASB)

¹ AND all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. ² Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. ⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, *and* Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiiah, and the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people *remained* in their place. ⁸ And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading. ⁹ Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest *and* scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” ¹¹ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.” ¹² And all the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

Introduction We are a people who talk a lot about our faith. Yak yak yak. We tell **Jesus stories from the Gospels**, again and again. We talk about the **resurrection** especially a lot. Then we like to talk about **His impending return**. This week I found myself in a conversation about **what we, Christians, are going to be doing during the Battle of Armageddon**. (I don't know but whatever it is, it won't be boring!) Talking about our faith is *fundamental* to our faith and basic to how we are, that we should speak about and around and in our faith so much.

We verbalize what we think *about* God, what we think about how people can and should relate to Him, and we what we think He is doing in the world today. The bedrock of our talking about Him, is the Word of God—He has communicated to people. He is there and He is not silent.

- ♦ And so we feature the Word of God.
- ♦ We spotlight it.
- ♦ We focus on it and we study it.
- ♦ We take it seriously and we revere its presence in our midst because we think it crisply reflects a bunch of things we need to know; that we *desperately* need to know.

(We look out at the sources of understanding that the world offers and we react with sadness, head-shaking and even anger sometimes. People go after just about any source of “answers” today except the Word of God.)

- ♦ But we look to the Bible. Because we think it has the answers for life. And in receiving communication *from* God, we want to communicate *back* to God. We call that “prayer.” We talk *about* our faith, we read the Bible and we talk *to* God. These are fundamental to our faith. Without them, our faith is no longer the Christian faith.

So today we want to say some things about the other two public means of doing talking ministry, doing readings of Scripture and praying in a group, which includes leading in prayer or what we call conversational prayer. Let me say that we do both of these things—reading, praying, in our services because we think the Lord is interested in our doing them. In fact, we think He delights when we do them and when we do them well. This is “core” to why we get together at *all* on Sunday mornings. Sometimes young people will say, “What’s the point? It’s just routine, predictable, boring, same-old same-old.” Sometimes *older* people say the same thing. Well, it doesn’t *have to be* same-old same-old. The ways in which we read Scripture, and pray can be a variety of creative ways. But the reason why we do them is ultimately because we believe God is honored and meets us there.

On reading Scripture, today we read Nehemiah 8 because it is a dramatic and wonderful event in Israel’s history. I love to imagine the scene. It is about 400 years before Jesus. Israel has come back into the land, at least a large number has. This ceremony reflects the form of Israelite worship that had developed in exile. Almost the same elements that characterized the synagogue services begun then appear here.

- The people assembled,
- there was a request for the reading of the Torah,
- someone opened the scroll, and
- the people stood.
- Then someone (Ezra) offered praise,

- the people responded, and
- they received instruction (a sermon).
- Finally the law was read, an oral explanation and exhortation followed, and
- the people departed for a fellowship meal.¹

We emulate a lot of that today in what we do. If nothing else, our worship is of an ancient type. We go back *in style* at least to 445 B.C.! Now **when the word of God is read**, here are some things to think about:

1. TRANSLATIONS – If the point of reading Scripture is to understand what God said, it would seem reasonable to use translations for public reading which are at the same time accurate and understandable. There is little gained by hearing something which only vaguely *resembles* what God said. We need accurate translations to the Hebrew and Greek. That means we need translations which translate word for word and sense for sense what was originally intended by the biblical author. It isn't only words. There is a sense in every writing too. The Book of Galatians has a different sense to it than does the Book of Nehemiah. They reflect the same God, the same theology and the same ethics and morals. But the sense in each book of the Bible and each chapter of each book is unique. When we're reading it publicly then, we need to have translations which catch the sense for us. And communicate it to us.

As for translations, they should be selected for the specific use. For personal study there is one kind, and for public reading the need is a little different. In general I like the NASB, HCSB, ESV and NIV. I even like *The Message* as an alternative reading because it is so American, though it is more of a paraphrase and not really intended to be a strict translation. Most of us *are* American and we *think* American. There are many other English translations too but these are enough choices probably to think about.

Nehemiah 8:12 (NASB)

And all the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

(HCSB)

Then all the people began to eat and drink, send portions, and have a great celebration, because they had understood the words that were explained to them..

(ESV)

And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

(NIV)

Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

¹Tom Constable. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*. Galaxie Software.

(KJV)

And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

(NKJV)

And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them Nehemiah

(The Message)

So the people went off to feast, eating and drinking and including the poor in a great celebration. Now they got it; they understood the reading that had been given to them.

2. SPEED – We need to read slowly enough so that the word is understood. Nothing is gained by blasting through a reading and, “Whew, now I can sit down.” Do we love the Word of God? It is a blessing to read it and to have it read to us. But balance is the thing and we don’t want to be so slow that people go to sleep either, but speed can be an asset in reading the Word for each other.

3. REVERENTLY – This is not a word which is used by us very much. We major so much on casualness and relaxation that we forget what it means to revere the things of the Lord. I once served on staff at a church with another assistant pastor who was a stern man but I learned from him never to make jokes about the Word of God. That stuck with me. You will not hear me make light of the Word or its doctrines. It is the Word of God. And when we read the Word it isn’t about putting on a phony or contrived kind of manufactured reverence or using some put-on special voice. It is about BEING **humble** and **quiet** in the presence of the Word. It is about **handling it carefully**

the way you might handle a **valuable piece of China** or a **delicate piece of instrumentation** or a **dangerous explosive**. You would not just casually throw *any* of these around. Neither should we be flip or casual about the reading of Scripture.

The Word of the Lord is the main conduit through from which we sense God’s presence. Just because we are awash in Bibles, and privileged to have it all around us does not mean we should ever be casual about it. It is alive--not magical, but alive. It judges the thoughts and intents of the heart. It frees people. It condemns people. It comforts people. It is worthy of respect in every sense.

I’m not even sure if we can exactly train each other to feel reverence for the Word. There isn’t a simple set of procedures for reading the Word reverently. I think carefulness is part of it. Which might imply practice beforehand so we can do it accurately. Nehemiah 8 has 27 names in it and it is a joke among us usually, “Don’t ask me to read a portion of the Word that has names in it.” Why not? “Because it is hard to get them right and I might get embarrassed.” Well,

learn them, then, with the same attentiveness that we use for sports figures and songwriters' names. We ought to not stumble or shy away at the Word of God and surely not just wave it off like parts of the Word of God are unimportant or unworthy of some work to learn to pronounce it correctly. It is the Word of the Lord.

4. ANIMATION – Now some of us are more gifted than others to bring some liveliness and animation to the reading of Scripture. But all of us can learn to read the Word in some way *other than* monotone-ish and boringly. We can explore how to make it interesting, and how to almost act it out like portraying the people we are reading about. The Word is exciting and there is lots of action in it. There is great emotion in the Word of God, many times the same kinds of emotions that we feel now, two thousand years after the last inspired words of Scripture were penned by the apostle John. It has great potential to ENTERTAIN us in a good way. It is worth the work to read it well!

Then, as regarding the other public spoken ministry that we have, **praying in public...** I know some do not and will not do this. They are afraid. And it is true, we ought to do this carefully but I think it is a part of the priesthood of all believers, a doctrine we say we believe in, for us to intercede and petition and praise the Lord publicly, on behalf of each other.

Please note this: **Public prayer is not us talking to each other. It is us talking to God.** In essence, it should involve no *different* of a conversation than you might have with Him privately—just the subject matter, perhaps.

Now this is something Jesus spoke directly to:

Matthew 6:5,7 (NASB)

And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full...

And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

So plainly, motivation is the first thing to check. If our motivation is to impress people or to win their approval, let us sit down and be quiet—rather, let's keep prayers completely private and have *no one* pray publicly. But if our motivation is to edify each other, to try to sense what people are feeling and pray on their behalf and FOR each other, then let us pray publicly and have many believer-priests doing it!

Here are **a few basic things** to keep in mind for the ministry of public prayer:

1. **PRAYING ON BEHALF OF THE CROWD** – When you stand up to pray, you are doing it **FOR** the crowd, not just for yourself. Many times we are subjected to listen to someone’s quiet time, because they obviously have *not* had one earlier in the day, when they are praying publicly. This is not the time to pray for the things that concern you alone. This is a time to imagine what your brothers and sisters need, and are thinking about and would like to say to the Lord, were they all praying. One practical point: In order to be built up by what someone is saying to God, we all need to be able to hear whomever is praying. Pray loud enough that everyone can hear.
2. **BRIEF** - Here’s where that little principle, “less is more” can be relevant. A short, well-said and sincere and passionate prayer speaks **BETTER** on someone else’s behalf than some longer prayer with too much detail, too many subjects and too much flowery language. Also, when we’re in a conversational prayer time, short prayers allow time for more to pray.
3. **WITH THANKFULNESS AND GENUINENESS** – You see thankfulness at the beginning of most of Paul’s letters, as he began to address people. He was often telling them that he was thankful to the Lord for them. It isn’t an *incantation* to the Lord, to thank Him for what He has done in and through other people. But it is an honor to Him, an acknowledgement that He has blessed you through other people. It is always appropriate to thank Him for the good things we enjoy at one another’s hands. Have you thanked the Lord for our worship team people, for our Sunday School teachers, for your friend whom you know prays for you frequently? This is always an appropriate thing in our public prayers too and for many other blessings from the Lord, too!

Genuineness is important too. Nothing turns me off than when someone starts in to pray and I can tell they’re putting on an act. That is distracting to me. And the Lord says *they have their reward*.

4. **ONE AT A TIME** – In some church circles it is thought to be spiritual to have everyone pray at once. The buzz sounds spiritual, I suppose. I have never found that edifying, personally. I am sure the Lord can process many prayers at once. But I cannot! I find it distracting. I would rather have a series of people praying—genuinely and passionately and maybe even taking us into areas not normally prayed for too. But one at a time.

We are a people who talk a lot about our faith. We can enjoy the Word in many ways, especially when you the people read it well. And we can enjoy the ministry of believer-priests well as many of you lead us in prayer at different times.

Nehemiah 8:1-12 (*The Message*)

1 By the time the seventh month arrived, the People of Israel were settled in their towns. Then all the people gathered as one person in the town square in front of the Water Gate and asked the scholar Ezra to bring the Book of The Revelation of Moses that God had commanded for Israel. **2** So Ezra the priest brought The Revelation to the congregation, which was made up of both men and women - everyone capable of understanding. It was the first day of the seventh month. **3** He read it facing the town square at the Water Gate from early dawn until noon in the hearing of the men and women, all who could understand it. And all the people listened - they were all ears - to the Book of The Revelation. **4** The scholar Ezra stood on a wooden platform constructed for the occasion. He was flanked on the right by Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiyah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, and on the left by Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. **5** Ezra opened the book. Every eye was on him (he was standing on the raised platform) and as he opened the book everyone stood. **6** Then Ezra praised God, the great God, and all the people responded, "Oh Yes! Yes!" with hands raised high. And then they fell to their knees in worship of God, their faces to the ground. **7** Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, all Levites, explained The Revelation while people stood, listening respectfully. **8** They translated the Book of The Revelation of God so the people could understand it and then explained the reading. **9** Nehemiah the governor, along with Ezra the priest and scholar and the Levites who were teaching the people, said to all the people, "This day is holy to God, your God. Don't weep and carry on." They said this because all the people were weeping as they heard the words of The Revelation. **10** He continued, "Go home and prepare a feast, holiday food and drink; and share it with those who don't have anything: This day is holy to God. Don't feel bad. The joy of God is your strength!" **11** The Levites calmed the people, "Quiet now. This is a holy day. Don't be upset." **12** So the people went off to feast, eating and drinking and including the poor in a great celebration. Now they got it; they understood the reading that had been given to them.