

Resource Manual

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TURNING

INK

INTO BLOOD

Resources for the Public Reading of Scripture

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The Vision

The video, *Turning Ink Into Blood: Resources for the Public Reading of Scripture*, was created to help lift up the importance of the reading of Scripture in worship and to assist congregations as they identify, recruit, train, and support those who serve as readers.

Reading Scripture is one of several important parts of Christian worship. Bringing people into an experience of God through reading the Bible aloud is no less significant than other experiences of God that come through preaching, the sacraments, music, singing, or liturgy. Consequently, the preparation that goes into the reading of the lessons should be taken just as seriously as the preparation that is given to other aspects of worship.

For example, organizing a choir that rehearses weekly is a common way that many congregations provide adequate preparation for those who lead the musical portions of worship. This is a fine model to use when congregations want to provide more adequate preparation for those who lead the scripture reading portion of worship.

Creating and maintaining a readers group in a congregation may actually be easier than maintaining a choir. A standard readers group requires relatively few people. In most instances, all you need is one director and four other participants—five people willing to meet for 1½ hours a week to carry out this incredibly important aspect of worship leadership.

The idea of having a choir that meets to rehearse is probably a familiar concept in most congregations, but what would it mean to have a similar group for those who read the lessons? What would people in your congregation think about such a thing? Who should organize it all? Who should be in such a group? What would actually happen in a rehearsal session?

Since this is a concept that is new for many, the following pages offer suggestions regarding:

- Creating “buy in” for establishing a readers group;
- Identifying a potential director;
- Recruiting the director;
- Identifying potential readers;
- Recruiting readers;
- Organizing the initial training;
- Structuring the weekly rehearsal;
- Responses to typical questions, and
- Suggestions for people working alone.

Creating “Buy In” for Establishing a Readers Group

No matter how good an idea may be, it is usually an uphill struggle to introduce it successfully without the support of certain key leaders or personalities within any given congregation. Experience shows that it is important for leadership to be both informed and supportive when there is consideration for doing something new and different.

If you are the pastor, you probably know very well who the key people are in your congregation that need to have “buy in” regarding the establishment of a readers group. They may be council members, elders, board members, worship committee members, or simply members with significant influence within the congregation. In situations where someone other than the pastor is attempting to introduce this concept, it will be important to make sure the pastor(s) are on board with the idea early on.

Think about how you want these people to be introduced to this “vision.” A suggestion to create a readers group that meets weekly to rehearse may sound like a pretty wild idea to some, if they just hear it out of the blue without any context or rationale. In fact, making such a “big deal” out of having people read could be met with suspicion. “What’s wrong with the way we’ve been doing it?” “You say you’re going to train people to read? What kind of training are you talking about?” “It sounds like a lot of work. What are we really going to get out of it that we don’t already have now?”

The overall approach to reading and the suggested strategies and tools for reading that the video presents are, for many people, a very new and different way of thinking about it all. Trying to describe the potential value of using specific strategies or tools discussed in the video can be confusing to people who are hearing these things out of context. The best way to give people enough of the context so that they can share the “vision” is to use the video itself.

In this “buy in” stage it is not necessary for these decision makers to view the entire video. Consider showing the segment where Prof. Rogers uses the four cups to discuss the four different approaches to reading, (minute 9:30 to minute 28:00 on tape 1), and the final segment where he outlines how a readers group could be organized in a congregational setting (last 3½ minutes of tape 2, starting at minute 45:30). This takes only a little more than 22 minutes, and it provides a good overview of:

- Why well prepared readings are important,
- The strategy and tools for achieving quality readings, and
- How a congregation can organize its resources to make it all happen.

By viewing this much of the video, people will have a pretty good idea of the serious approach to reading taken by this training. They can also get some idea of what it would mean for the congregation to have a readers group and how such a group would spend its time in preparing for worship leadership. Hopefully your congregation will catch the “vision” and decide to move forward.

Identifying a Potential Director

There is a good chance that the person who is reading this *Resource Manual* is the person in the congregation who feels most strongly about the importance of beginning a readers group. If so, perhaps congratulations are in order! It may make the most sense for you to be the director of this project. Whether or not a readers ministry will thrive in a congregation usually depends on having one person in the congregation with such a good grasp on the “vision” (or, actually, the “vision” having a grasp on her or him) that (s)he simply does what it takes to make it all happen. Having a passion for people to be touched deeply and powerfully by God through the reading of the Word is THE most important quality in a good director. If you have that passion, it is likely that everything else necessary will follow.

If it is your job to secure a director, you will want to identify someone with the following qualities:

Loves God and takes worship seriously

Look for people who personally experience God in and through worship. Typically they have great respect and appreciation for the individual parts that make up the total worship event. When you introduce such people to the “vision” of how the scripture reading portion of worship can lead to an even more transcendent encounter for worshippers, they tend to see the value of significantly increasing the time and effort given to preparing readings.

Organized

The director needs to have at least some basic competence in organization in order to:

- Recruit members of the readers group,
- Facilitate the initial training,
- Coordinate the reading schedule, and
- Facilitate the rehearsal sessions

Please note that you are not looking for someone who necessarily has experience in doing all or any of these things. This manual and the video provide all the needed tools and directions to carry out these tasks. You are looking for someone who possesses the overarching qualities of *being dependable* and *attending to details*. For example, you want someone who is conscientious enough to make sure that the reading schedule is prepared in a timely manner so that the readers have their correct

reading assignments at the beginning of each weekly rehearsal session.

Open to learning new ways of doing things

The director is expected to serve as one of the readers of the congregation taking his or her turn on the reading schedule. That means that the director will prepare and rehearse in the weekly rehearsal sessions just like all the other members of the group. So, what skills will this require?

To be an effective reader (from the perspective presented by this video) does not require the reader to have experience or expertise in drama or public speaking. Nor is it important that the reader feel exceptionally confident before groups. In fact, it is actually a good thing if they have some degree of anxiety. (See more on this point under “Recruiting Readers.”) The most successful readers in this kind of a reading ministry are those people who are open to experimenting with new ways of doing things. The best readers in a congregation may be people who are relatively quiet in a group; however, if they have the quality of being open, they can be shaped and coached into becoming incredibly effective readers.

Recruiting the Director

When asking someone to accept a leadership position for a new ministry, it is important to be as clear as possible about what you are asking them to do and the resources that are available.

What you are asking them to do

The value and need of the work

When you recruit a Sunday school director you can usually assume that the person being asked knows what Sunday school is and why it is important to the life of the congregation. In recruiting a director for a readers group, you may not be able to assume that the person knows of either the value or the need of the work being proposed.

The first step is to use the video to present the “vision” of the work you are asking them to consider. If a candidate for director was not a part of the decision making group that saw a portion of the video during the “buy in” stage, then you will want to make sure that they watch at least the two sections noted earlier to get a sense of the value and need of what you are proposing. The person will most likely want to watch the entire video before saying yes to directing this program, but seeing the shorter version may be enough for them to begin to talk further about specifics of the director’s role.

Description of the work (A job description)

A standard job description for the director of a readers group consists of five responsibilities. (These tasks can of course be modified or delegated to others, but there is definite continuity value in having the director responsible for them all.)

- **Recruits the members of the readers group**

In most settings this means recruiting *four* people. (See “Identifying Potential Readers” and “Recruiting Readers” later in this manual.)

- **Facilitates the initial training**

Prior to initiating the weekly rehearsal sessions, there needs to be a training workshop in which the entire readers group views and discusses the video and how the readers group concept with weekly rehearsals will actually take place. You need to schedule 4 to 4½ hours for this. (See “Organizing the Initial Training” later in this manual. You will find a suggested format for doing the training on a Saturday from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM, allowing for lunch and break times.)

- **Coordinates the reading schedule**

The director will need to work with the pastor(s), worship committee or whoever determines which readings are to be read for a given service. The weekly rehearsal schedule is designed so that each set of readings is prepared and practiced over a period of four weeks during the rehearsal sessions. Therefore it will be necessary for the director to ensure that the readings (at least the ones to be read by the readers group) be determined at least five weeks in advance.

The director will create and distribute a schedule indicating who in the readers group is assigned to read which lessons for a given worship date.

- **Facilitates the rehearsals**

The director will structure and facilitate the 90 minute, weekly rehearsal. The director’s main responsibility is to ensure that each set of readings receives the allotted time for work on the step scheduled for that session. (See “Structuring the Weekly Rehearsal” later in this manual.)

Note that the title “director” may be somewhat misleading as it pertains to the director’s leadership role during rehearsals. Again, the comparison to a choir may be helpful. In a choir, the director is responsible for actively guiding the group to achieve their best possible presentation of a musical work. In a readers group, the group itself works collaboratively to guide individual readers in achieving their best possible reading. The readers group director facilitates the discussions making sure (1) the group stays on schedule and (2) everyone has an opportunity to contribute appropriately. When the group is working on the director’s readings, it will probably be a good idea for someone else to facilitate that portion of the rehearsal.

- **Serves as one of the readers**

While it is obviously possible to recruit a fifth member for the group so the director would not have a reading responsibility, there is great value in having the director participate with the group as a fellow reader.

Note: In some congregations, this position will be a paid position. In others, it will be a volunteer job. It is important that this be clearly noted in the job description before the person accepts the directorship.

Recruiting the Director

Time commitment

By being as detailed as possible with the job description, the candidate can get a pretty good idea of:

- The time required for the starting the program (recruiting readers and facilitating the initial training).
- The time required each month (coordinating the reading schedule, facilitating the weekly rehearsals, and preparing one's own readings).

It is also important to be clear about the expectation regarding the duration of the commitment. A one-year commitment is typical.

The resources that are available

Support of the decision making group

It is important to communicate to the person you are recruiting that the leadership of the congregation (the decision making group) already understands what it means to have a readers group and has given the project its support. It may be a good idea for the pastor(s) or church officials to talk directly with the person, assuring them that, even though this is a new way of doing things, it has their full endorsement and will have their ongoing support.

The video training tapes, *Turning Ink Into Blood*

Be sure you remind them that, even though the director is responsible for "facilitating the initial training," basically this just means hitting the "Play" button of a VCR. The complete training is provided by the video tapes. The director is not expected to be an expert who will train others. The director is simply a fellow learner on the road to even better reading in worship.

The Resource Manual

This *Resource Manual* is designed to provide all of the information that the director will need to carry out the other parts of their job description. Make sure that that the person you are recruiting knows it exists and has an opportunity to examine it.

Their gifts/qualities to do this well

Finally, do not forget to tell the person you are asking to direct this program why you chose to ask them rather than someone else. One of the biggest resources available to the director will be his or her own gifts and qualities of leadership. When asking people to assume a leadership role, it is appropriate to clearly state the characteristics you believe they possess that will equip them to be successful. Be as specific as you can. (See "Identifying a Potential Director" on page 4.)

Identifying Potential Readers

Look for readers with the following qualities:

Loves God and takes worship seriously

Being part of a readers group takes a significant amount of time and commitment. Faithful members who worship regularly are the obvious candidates when asking people to assume the serious responsibility of becoming a reader. Such members are already convinced of the importance of good worship. They will be the most open to considering ways to make worship even more meaningful and to giving the time required.

Dependable

Readers are asked to give a large amount of time to the task of reading well.

You are asking them to commit to:

- An initial training of approximately 5 hours,
- Weekly 1½ hour rehearsals for a year,
- The additional “at home” practice that is required to adequately prepare the readings,
- Reading the lessons in worship once every 5 weeks

You do not want people who just say “yes;” you want people you can trust to follow through on their commitment. Ideally, you are looking for people with a proven track record of dependability.

Appropriate balance of confidence and fear

There may be a tendency to assume that the most outgoing and extroverted members of the congregation will make the best readers. Indeed, this may be true, but it is important not to equate competency for this task exclusively with confidence. While some degree of confidence is necessary, it is not a bad thing for such confidence to be balanced with a healthy measure of genuine fear.

Since reading in church involves speaking in front of others, there is a universal anxiety or “fear” factor that needs to be considered. Reading in public is a less fearful task for most people than giving a speech, but it runs a close second. In studies asking people to list their greatest fear, 42% list speaking in public. This is in contrast to 16% who list death as their greatest fear. It is no small thing that 42% of the population considers speaking in public to be a fate worse than death.

For 20% of the population the anxiety factor is enough of a problem that it physically manifests itself in ways that limit their presentation effectiveness. For ¼ of that group (5% of the total population), their fear is so great that they literally cannot do it. They would run out of the room before they would open their mouth in public. Obviously, people in this 20% are not your best candidates for this job. Fortunately, you do not have to worry about asking the wrong person unknowingly; they know who they are and will probably not even consider the idea of becoming a reader.

These studies are noted so that you know that fear is a factor in identifying potential readers. What you are looking for are people who appear at least moderately confident talking with others in social settings. They will likely admit to having some fear about speaking or reading before a group. Such fear is not a problem; actually, a little fear is a good thing. The ideal reader is not someone who says they have absolutely no fear or anxiety speaking before a group. The best readers will be those who consistently get a tiny shot of adrenaline when they stand before a group. Fear energizes people physically. With training, readers can learn to use this fear (energy) to bring an even more engaged response to the reading they are interpreting for their hearers.

Open to learning new ways of doing things

The most successful readers in this kind of readers group will be open to learning new ways of doing things. Acquiring the skills necessary to read in the ways presented in the video does not happen overnight. The ideal participants will have patience and a willingness to stretch beyond their comfort zone for the sake of the task. They will come to the process with an open mind, receptive to being shaped and coached into becoming the best readers they can be.

Recruiting Readers

You are asking someone to accept a significant role in what may well be a new ministry for your congregation. They need to know, as clearly as possible, what you are asking them to do and the resources that are available.

What you are asking them to do

The value and need of the work

Ultimately, for a congregation truly to achieve the “vision” of lifting up the importance of the reading of Scripture, those who most need a firm grasp on the “vision” are the readers themselves. Everyone who finally accepts the job of being a reader will view the entire video as a part of the initial training. Nonetheless, it may be a good idea to show them a portion of the tape, as a part of your recruitment, to give them a sense of the value and need of what you are proposing.

Consider showing the segment where Prof. Rogers uses the four cups to discuss the four different approaches to reading (minute 9:30 to minute 28:00 on tape 1) and the final segment where he outlines how a readers group could be organized in a congregational setting (last 3½ minutes of tape 2, starting at minute 45:30). This takes only a little more than 25 minutes, and it provides a good overview of:

- Why well prepared readings are important,
- The strategy and tools for achieving quality readings, and
- How a congregation can organize its resources to make it all happen.

Description of the work (A job description)

- Participate in a 4–5 hour initial training.
- Participate in 90 minute, weekly rehearsals.

Provide a copy of the Weekly Rehearsal Schedule. (See “Structuring the Weekly Rehearsal” below.) This will enable them to see how they will be working on their readings with the group for four weeks before reading in worship.

- Read the Scripture lessons in worship once every 5 weeks.

Time commitment

In addition to the time for the initial training and weekly rehearsals, readers will need to spend some time at home preparing their readings. Although how much one dedicates to this part of the process can vary greatly from person to person and from reading to reading, readers should plan to spend at least ½ hour to 1 hour per week, beyond the group rehearsal times.

A one-year commitment to the readers group is typical.

The resources that are available

Support of the decision making group

Since this may well be a new way of doing things, make sure the person you are recruiting knows the pastor(s) and other leaders of the congregation (the decision making group) already understand what it means to have a readers group and have given the project its support.

Initial training and ongoing training (rehearsals)

Emphasize to the people you are recruiting that they are not expected to understand completely what it means to be a part of a readers group beforehand. That is why there is extensive training (4–5 hours), including modeling. The group will also continue each others’ “training” as they work together in the weekly rehearsals.

Their gifts/qualities to do this well

Finally, be sure to affirm the gifts and qualities you see in the people you are asking. (See “Identifying Potential Readers” above.) Be frank in telling them why you think they are the right person for this ministry role.

This may be a time to discuss the appropriateness of any anxiety or fear they may have about undertaking this responsibility. You cannot guarantee that the “butterflies” in their stomach will ever go completely away when they read in public. However, you can assure them of the support of a group of fellow readers who will assist them in becoming the very best reader they can be, and you can remind them that that is what really matters for the sake of God’s people in worship. After all, the goal is not to get rid of the butterflies—just to get them to fly in formation.

Organizing the Initial Training

Sample Agenda for a Saturday Training Session

9:00–9:15 AM	Opening Prayer, Welcome, and Introductions (if necessary)
9:15–10:15 AM	Session I View the video from the beginning of Tape 1 through the “Break for Discussion of Step 3.” Note: The 60 minutes allotted in the schedule are divided between 40 minutes for viewing the tape and 20 minutes for group discussion during the 3 times the tape invites viewers to discuss.
10:15–10:35 AM	Break
10:35–11:30 AM	Session II View the video from “Possible Placements of the Scene” through the “Modeling of Step 1.” Note: The 55 minutes allotted in the schedule are divided between 45 minutes for viewing the tape and 10 minutes for group discussion.
11:30 AM–12:00 PM	Lunch
12:00–12:45 PM	Session III View the video from “Modeling of Step 2” to the end. Note: The 45 minutes allotted in the schedule is exclusively for viewing the tape. There are no breaks for discussion.
12:45–1:00 PM	Distribute Proposed Weekly Rehearsal Schedule Discuss how the steps presented in the video will be incorporated into the weekly rehearsals.
1:00–2:00 PM	General Questions and Discussion A significant amount of time is scheduled here so that everyone has an opportunity to raise questions, express anxiety, or say or do whatever else is needed at this point. Distribute Reading Assignments Closing Prayer Consider including a reaffirmation of commitment to the “vision” of lifting up the importance of the reading of Scripture

Structuring the Weekly Rehearsal Schedule

Sample Rehearsal Schedule—Once the Group Is Underway

Note: Person A is highlighted to illustrate how a given reader prepares over a four week period.

Rehearsal Date	Reader	Texts	Work on Step(s)	Amount of Time
<i>Meeting #1</i> (Coordinator would fill in this information)	Person A	(Coordinator would fill in this info.)	1	30 minutes
	Person B		2 & 3	15 minutes
	Person C		2 & 3	15 minutes
	Person D		3	30 minutes
	Person E		No Assignment	
	<i>Note: Person D reads on the following Sunday</i>			
<i>Meeting #2</i>	Person E		1	30 minutes
	Person A		2 & 3	15 minutes
	Person B		2 & 3	15 minutes
	Person C		3	30 minutes
	Person D		No Assignment	
<i>Note: Person C reads on the following Sunday</i>				
<i>Meeting #3</i>	Person D		1	30 minutes
	Person E		2 & 3	15 minutes
	Person A		2 & 3	15 minutes
	Person B		3	30 minutes
	Person C		No Assignment	
<i>Note: Person B reads on the following Sunday</i>				
<i>Meeting #4</i>	Person C		1	30 minutes
	Person D		2 & 3	15 minutes
	Person E		2 & 3	15 minutes
	Person A		3	30 minutes
	Person B		No Assignment	
<i>Note: Person A reads on the following Sunday</i>				
<i>Meeting #5</i>	Person B		1	30 minutes
	Person C		2 & 3	15 minutes
	Person D		2 & 3	15 minutes
	Person E		3	30 minutes
	Person A		No Assignment	
<i>Note: Person E reads on the following Sunday</i>				

The pattern presented here simply continues; i.e. meeting #6 is the same as #1; meeting #7 is the same as #2, and so on.

Responses to Typical Questions

Questions Dealing with the Pastor and Congregation

In our congregation the pastor (preacher) always reads the Gospel lesson. What should we do about that?

The suggestion to establish a readers group in a congregation is not intended to disrupt traditions or create tensions. Certain religious groups have directions (“rubrics”) in their liturgies indicating that the preacher “shall read the Gospel.” Other groups have no such direction, and the actual practice for those who do can vary greatly from congregation to congregation.

If the practice in your setting has been for the preacher (usually a pastor) to read the Gospel lesson, it is important to check with the pastor(s) to see if they wish to continue this format or not. It is not a good idea to assume anything on this point. Some pastors may wish to continue reading themselves. Others may want to take advantage of the readers group and have the reader for the day read the Gospel lesson as well. Still other pastors may want to meet with the readers group (either regularly or occasionally) to work on the Gospel lesson readings that they will read themselves.

(Note: This final option can provide a real plus for the group, in that it can be very helpful to have the pastor participate with the group in wrestling with what a text means and how it feels. Pastoral presence can, however, be a limiting thing if the pastor assumes an overly strong teaching role and short circuits the process of allowing each member of the group to wrestle with the meaning of the text, as opposed to having that meaning handed to them. That’s right. This is really a note for pastors who may be reading this.)

This approach to preparing to read and the examples in the tape of people actually reading seem very different than what people in our congregation are accustomed to experiencing. Do we need to inform the congregation that we are going to be doing things differently?

Giving serious attention to a reading ministry by establishing a readers group will most likely produce a noticeable change in how the lessons are read. The change may be significant. Any kind of change in worshipping congregations almost always goes better if:

- The congregation is notified *well in advance and repeatedly* that a change is taking place. Not a lot of people seem to like surprises when it comes to their worship.
- The congregation knows that the *leadership supports* the change.
- It is clear to everyone *why* this change is a good thing.

To achieve the first criteria (“Congregation is notified well in advance and repeatedly”): It is a good idea to utilize as many of the congregation’s channels of communication as possible. This could be a newsletter, verbal announcements, printed reports, bulletin board announcements, worship folder inserts, or whatever else your congregations uses. Ideally people will know that a readers group is being started a month or two before the group is actually recruited and begins to meet for rehearsals. (Reminder: Typically no one from the group reads in worship until four weeks after the group begins meeting for rehearsals.)

To achieve the second criteria (Congregation knows leadership supports the change”): It is good for the congregation to hear or read a public endorsement from the pastor(s) and other key leaders. The pastor may want to use the “Pastor’s Page” in the congregational newsletter (or something comparable) to introduce the concept of a readers group and the rationale for starting one.

Responses to Typical Questions

For congregations that have a public rite of installation or a commissioning service for those beginning work as a Sunday school teacher or other kinds of leadership roles, it is useful to use the same rite or service for those beginning a readers group. This both gives a “heads up” to people of what is coming, and it invites people to begin to support those working in the readers ministry by praying for them.

To achieve the third criteria (“It is clear to everyone why this change is a good thing”): Consider this. If you were to think of a stage play as a metaphor for worship, what role would you assign to the those who lead worship, and what role would you assign to those who sit in the pews or chairs? Most people, when asked this question, say that they envision the reading stand and pulpit as the stage from which the worship leaders function as the actors. They see themselves, the listeners in the pews, as the audience. With such a view it is typical for worshippers to say to one another after worship, “Well, how do you think the (reader, preacher, choir, fill in the blank) did this morning?”

But what would happen if we were to think of God, not ourselves, as the ultimate “audience” of our worship? Suddenly the roles change. The worship leaders function as directors of the “play,” but we, the members of the congregation, are the primary actors. The pews are the stage from which we offer our praise, prayer, song, and attention to and reception of God’s Word. With this view, it would be possible for worshippers to say to one another at the close of worship, “Well, how do you think we did this morning?”

A reading ministry that employs a readers group operates on the assumption that the reader is one of the “directors of the play” whose job it is to empower and enable the worshippers to attend as fully as possible to God’s Word through the scriptures. That is a very important job. People may ask, “Why do we need to change how readers prepare?” The answer is tied to why we think it is important for pastors to be theologically trained in a seminary and to take courses in presiding and preaching? That training is critical because those particular, director’s roles are very important for helping the true actors (the congregation) create the best worship possible. It’s the same answer for why we put time and energy into the musical aspects of worship? Once

worshippers grasp their actual role and responsibility in the drama of worship, the need for the most competent directors possible, for all parts of the “drama” tends to become more clearly apparent.

We include a leaflet with the lessons printed in the worship folder, or we print out the lessons in the folder itself. How does such a practice relate to the approach to reading presented in this training?

It is not surprising that many congregations provide worshippers with a printed copy of the lessons. Conventional wisdom suggests that people will be better able to fully attend to the scripture if they not only hear the words, but see them as well. In situations where the lessons are read very poorly, it probably is a plus to have the printed words in the hands of the worshippers. If people cannot hear or understand the reader, at least the worshippers can read it for themselves.

However, in a situation where the lessons are read with preparation and care, it does not make sense to distribute a printed text. The ink comes alive for the hearers when they see it coming alive in the person of the reader. The link to that aliveness comes when the hearers actually see the reader.

Perhaps an analogy would be useful here. When we attend a live theater performance, the usher does not hand us a copy of the play’s script and say, “We thought you would probably want to read along rather than watch the actors.” No one would ever dream of doing such a thing. To do so would destroy our experience of the play. In the same way, it is just as ludicrous to distribute a printed text in a worship setting where the lessons are being read well.

It is important again to remember the difficulty of change for many people. There can be wisdom in minimizing it where possible. It might be a good plan not to take away the printed lessons on the same the day the first person from the readers group reads. Maybe the printed lessons should remain for a couple of months and then be discontinued. If the readers are doing what this training equips them to do, it is doubtful if very many, if anyone will object at that point.

Responses to Typical Questions

Questions Dealing with the Readers Group and Rehearsals

It seems that Step I of the process presupposes that the readers have a certain level of biblical knowledge.

What if no one in the group has a strong biblical background?

If this is a serious concern, you may want to add another criteria in recruiting at least one of the group's members. While it is not necessary to have formal Bible training to participate in this process, it would be important for at least one person in the group to have a relatively sound understanding of the overarching messages of the Bible.

In some cases, where group members feel they have a limited background in reading and studying the Bible, it may be a good idea to have someone with more biblical knowledge join the rehearsals to serve as a resource. People assuming this role must clearly see themselves primarily as a resource for the purpose of guiding the group into a deeper and perhaps more accurate understanding of the text. Please beware. A series of Bible lectures on each lesson will work against the process that is intended. This is not a Bible class with the goal of providing information about the scriptures for the sake of having more information; it is a group that is honestly seeking to personally and fully interact with these texts, at multiple levels, before reading them in worship.

The “Sample Rehearsal Schedule” shows a series of meetings once the group is underway. How should we structure the time for the first three rehearsals before we are on track to use the “Sample Rehearsal Schedule?”

It is a real plus that there is extra time in the first three rehearsals. It is one thing to view people modeling the steps on the video tapes; it is quite another thing to actually start to do it oneself. Since using the three steps introduced in the training is probably a new experience for most, it will naturally take a bit longer at first until everyone becomes familiar with the process. The following is a suggestion for structuring the time in the first three rehearsals of a new group.

(Note: Following this schedule, everyone will be set to work on the steps outlined in “Meeting 1” of the “Sample Rehearsal Schedule—Once the Group Is Underway.”)

Possible Rehearsal Schedule—First 3 Sessions of a New Group

Rehearsal Date	Reader	Texts	Work on Step(s)	Amount of Time
<i>Meeting #1</i> (Coordinator would fill in this information)	Person D	(Coordinator would fill in this info.)	1	60 minutes
	Person C		1	30 minutes
<i>Meeting #2</i>	Person C		1	30 minutes
	Person B		1	15 minutes
	Person D		2 & 3	30 minutes
	Person C		2 & 3	15 minutes
<i>Meeting #3</i>	Person B		1	30 minutes
	Person C		2 & 3	30 minutes
	Person D		2 & 3	30 minutes

Responses to Typical Questions

What happens if the person who has prepared to read gets sick or has an emergency and cannot do it? What are our options then?

Since everyone else in the group has also spent a part of four rehearsals working with the lessons that are scheduled to be read, any group member is already relatively well prepared to offer a credible reading. If the substitute chooses the option of placing the focus on the page, the reader will not be severely limited by not having had significant rehearsal time with those lessons.

Granted, the substitute reader may not do as well as the scheduled reader would have done, but it will still be a vastly more engaged reading than would be the case with a substitute who had spent little or no time with the texts.

What do we do if we discover that the suggested time frame presented in the “Sample Rehearsal Schedule” does not give us enough time to work on each person’s lessons in the way we would like?

There are three simple solutions to this problem:

- You can increase the length of the rehearsals. The “Sample Rehearsal Schedule” allows for a 1½ hour rehearsal. This time frame is not cast in stone. If the group is willing to meet longer, there’s your answer.
- The entire group does not have to be present for this process to work. You may find it helpful to have group members pair up as partners. The “partner” can then meet with the reader sometime outside of the scheduled rehearsal time to provide the further help or feedback that the rest of the group did not feel they had adequate time to give.
- You can have two separate groups. If enough people are recruited to form two readers groups, each group suddenly has twice the time to prepare. Instead of needing to have a reader prepared and ready to read each week, each group is only responsible to provide a reader every other week.

You still only need one coordinator, even if you have two groups. The coordinator works out the reading schedule for each group. With two groups, the coordinator may facilitate the rehearsals for one of the group and arrange to have someone in the other group to facilitate the rehearsals for that group. The coordinator may also choose not to be a formal member of either group. He or she may visit back forth between groups, filling in when there are absences or temporary vacancies in either group.

In the “Sample Rehearsal Schedule” it shows one person with “no assignment” each week. Should this person still come to the rehearsal?

The expectation is that all five members of the group would attend all the rehearsals. In some sense, the person who does not have part of their brain thinking or worrying about their own assignment for that week may be the most focussed and useful resource present. The work of being a member of a readers group is not just to read, but also to assist the other readers in working through each step as they prepare their readings.

Responses to Typical Questions

What about readings for special midweek services or celebrations that do not fall on Sundays?

There are indeed more worship services than the 52 Sundays of each year. Some traditions celebrate mid-week worship in Advent and Lent, and there are additional services in Holy Week and around Christmas and Thanksgiving for many. Since the “Sample Rehearsal Schedule” offered only produces one prepared reader each week, accommodations need to be made for these other worship events where lessons are read. Some options, in descending order of their desirability, include:

- In anticipation of upcoming special services, one or more new people could be brought into the group to work on the readings for the non-Sunday services. This option has the added advantage that people are given a glimpse of how the readers group functions. These could be ideal prospects for new, full-time recruits in the future.
- The person with “no assignment” for a given rehearsal could rehearse and do the readings for the special service.
- The reader scheduled to read at the Sunday worship can also be assigned the readings for the other worship services that week. If you follow this plan, the reader will probably want to utilize only the method of locating the scene on the page, for all the readings, since this takes far less rehearsal time.
- Have someone outside the readers group do the reading.

Questions Dealing with the Readings Themselves

Are there absolutely no times when it is appropriate to make eye contact with your hearers while reading?

It does make sense to make eye contact with your hearers *if* you are placing the scene either in your body or in the midst of your hearers and the text has a section of commentary that breaks the action. When this happens, it works reasonably well to disconnect from the locus of the scene, deliver the commentary section of the text while looking at the hearers, and then re-engage yourself to previous locus for the remainder of the text or until the next commentary. This is a bit like an actor giving what is known as an “aside” speech in a stage play where they turn from interacting with the other actors on stage to turn and speak directly to the audience.

How do you do Step I (Asking: “How does the text feel?”) when you are dealing with a text that is somewhat abstract or intellectual, as is sometimes the case in the epistles?

Admittedly, many of the suggestions for preparing to read a text offered by this training work best when the text includes dialogue between people, where there is action of some kind, or when the text is a form of poetry. Some biblical texts include none of these things. Thus for some texts it may be a very legitimate and commendable goal simply to accurately determine “What is going on?” in the text. It is no small feat to bring clarity to hearers for text that may be fairly abstract and/or embedded in a larger conversation or theology.

Nonetheless, even with the most intellectually oriented passages of scripture that deal strictly with concepts and ideas, it is still possible to ask how the text feels. While the text may contain no characters who might conceivably feel something, people (with feelings) are always somehow involved. The text was written by a person (the author) to a group of people (the original audience) and is ultimately heard by another audience (the hearers to whom you read). Asking how this text made or makes these various people feel can sometimes end in our having a different understanding of how “the text,” which we will read, “feels.” Sometimes it will not.

Suggestions for People Working Alone

Although this training proceeds on the presumption that a congregation will organize a readers group, the possibility exists that not every congregation will be able to move to this step immediately. It is quite likely that some people, who may already be readers in their congregations, will use this video alone.

While working alone may not be ideal, it certainly is not an insurmountable problem. You can disregard the discussion concerning the readers group, but everything else in the video still pertains precisely to what you are doing as a reader. It may even be that one reader in a congregation's schedule of readers wants help in how to prepare for their Sunday's reading. Pastors and worship leaders are encouraged to get this resource to them. Perhaps, if some people begin using the strategies in this training video, others will want to do the same, and a group can form that way.

It may also be that a group watches the video together but are not able to meet on an ongoing basis as a group. While it is possible to make use of all the tools presented in the video while working alone, you may still want to seek out at least one person to work with you on Steps 1 and 3. For example, if it is customary in your church for someone to read the lessons for a month at a time, you could meet with another reader to help you with Steps 1 and 3 as you prepare for your month's readings. You could then, in turn, assist him or her in working on the readings for their month.

Ultimately, whatever system is used, the reader is urged to set up some form of feedback before they present the reading in actual worship.

Job Descriptions

Director's Job Description

A standard job description for the director of a readers group consists of five responsibilities. (These tasks can, of course, be modified or delegated to others, but there is definite continuity value in having the director responsible for them all.)

- **Recruits the members of the readers group**

In most settings this means recruiting *four* people. (See "Identifying Potential Readers" and "Recruiting Readers" later in this manual.)

- **Facilitates the initial training**

Prior to initiating the weekly rehearsal sessions, there needs to be a training workshop in which the entire readers group views and discusses the video and how the readers group concept with weekly rehearsals will actually take place. You need to schedule 4 to 4½ hours for this. (See "Organizing the Initial Training" on page 9 in this manual. You will find a suggested format for doing the training on a Saturday from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM, allowing for lunch and break times.)

- **Coordinates the reading schedule**

The director will need to work with the pastor(s), worship committee or whoever determines which readings are to be read for a given service. The weekly rehearsal schedule is designed so that each set of readings is prepared and practiced over a period of four weeks during the rehearsal sessions. Therefore it will be necessary for the director to ensure that the readings (at least the ones to be read by the readers group) be determined at least five weeks in advance.

The director will create and distribute a schedule indicating who in the readers group is assigned to read which lessons for a given worship date.

- **Facilitates the rehearsals**

The director will structure and facilitate the 90 minute, weekly rehearsal. The director's main responsibility is to ensure that each set of readings receives the allotted time for work on the step scheduled for that session. (See "Structuring the Weekly Rehearsal.")

Note that the title "director" may be somewhat misleading as it pertains to the director's leadership role during rehearsals. Again, the comparison to a choir may be helpful. In a choir, the director is responsible for actively guiding the group to achieve their best

possible presentation of a musical work. In a readers group, the group itself works collaboratively to guide individual readers in achieving their best possible reading. The readers group director facilitates the discussions making sure (1) the group stays on schedule and (2) everyone has an opportunity to contribute appropriately. When the group is working on the director's readings, it will probably be a good idea for someone else to facilitate that portion of the rehearsal.

- **Serves as one of the readers**

While it is obviously possible to recruit a fifth member for the group so the director would not have a reading responsibility, there is great value in having the director participate with the group as a fellow reader.

Note: In some congregations, this position will be a paid position. In others, it will be a volunteer job. It is important that this be clearly noted in the job description before the person accepts the directorship.

Readers' Job Description

- Participate in a 4–5 hour initial training.
- Participate in 90 minute, weekly rehearsals.

Provide a copy of the Weekly Rehearsal Schedule. (See "Structuring the Weekly Rehearsal" on page 10.) This will enable them to see how they will be working on their readings with the group for four weeks before reading in worship.

- Read the Scripture lessons in worship once every 5 weeks.

Time commitment

In addition to the time for the initial training and weekly rehearsals, readers will need to spend some time at home preparing their readings. Although how much one dedicates to this part of the process can vary greatly from person to person and from reading to reading, readers should plan to spend at least ½ hour to 1 hour per week, beyond the group rehearsal times.

A one-year commitment to the readers group is typical.



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