Reading: Giving the Sense

By Nedra Newkirk Lamar

What *Is* Good Reading?

If someone asked you, "What are the essentials of good reading?", would you say: "A good reader must have a beautiful voice, he must read with great joy and conviction, he must never make a fluff, and he must come to an impressive conclusion"?

I hope not, because I feel that, though these things may be admirable, you could have them all and still lack the essentials.

What might be missing from such reading? The *meaning.*

There are, in my opinion, just three indispensables to good reading:

1. Audible voice. After all, why bring out the meaning if no one behind the fifth row can hear you?
2. Intelligible diction. What's the good of being heard, if your listeners can't figure out the words?
3. The meaning. The meaning. The *meaning.* What's the point of hearing and understanding the words if they are *just* words?

The meaning. Whose meaning? The writer's meaning. Not what the reader wishes the writer had meant. Not what the writer did mean somewhere else, but what the writer means right here.

So, how do you know what the writer means? If you accept the premise of the "basic emphasis" principle, which this article sets forth, you believe that the meaning uncovered can be proved by the logic of the principle. But I don't ask you to accept without question what is written here. I ask you only to be reasonably skeptical, while preserving your open mind, and to accept only the points you feel I prove.

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. Nehemiah 8:8.

If you're going to serve your guests a cake, do you set before them a silver tray holding butter, sugar, flour, baking powder, milk, eggs, and vanilla? Most desirable ingredients, but who wants to eat ingredients? You must *process* them. All that your guests should have to do is eat the cake and enjoy it.

Too often an oral reader gives his hearers only the ingredients—the words. But the words need to be processed, and the three main ways of processing these ingredients are emphasis, phrasing, and inflection. Let's discuss the first two, beginning with emphasis.

If we read just as we talk—and conversational reading is a widely desired goal—we generally emphasize each new idea, especially if it's a contrast, and subdue the old. In conversation we do this without giving it a thought; it's automatic. We're *thinking* the ideas so strongly that we don't have to stop to plan whether we shall emphasize or subdue.

In reading, however, we're usually presenting material written by another person, and we do have to consider, first, how to find the writer's meaning, and, second, how to let it show itself to the hearer. Analytical Reading principles show us how to take both of these steps.

A director of plays once said to me, "Oh, if I could only get these people to stop reading lines this way: 'I need something from the library. Let's go to the *library.*'" Once you've mentioned the library, the word *library* becomes an old idea and you naturally subdue it: "Let's *go* to the library." In fact, you could just say, "Let's *go* there."

If you can actually omit a word, or substitute a more general word, without affecting the meaning, why should you emphasize it? Here, wouldn't you stress *go* instead? Isn't *go* the new idea? *Library* is so clearly understood that you might not even need *there* as a substitute word. Couldn't you simply say, "Let's go"?

This is a very simple example of the way we usually stress a new idea and subdue the old. (I say "usually" because there are times when a word, though old in idea, needs to be stressed, as when it's in strong contrast to some other word.)

A radio or television announcer aware of this principle would not say "France and other European *countries*"; "his grandmother and his aunt and many *relatives*"; "apartments, condominiums, and other *domiciles.*" A weather newscaster wouldn't tell us about the snow "in New Hampshire and other New England *areas.*"

The news announcer would realize that, since France is a country, *countries* would be subdued as old; that, since grandmothers and aunts are relatives, *relatives* would be subdued; that, since apartments and condominiums are domiciles, *domiciles* would be subdued. Obviously, the announcer should stress *other, many,* and *other*, respectively, in the three examples. And, of course, the weatherman would emphasize *other,* since New Hampshire and New England are both areas and New Hampshire makes New England an old idea.

This principle of new-and-old ideas is the basis of meaningful, conversational emphasis. It combines with more advanced aspects, and with principles of phrasing and conversational patterns of inflection,

to make up the subject which I call Analytical Reading—most facets of which, I feel, are unique.

The examples I've given may seem too simple to bother with, especially since the listener can ignore the announcer's emphasis and see the meaning for himself. In hearing the Bible read, however, or Shakespeare, or any other complicated writing, packed with deep meaning, how many listeners can figure out the meaning for themselves? The more the writer has compacted into his sentences, the more clarification they require. And remember—it is not the *listener's* task to process the ingredients. The audience should understand the writer's meaning *because* of the reader, or actor, or minister, not in spite of him.

Here let me say that nothing in this article is intended as unkind criticism of any reader or speaker. Sometimes it's hard not to notice things that we don't like, but we never know how much the reader or speaker has improved, how hard he is working, or how great are the difficulties he is facing.

Many Bible readers have a conscientious hesitancy about planning their phrasing and emphasis; they're afraid it might cause them to "interpret." Sometimes they even resort to a monotone. But the only way you can avoid interpreting is to use no phrasing, emphasis, or inflection at all (a real monotone!). This conveys no meaning whatever.

A knowledge of emphasis, phrasing, inflection is as indispensable to the silent reader as to the reader with an audience. Many people who have no intention of ever reading before audience, congregation, or radio microphone, study the subject in order to see for themselves the meaning of deeply philosophical or religious writings, especially in the Bible and Shakespeare. An editor who did such study told me, "A page of print will never look the same to me again. Now I see ideas, not just words."

The moment you have emphasized or subdued, paused or connected, or changed your inflection, you have "interpreted." You have given out a meaning. Shouldn't the reader, then, do his best to decide what a sentence says and use his emphasis, phrasing, and inflection to bring out what he honestly feels is its meaning? In this way he is avoiding *personal mis*interpretation by giving the impersonal interpretation.

Let's examine some fairly simple Bible verses to see how the principles of Analytical Reading uncover fuller and deeper meaning.

In Mark 5:34—"Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole"—you often hear *faith* and *whole* emphasized. But is *whole* new? Isn't it clearly implied in verse 29: "she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague"? So you might subdue *whole.* Now, what about *faith?* Isn't it not only a new idea but also a definite contrast with *garment,* away back in verse 27? Didn't the woman think that touching his garment had healed her (verse 28), but wasn't Jesus assuring her—in verse 34—that it was her faith, *not* his garment?

Would you read John 9:7 in this way: "He went his way therefore, and washed, and *came—seeing"?* Is *came* really a new idea? He was always able to come and go, wasn't he? His problem was not locomotion but vision. So wouldn't you subdue *came* as old, and stress *seeing* only, as contrasted with *blind?* "He went his way therefore, and washed, and came *seeing.*" Why accentuate *came* by pausing after it?

The fiftieth verse of John 4 presents a point that is widely overlooked. "And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way." There is a temptation to place a triumphant stress on *believed.* (Oh, fine! He believed!) But isn't *believed* old? Jesus implied in verse 48 that the man would believe signs and wonders. So, since this makes *believed* old in verse 50, wouldn't *word* be the new idea? It's easy enough for people to believe signs and wonders, but *this* man believed Jesus's *word!* What a significant difference attention to new and old ideas makes here! Doesn't this indicate that this man was so receptive that he did more than just believe in a sign or wonder; he took Jesus's *word* for the healing without having to see the healing.

This doesn't mean that there will always be only one way to read a sentence. Many sentences present two or more meanings, all provably logical. A very simple example is in Luke 8:52, 53: "he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead." Couldn't you stress only the second *dead,* as contrasted with *sleepeth?* Or stress only *was,* in constrast to saying she was *not* dead? Or even consider stressing only *knowing*—he said she was not dead but they *knew* she was dead? Three different readers might read it three different ways. Wouldn't each way be logical?

Verses 10 through 13 in II Kings 5 become much more meaningful when principles of Analytical Reading are applied.

"And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

"But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

"Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

"And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?"

It's easy to see, at the end of verse 11, that *leper* is old and *recover* new. Often, in "He will surely come out to me," the only word stressed is *out;* but we know that someone had come out to Naaman, because Elisha had sent a messenger to him. So the messenger had come out. This would make *come out* old. Then what is new here? *He* is not new because *He* refers to Elisha. But isn't *He* contrasted with *messenger?* Naaman had expected personal attention from Elisha himself, but all he got was a mere messenger! So wouldn't you pointedly emphasize *He* and soft-pedal the next six words? Because the contrast is so great—infuriatingly so to Naaman!—couldn't you ac-

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centuate that contrast by emphasizing *messenger* as well as *He*? This would build up the contrast on *He*.

In "Behold, I thought" which is newer, *I* or *thought*? Isn't *thought* old by implication, and couldn't you contrast *I* with *Elisha*? (*I* thought *Elisha himself* would come out to me, but *Elisha* thought that a lowly *messenger* should come out to me.)

Doesn't this indicate Naaman's self-importance, a point which is lost if the reader stresses *thought*, or subdues both *I* and *thought*? Please note that this approach, through new and old ideas, is quite different from working with the sentence this way: "H'mm. Naaman was a very self-important man. How can I indicate this? What can I emphasize?"

This latter approach would be personal, depending on an assumption made by the reader. The new-and-old idea approach does not try to put meaning *into* the sentence, but *finds* it there.

In verse 12, aren't *Abana* and *Pharpar* contrasted with *Jordan*? Isn't *waters* implied in *rivers*? And isn't *Israel* in great contrast to *Damascus*, so that you would emphasize both *Israel* and *Damascus*? (You might lightly stress *all* as new.) This leaves you heavily stressing the big contrasts, *Abana, Pharpar, Damascus,* and *Israel,* and subduing *rivers* and *waters* as old.

In verse 12, is *wash* new? Naaman has already been told to wash; this makes *wash* old. Is *be clean* new? It was said in verse 10; so it's old. Then what is new in Naaman's question? Well, *them* (referring to Abana and Pharpar) is not new; on the other hand, doesn't Naaman indignantly contrast *them* with *Jordan*? So wouldn't *them* be the only stressed word in this question? (A good example of the fact that an old idea may need to be stressed.)

What about *and be clean* (verse 13)? Isn't being clean what Naaman's visit was all about—in addition to its having been mentioned in verses 10 and 12? So it strengthens the point if you subdue *and be clean*. Now let's go back to *great thing*. Which word is new, or which might be a contrast? Wouldn't the idea in *great* be the opposite of the idea in *wash*? Notice the interesting contrast between *great* and *wash;* "If he had asked you to do some *great* thing to be clean, wouldn't you have done it? Well, then, why not just *wash* and be clean?"

In these four verses, there are numerous other words, mainly new ideas rather than contrasts, which you may feel require some emphasis. But do you agree that your heavier emphasis would be on the out-and-out contrast words: *messenger* (verse 10); *I* and *He* (11); *Abana, Pharpar, Damascus, Israel, them* (12); *great, rather,* and *wash* (13)?

There are many situations in which a sentence requires a certain emphasis when read by itself, but needs a different emphasis if preceded by another—one that causes a different arrangement of new and old ideas in the second. This situation requires the application of a ramification of the new-and-old principle which we call *carry-over*.

We don't decide on one way of emphasizing a sentence and then settle back comfortably and say, "That's the way to read that sentence forevermore. Zzzzzzzz." There's nothing static, nothing cut-and-dried, about Analytical Reading. The sentence that immediately precedes another—or even sentences from a longer distance back—can make an old idea of something that otherwise would be new.

Probably the most common failing among oral readers is the failure to connect what is being read with what preceded it. It's fairly easy to bring out the meaning reasonably well in isolated phrases or even clauses, but in reading whole sentences and paragraphs it's more difficult to show what the writer is really saying. Some readers not only don't know how to relate a sentence to preceding sentences, but often don't even relate the last part to the first part of the same sentence.

If you're asked to read aloud a sequence of Bible verses arranged to establish a certain thought or theme, and you don't see and bring out the ideas carried over from one verse to another, you're presenting not a connected reading but merely excerpts from the Bible. (And they may sound like exactly that—unrelated excerpts—unless the phrasing and emphasis indicate the relationship by bringing out the carry-over.) Of course, this applies not only to the Bible but to any material that pursues a connected theme.

Let's look at Isaiah 2:22: "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." When this is read as an isolated verse, readers often emphasize *cease, man, breath,* and *nostrils*. But suppose you should read it following Genesis 2:7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

What would now be new in the Isaiah verse? Isn't every word (idea) old except *cease*? If you emphasize anything other than *cease*, see how you disconnect this verse from what you read before. If you leave out the carry-over, all you're leaving out is the point.

If you read "Shake thyself from the dust" (Isaiah 52:2), you might stress *dust* and, possibly, *shake*, as new ideas. But if you've just read Genesis 2:7—"the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground"—shouldn't this have a significant effect on the way you read the Isaiah verse? Wouldn't you now need to carry over by subduing *dust*, as old, and wouldn't the idea of "shaking from" be new? You'd have to decide which would sound more natural, more conversational, stressing *shake* or stressing *from*. That's up to your judgment as the reader.

Don't decide on one way of emphasizing a sentence and then settle back comfortably and say, "That's the way to read that sentence forevermore. Zzzzzzzzz!"

Whether we pause or not, or where we pause, has a great deal to do with whether we're giving out meaning accurately. Let's look at an Analytical Reading principle of phrasing called What Does It Modify or Belong With, which shows us how to decide which words a certain word or phrase belongs with, and how to phrase to show this relationship.

Romans 12:1 tells us to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." The word to be considered here is *acceptable*. Does it belong with *holy*? Or with *unto God*? Let's see what happens if we phrase it with *holy*, by not pausing after *holy*. Doesn't this sound as if it meant *wholly acceptable?* Since that's obviously not the meaning, we can show, by pausing after *holy* and not pausing before *unto*, that *acceptable* does not belong with *holy*. It's clear now that it means *consecrated and acceptable unto God*, rather than *entirely acceptable unto God*.

You see that by this phrasing principle we have actually defined a word, by showing that *holy* means *consecrated*, not *entirely*. We have even spelled a word for the listener, by letting him know whether it means *holy* or *wholly*, since they sound just alike.

In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the Duke of Clarence tells Brakenbury about his horrible dream and how it frightened him. Brakenbury replies, "I promise you, I am afraid to hear you tell it." I once heard a prominent actor read this line with no pause after *afraid*. All this meant was: I'm afraid for you to tell it to me.

Can this be the meaning? No, because Clarence has already told it to him. Doesn't it mean: just hearing you *tell* it is frightening? Shouldn't Brakenbury have paused after *afraid*? This alone would have suggested his real meaning, but stressing the second *I* and *tell* and subduing *afraid* would make the meaning unmistakable. (No wonder you were afraid. *I* am afraid, just hearing you *tell* it!)

Moral: How many people can follow behind the actor and in their own minds clear up the phrasing and emphasis until they find the meaning? This actor gave us the finest ingredients—velvety voice, exquisite diction, strong emotions ("it was the *best* butter!")—but where was the cake? I had to make my own.

Many of Paul's (or his translator's) sentences are bafflingly involved, their intricate wording packed with meaning. For example, Galatians 3:8: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed."

Ask yourself: What does *the gospel* go with? With *before*? If so, what would *before the gospel* mean? In front of the gospel? Previously to the gospel? Hardly. Well, then, does *the gospel* go with *preached*? Isn't that what it means—preached the gospel? Then this defines *before* as meaning *beforehand*. Preached the gospel beforehand. (This phrasing principle has again defined a word.) Naturally you can't connect *gospel* with *preached*, because of the intervening words, but you can indicate this relationship by disconnecting *the gospel* from *before*, by pausing after *before*.

Now, what does *unto Abraham* go with? Is it *gospel unto Abraham*? Isn't it rather *preached unto Abraham*? Beforehand the scripture preached unto Abraham the gospel. Or, the scripture preached the gospel unto Abraham beforehand.

Well, since we've uncovered the meaning through this principle, let's learn from it how to bring out this meaning. Seeing that *the gospel* doesn't go with *before* shows us that *before* has to go with *preached*; so we do not pause after *preached*. Seeing that *the gospel* does go with *preached* rather than with *before*, we do pause after *before*. To avoid ambiguity, both the pauses and the connections require attention.

You'll see the opportunities—in fact the need!—for this phrasing principle wherever you look or listen. As in this ad I saw recently: "Eat anything with false teeth."

The intention of Analytical Reading is not to influence the reader's thinking but primarily to pose questions—to be answered by whom? By the reader himself in the light of logical principles, so that he sees possibilities he might otherwise have missed.

Analytical Reading lifts the veil of archaic wording from the Bible and Shakespeare and lets the reader see through the words to the ideas. It serves to uncover the meaning in anything you read. It draws the hearer's attention from the reader and his style to the writer and what *he* is saying.

Best of all—as many can testify—instead of stifling inspiration, reading with meaning actually increases it.

And what could be more inspiring than suddenly seeing the healing message of a Bible verse?

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