



What is the Narrative Lectionary?

The Narrative Lectionary is a set calendar of Scripture readings that can be used in worship. In comparison to some other lectionaries, the Narrative Lectionary narrows the number of readings per Sunday (and other festival days) to one main “preaching” or focus text, instead of three to four passages. Each Sunday also is assigned an “accompanying text,” or a short additional reading that is either from the Gospel for that year (if the focus text is not from a Gospel) or from the Psalms (if the focus text is from a Gospel).

The Narrative Lectionary starts in September with a story about creation and touches on the major stories, characters, and plot points in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) until mid-December (through the Third Sunday of Advent). At that point, the lectionary picks up one of the four Gospels (one Gospel each year for the four-year cycle) and moves through many of the main stories or passages of that Gospel in order (mostly) through the Sunday after Easter. From the Third Sunday of Easter through Pentecost Sunday, the readings are pulled from Acts and the Letters. The readings line up with the major church festivals (Christmas, Transfiguration Sunday, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost). The main lectionary is not a full twelve months long, but approximately 9 months, following a “typical” American school year.

Who created the Narrative Lectionary?

The Narrative Lectionary is the creation mainly of two Bible professors at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, Drs. Craig Koester and Rolf Jacobson, working together with a growing community of congregations. Dr. Koester teaches one of the most popular courses at the seminary, a weeklong January term course called “Genesis to Revelation.” As the name suggests, the course is a fast introduction to the Bible from beginning to end. This class is also available through Great Courses as Reading Biblical Literature: Genesis to Revelation. The class originated in Dr. Koester’s congregation, where around 80 people attended over the course of a year. The idea caught on as a lectionary for worship and preaching when Dr. Jacobson threw out the idea at a regional synod assembly (multi-congregation annual meeting) in 2010. Since then, Dr. Jacobson, with the help of others, creates and adjusts the Narrative Lectionary through the website WorkingPreacher.org. In 2017-2018, the Narrative Lectionary finished its second full cycle.

Why should anyone use the Narrative Lectionary?

The main purpose for using the Narrative Lectionary in a congregational context is to increase biblical literacy in worshippers. Frankly put, most people don’t know the Bible, even your ever-Sunday attendees. Many people know a number of different Bible stories (from one story on up), but most do not know how to put them in order, or how they are connected. And, most of the stories known are from the Gospels.

The Narrative Lectionary is one tool to increase biblical literacy. By narrowing the assigned reading to one main Scripture passage each week, more attention can be paid by worshippers and preachers to that single passage. Many times, preachers and teachers summarize what has happened in the larger biblical story since the previous week to help connect the dots.

Why narrative?

A narrative is a story. And, stories are important for us; they are how we understand the world and our place in it. A series of facts is not powerful unless there is a compelling story connecting them. Stories form our worldviews and our identities. Stories form our faith.

Is the Bible really a single story?

The Bible is a library of writings from a long period of time containing many different genres of literature. However, running through it all is a story about how the Creator of the universe guided one tribe of people from its beginning, through slavery, war, exile, and return and then expanded that nation to include people from every time and place through the surprising work of a Messiah, all to spread God's kingdom throughout the world. This epic story defined the original audience and continues to form the identities of those who still hold this story sacred.

What about the Revised Common Lectionary? Don't all churches use that?

The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) is a three-year cycle of Scripture readings with four assigned readings each Sunday and festival day (usually Old Testament, Psalm, Letter, and Gospel). Churches throughout the world use the RCL. However, while the use of lectionaries goes back hundreds of years, the RCL itself was published in its current form in 1994, tracing its direct lineage from the *Ordo Lectionum Missae* (1969) created by the Roman Catholic Church. Although the RCL (in various forms) is very common in liturgical denominations, even there it is not universal. There are many churches and denominations who do not use a lectionary; instead the pastor or others select Bible readings themselves. What unites the Body of Christ is not the use of the same lectionary, but Christ through the Holy Spirit.

How many churches use the Narrative Lectionary?

Congregations are not required to sign up or purchase resources to use the Narrative Lectionary, so it is not possible to calculate statistics or demographics related to all who use the Narrative Lectionary. Even among those who use it, many follow the Narrative Lectionary for only a certain period of time or change it to fit their context. For some idea of numbers, the Narrative Lectionary Facebook group has over 6,000 members as of March 2018. In 2017, Spirit & Truth Publishing sold resources to over 450 congregations in over 24 different denominations. From observation, it seems that the majority of Narrative Lectionary users are from English-speaking countries, primarily the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

Should you start with Year 1? Do you have to start in September?

The primary decision-making priorities for those congregations who decide to use the Narrative Lectionary should be based on their contexts and goals. There is no one way you "must" use it. Most congregations do start at the beginning in September and use the "assigned" year (e.g. use Year 1 (Matthew) in 2018-2019). The benefit of starting in September is that worshippers are able to start at the beginning of the story, learning some of the important stories and characters in the oft-neglected Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). The benefit of using the current year of the lectionary is for the creative fellowship of others using it (the Narrative Lectionary Facebook group is great for that), and the most up-to-date resources are focused on that year (like ours). However, others start around Christmas with the Gospel readings or whenever works best for them!

What happens in the summer?

Drs. Rolf Jacobson, Craig Koester, and others at Working Preacher (the website/organization who publicizes the Narrative Lectionary) have created a series of three to four modules each year that can be used over the course of the summer (each being about one month long), usually focusing on a single biblical book or a topic. Not all Narrative Lectionary congregations use the summer lectionary, and there are often less resources that support it.

What does Spirit & Truth Publishing do to support the Narrative Lectionary?

Spirit & Truth Publishing produces faith formation resources that correspond to and support the Narrative Lectionary. Our *Living the Word (Narrative Lectionary)* series includes nine different products for each of the four years of the Narrative Lectionary, from elementary classroom-style curricula to interactive, intergenerational worship resources. You can find resources for all ages!

Do you need to use the Narrative Lectionary in worship to use your *Living the Word* products?

No! While we follow the Narrative Lectionary in the choosing of the Scripture lessons we cover, you can use all of our *Living the Word* products (with the exception of one) to teach the story of God through the Bible without using the Narrative Lectionary in worship. The only exception is our *Living the Word: Cross+Generational Worship* resource, a product that provides an interactive, intergenerational liturgy (order of service) for worship written around each Narrative Lectionary reading.

What other resources exist to support the Narrative Lectionary?

There is a relatively small but growing list of resource providers that support the Narrative Lectionary. A few are:

- Working Preacher (Assigns the NL readings, includes background resources for preaching)
- Narrative Lectionary Facebook Group (An online community of NL users and interested people)
- Rev Gal Blog Pals (A weekly blog on NL texts)
- Clergy Stuff (Worship resources)
- Warner Press (Adult study)
- Spill the Beans (Worship & educational resources)