

How to Host Your Own Public Evangelical Reading

1. Have your own prayerful experience of the script first. Ask God to push the affirmations, lament, and repentance deep into your own heart first.
2. Talk about the idea with four-five other friends who, along with you, will become your first confirmed readers. They will be your team to help with script decision, logistics and publicity.
3. Decide on a script and then stick to it. You are obviously welcome to use the one provided on this webpage, but you are of course free to rewrite the introduction, the transitions, or the conclusion—and you are free to use other components besides Labberton's text, Reclaiming Jesus, the Prayer of Lament, or the song Amazing Grace. But decide on a script early on because you will want to give your Readers a chance to choose a section which they can read with integrity and passion (See Step #5), and you will want to give attendees a chance to preview the script with no surprises (See Step #7). If you do rewrite a script, i.e. choosing one other than on this webpage, you will have to figure out how to make that script available to the curious (e.g. through your own webpage, a Facebook group, hard copies, etc.)
4. Choose a date, a time, and a venue. The whole event requires about 40 minutes. As for venue, the Public Evangelical Reading can be held in a living room or in a church sanctuary. Nonetheless, we believe there is great value in holding the event in a *public* setting, such as in a city park. Our reasons include: 1) it allows for an open invitation to any number of people who want to attend; 2) it is less threatening to those who want to come simply as listeners or witnesses; 3) it is in keeping with the "public" nature of our declaration whereby we make ourselves accountable to society for our affirmations; 4) it provides visibility to a portion of evangelicalism which is often hidden by louder, more divisive national figures. You may need to officially book the venue and there may be costs involved.
5. Begin recruiting sixteen total readers and one song leader. Ask them to read the script first (available on this page) and let them sign up for that portion of the script that is most meaningful to them, or that they can read with the most conviction. Don't randomly assign readings. For example, men should probably read the Reclaiming Jesus parts 3A and 3B as the group repents for sexism and misogyny. Similarly, white readers should be the one verbalizing our rejection of white supremacy in Reclaiming Jesus parts 2A and 2B. The song leader may or may not wish to use a guitar. He or she is simply starting us in three stanzas of "Amazing Grace."
6. Having recruited sixteen readers and a song leader, please rest confidently that you have achieved critical mass. Even if all you have on the night of the event is seventeen people, it will feel like a public event. It will allow people to feel that "they are not alone" in this moment of crisis. It is a large enough group to be noticed by others. These people will become your publicizers and mobilizers as you seek more than seventeen participants.

7. As you begin to publicize the event, it is important that all people, especially local pastors, have an opportunity to read the script ahead of time, so make sure to direct people to the webpage where they can read the script on line. Some potential participants will be quite skittish. They are afraid they will be asked to make an affirmation that they are not ready for. The public nature of the event can be scary, even for people who are just showing up to listen. Additionally, you will want to give them the assurance that what they see in the script is ALL that the Public Evangelical Reading will be. In other words, once the script is read, then the event is over. There will be no surprises from organizers. We advise you to make this promise, and then keep it—so make sure you have a script that you can you stand behind without any last minute revisions (see Step #3).

8. Publicize your event. Here's some ideas:

- word of mouth and personal invitations
- design and place flyers in coffee shops and community bulletin boards. Include an end time to the event (e.g. "7 -7:40 pm") so that people know how to plan.
- hand out flyers to pastors and local Christian leaders. Certainly invite all evangelicals, but also invite other Christians and non-Christians to come as listeners and as witnesses to your affirmations.
- post regularly on social media, and encourage people to "like" and "share."
- start a local Public Evangelical Reading Facebook group.
- write a letter to the editor to your local newspaper. Describe why you are part of this event, and extend an invitation to the public. Include a link to your script or to www.reclaimingjesus.org
- take out an ad in your local newspaper that reprints all or some of the text from www.reclaimingjesus.org
- It is difficult to convey on the flyers or on the webpage the "WHY?" of why you are having this Public Evangelical Reading. Neither do you want to scare off people with blatantly provocative images or statements. Instead, our first group in Manhattan, KS, encouraged our Readers, in the week before the event, to post short two-minute videos on their Facebook walls describing the reasons why they are a reader. They shot the videos simply with their phones, and it was quite fascinating and touching to hear the different reasons. These videos also attracted more attendees and also stimulated interest in other communities for having their own Public Evangelical Reading since each person's Facebook reach is different.
- decide whether or not you want to alert local newspapers or media outlets to cover the event.

9. Arrange for a sound system, if necessary. In most cases a single microphone and amp will do. Some of your Readers may have soft voices and sometimes sound may be carried away in an open space, so amplification is advisable, just in case. If you don't have a sound system, or if your group grew unexpectedly large, you can:

- advise your Readers to write extra loudly
- break the crowd into two groups and either quickly recruit a second set of readers; or stagger your readers so that the convener reads first to one group and then moves over to the second group, followed by the Labberton reader, followed by the

Reclaiming Reader. At which point, you may want to have the first group wait until the second group is done with all the readings and then sing Amazing Grace as one large group.

10. For the event itself:

- have seventeen scripts available for your Readers, with their parts clearly marked.
- encourage Readers to arrive 10 minutes early for handing out scripts, familiarizing with the venue, and praying briefly together.
- do a mic check.
- have hand-outs available at the end. (See attached.) These hand-outs allow people to read the entirety of Labberton's excellent address, encourage them to pass the idea of this Reading on to another community, and reach out to you for any further organizing as we seek to put "feet to our prayers" when it comes to tackling these issues.
- make sure to linger around after the event. For many people this will be a much-longed for moment when they finally feel like they are surrounded by like-minded compatriots in the faith. Be on hand to listen to stories and provide comfort and hope.

11. Next steps after the event:

- Pray for the effects of this Reading to permeate your community.
- Just because you've hosted this event once, doesn't mean that you can't do it again four to six months later, or as things continue to unfold in the national news, or as evangelicals seek to discern their role in the 2018 midterm elections.
- Try to recruit at least one other friend elsewhere in the country to do what you've just done: host a Public Evangelical Reading of their own. Alert them to this webpage.
- Be open to organizing local efforts and participating in national and global ones which practically work for the affirmations that you have made.
- Having once made your affirmations public, keep them public. Be willing to graciously confront others when you see these values violated.



**Thank you
for participating in the
Public Evangelical
Reading**

To read the full text of Dr. Mark Labberton's
address to the Wheaton meeting:

<https://www.fuller.edu/posts/political-dealing-the-crisis-of-evangelicalism/>

To host your own Public Evangelical Reading:
or to promote it in other communities:

<http://www.theliberator.today/public-evangelical-reading/>

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