

## **MINISTERING TO PEOPLE WITH DYSLEXIA**

### **Sample responses from FIEC churches**

#### **A. CHANGING ATTITUDES**

Many churches have become literacy dependant. In my view, the mindset needs to be the first to change, before we consider the way we use the resources.

Develop one-on-one mentoring relationships which are audio verbal focused rather than printed page in emphasis. The key is relational.

In our discipleship course we put people in a small group with those who would be happy to go at their pace.

Our evening service is done café-style. It is very informal and interactive, and it seems to communicate with people across the age/intellect spectrum.

What we have done - more by accident than design - is to spend time with people on a one-to-one basis, helping them as they struggle with reading and numeracy. One lady has no problem with reading; what she can't cope with is numbers. So whoever sits next to her in whatever meeting she is at is encouraged without any fuss to find the hymns for her. My own son-in-law is dyslexic, as one of his tee-shirts declares, 'I dyslexia love', the love is in the shape of a heart, and so he is part of a small group of young men around his age who share and study together, though the others in the group do not have dyslexia problems.

Our discipleship is quite conversationally-focused and individualised, enabling individuals to find what the next step is for them in their growing in Christ. Hearing the word of God can come via the internet or CDs nowadays, so personal Bible study need not be a barrier. Prayer, service and fellowship need not be literacy-based.

Many dyslexic people are intelligent, but struggle with aspects of literacy. Having being diagnosed dyslexic myself, I now tend to ask people who call themselves dyslexic how their particular form of dyslexia manifests itself. Briefly, you have people of varying intelligence, with a variety of processing speeds, with varying abilities to read the words on the page (or guess what they say), and who vary in their ability to remember them. You also have a variety of abilities in how they can articulate what they understand from those words. For example, I can read the Bible nearly word-perfect, but not remember what it says. Others may have a great memory, but not be able to actually read it. Therefore, in one-to-one Bible study, just fit the way you use the course to the strengths and weaknesses of the individual. Sometimes, as a dyslexic, someone affirming the strengths you have is a real blessing. Sadly, I think we have become reading dependent to the stage where we betray the sense that if you are a booky type, you will be a 'good Christian' because you will progress well and grow. If you are not booky, you will struggle to grow. This is clearly not true, but somehow it oozes out of our DNA (if that is not mixing metaphors!)

Many dyslexics are slow readers but love books; some dyslexics can't just read books, they have to talk about them. I process verbally, so I have to talk! This is a great benefit in one-to-one work, or in small group Bible study. It may be that 'Book Clubs' are just as enjoyable for dyslexics; they might just need a little bit of care and guidance, and may need to hide what would most help them.

A young boy never got on well at school because his reading was not good. Think of him taking a risk in asking an older guy to read the Bible with him. In conversation, the older guy realises that although the questions in the Bible study are good, this young chap responds best to verbal questions and Bible study by listening twice to the MP3 Bible and following it in their hands also. By care, and the slightly slower pace, the young guy not only has the time to comprehend what it says, but the Spirit brings life to his heart and illuminates the word in front of him. He knows that words are no barrier to understanding God. He also knows he has a friend who cares so much that he will slow the pace to share the Lord.

## B. ACCESSING RESOURCES

"Causeway" may be of help; their ministry is to people with learning difficulties and they produce a number of materials that are in an easy read form, they also produce a simple to read Bible version, which was originally done for use with signing. We have found it very useful in working with folk with various levels of learning difficulties.

Their contact details are  
Tony and Tua Phelps-Jones  
tel. 0118 951 6978  
email: [causeway@prospects.org.uk](mailto:causeway@prospects.org.uk)  
web address: [www.prospects.org.uk](http://www.prospects.org.uk)

Resources can be obtained from:

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk) it is a national charity and our vision is that of a dyslexia friendly society that enables dyslexic people of all ages to reach their full potential.

There are the excellent "Faith comes by hearing" resources.  
We had a whole church drive to use these recorded Bible CDs and tapes.  
Link here -

<http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/resources22/bibles-2/audio-bibles-2/>

"Through The Roof" would be able to give general advice.

[www.throughtheroof.org](http://www.throughtheroof.org)

This blog might be of use - <http://transforminggrace.wordpress.com/2010/01/26/dyslexia-and-christian-ministry/>

Here are some other resources:

- "Read and Write Gold" text-to-speech software
- MP3 Bible (available from Amazon and can be uploaded to an mp3 player, i-phone, computer etc)
- Christianity Explored in simple English.
- Anyone who can speak rather than write questions. Alternatively, the church can buy an mp3 recorder for a member of the congregation so that they can 'listen' to notices and Bible studies rather than reading them.

Preachers should only use technical language when it is necessary and clearly explained.

Choose the right Bible versions; the ones we use are often beyond the comprehension of many. Actually, the Good News version often fits the Bill; the NIV can be understood by many but not all.

Avoid PowerPoint slides being too busy - just a picture can be a window into a sermon - whereas lots of words can be a barrier.

There is a place for the repetitive song.

I have tutored children known to me who are dyslexic and also one adult. At the present moment I am helping my next door neighbour's twin daughters who are almost 8 years old who had difficulties reading and spelling. They need to have rules of spelling and grammar in a very structured way. As these children are young we want back to the beginning. I used material that 5 year old children would use but also adapted a book called Alpha to Omega which is the A-Z of teaching reading writing and spelling. This book was used by a friend of mine who taught young offenders. They are now making good progress. The mother of these children is also dyslexic and so is their older sister who has just finished her first year at university as it tends to run in families. The older girl was given coloured sheet of Perspex to put over the book page which helped as the words often blend into one for dyslexics but they need to find out the correct colour for each person. They also find it difficult to remember anything in sequence as in days of the week or months of the year and are generally disorganised. Repetition, repetition is the only answer. They find that they can only study in short periods and have to have breaks. They need longer to read questions and are allowed extra time in exams.

The good news is that most churches still have the preaching of the word as a central part of the service. Verbal information is the best for dyslexic people. The rise of MP3 sermons is a great step forward. Sometimes, a dyslexic who processes a little slower might have to listen to the sermon twice. Praise God that we live in the age of MP3 sermons, MP3 Bibles, MP3 books and programs on the computer that can read the text to us. This brings me on to the next stage.

Many resources are 'dyslexic friendly' now. Computer programs can read text to you, MP3 Bibles are cheap, many people know what help they need, so that churches can enable people to take part with a little adjustment. Probably best to be speaking to the individual involved.

Visuals really help. Visuals help people engage. I believe most dyslexics think in pictures, when 'normal' people thinking words. Therefore, a sermon with three headings is more likely to be remembered by a dyslexic for the pictures you use, rather than the words that you use. I remember a sheet from Sunday with a tearful boy on the front, scales in the middle and a baby on the back. This helps me to remember the main points. In short, use visuals.

Lastly, dyslexia is a gift given by a sovereign God. There are as many strengths of dyslexia that I have found as there are weaknesses. God blesses his church with people of all different intelligences, abilities and 'ways of doing things'. Praise God that we live at an age where people are more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. I know it is difficult for the leaders of the church to speak to a wide range of these differences, but it does remind us that our infinitely wise creator makes us all different. Why? Because it brings glory to him! Just two little visions of this to end with. Think of a highly intelligent 'booky' preacher who labours hard to make the difficult concepts he has grasped in huge theological books simple and visual so that a chap in the congregation who has always struggled with reading can grasp the wonder of his creator and praise him in spirit and in truth. Think of the difference that makes in a world that looks down on him because he cannot read so well, when he understands that no-one has the ability to fully comprehend God, but he grasps something of infinite value through the words he hears. This man also knows his pastor loves him so much that he labours to leave his world of safety and risk to engage people that live differently.

Remember that Einstein was Dyslexic!

RJU  
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