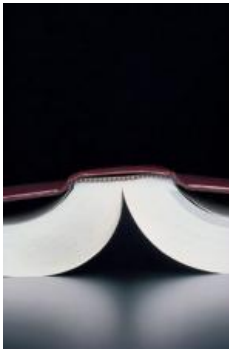


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Some Thoughts on the Reading of Books

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I cannot really remember when I did not love to read books. I do know that I was very eager to learn to read, and that I quickly found myself immersed in the world of books and literature. It may have been a seduction of sorts, and the Christian disciple must always be on guard to guide the eyes to books worthy of a disciple's attention — and there are so many.

As Solomon warned, “Of making many books there is no end” [[Ecclesiastes: 12:12](#)]. There is no way to read everything, and not everything deserves to be read. I say that in order to confront the notion that anyone, anywhere, can master all that could be read with profit. I read a great deal, and a large portion of my waking hours are devoted to reading. Devotional reading for spiritual profit is an important part of the day, and that begins with the reading of Scripture. In terms of timing, I am somewhat unorthodox. My best time for spending time in the Word is late at night, when all is calm and quiet and I am mentally alert and awake. That is not the case when I first get up in the mornings, when I struggle to find each word on the page (or anything else, for that matter).

In the course of any given week, I will read several books. I know how much I thrive on this learning and the intellectual stimulation I get from reading. As my wife and family would be first to tell you, I can read almost anytime, anywhere, under almost any kind of conditions. I have a book with me virtually all the time, and have been known to snatch a few moments for reading at stop lights. No, I do not read while driving (though I must admit that it has been a temptation at times). I took books to high school athletic events when I played in the band. [Heap coals of scorn and nerdliness here.] I remember the books — do you remember the games?

A few initial suggestions:

1. Maintain regular reading projects. I strategize my reading in six main categories: Theology, Biblical Studies, Church Life, History, Cultural Studies, and Literature. I have some project from each of these categories going at all times. I collect and gather books for each project, and read them over a determined period of time. This helps to discipline my reading, and also keeps me working across several disciplines.

2. Work through major sections of Scripture. I am just completing an expository series, preaching verse by verse through the book of Romans. I have preached and taught several books of the Bible in recent years, and I plan my reading to stay ahead. I am turning next to Matthew, so I am gathering and reading ahead — not yet planning specific messages, but reading to gain as much as possible from worthy works on the first gospel. I am constantly reading works in biblical theology as well as exegetical studies.

3. Read all the titles written by some authors. Choose carefully here, but identify some authors whose books demand your attention. Read all they have written and watch their minds at work and their thought in development. No author can complete his thoughts in one book, no matter how large.

4. Get some big sets and read them through. Yes, invest in the works of Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, and others. Set a project for yourself to read through the entire set, and give yourself time. You will be surprised how far you will get in less time than you think.

5. Allow yourself some fun reading, and learn how to enjoy reading by reading enjoyable books. I like books across the fields of literature, but I really love to read historical biographies and historical works in general. In addition, I really enjoy quality fiction and worthy works of literature. As a boy, I probably discovered my love for reading in these categories of books. I allow some time each day, when possible, to such reading. It doesn't have to be much. Stay in touch with the thrill.

6. Write in your books; mark them up and make them yours. Books are to be read and used, not collected and coddled. [Make an exception here for those rare antiquarian books that are treasured for their antiquity. Mark not thy pen on the ancient page, and highlight not upon the manuscript.] Invent your own system or borrow from another, but learn to have a conversation with the book, pen in hand.

I would write more for this post, but I must go read. More later. For now: *Tolle! Lege*

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