

Learning to Read to the Glory of God

- I. Why Read
  - a. We are a people of the Book (Deut. 31:26; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Psalm 119, 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21)
  - b. Hunger & Thirst for Righteousness (Matt. 5:6)
    - i. Humility (Prov. 1:5; 9:9)
    - ii. Walking with Wise (Prov. 13:20)

Descartes, "The reading of all good books is like conversation with the finest men of the past centuries."

- c. For Leadership (Titus 1:9)

Harry S. Truman, "Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers."

Andrew Purves, *The Crucifixion of Ministry: Surrendering Our Ambitions to the Service of Christ* (IVP, 2007), 44-45:

To ministers let me say this as strongly as I can. Preach Christ, preach Christ, preach Christ.

Get out of your offices and get into your studies.

Quit playing office manager and program director, quit staffing committees, and even right now recommit yourselves to what you were ordained to do, namely the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

Pick up good theology books again: hard books, classical texts, great theologians.

Claim the energy and time to study for days and days at a time.

Disappear for long hours because you are reading Athanasius on the person of Jesus Christ or Wesley on sanctification or Augustine on the Trinity or Calvin on the Christian life or Andrew Murray on the priesthood of Christ. Then you will have something to say that's worth hearing.

Remember that exegesis is for preaching and teaching; it has no other use.

So get out those tough commentaries and struggle in depth with the texts.

Let most of what you do be dominated by the demands of the sermon as if your whole life and reason for being is to preach Christ, because it is.

Claim a new authority for the pulpit, the Word of God, Jesus Christ, over you and your people.

Commit yourself again to ever more deeply becoming a careful preacher of Christ.

Don't preach to grow your congregation; preach to bear witness to what the Lord is doing, and let him grow your church.

Dwell in him, abide in him, come to know him ever more deeply and convertedly.

Tell the people what he has to say to them, what he is doing among them and within them, and what it is he wants them to share in.

He is up to something in your neighborhood, if you have the eyes to see and the ears to hear.

Develop a christological hermeneutic for all you do and say. Why? Because there is no other name, that's why.

- II. What to Read
  - a. The Bible (Psalm 119)
  - b. Broadly, but not indiscriminately

Charles Spurgeon, reflecting on 2 Timothy 4:13:

(Where Paul said to Timothy: "When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments"): We do not know what the books were about, and we can only form some guess as to what the parchments were. Paul had a few books which were left, perhaps wrapped up in the cloak, and Timothy was to be careful to bring them.

Even an apostle must read.

Some of our very ultra-Calvinistic brethren think that a minister who reads books and studies his sermon must be a very deplorable specimen of a preacher. A man who comes up into the pulpit, professes to take his text on the spot and talks any quantity of nonsense is the idol of many. If he will speak without premeditation, or pretend to do so, and never produce what they call a dish of dead men's brains—oh, that is the preacher!

How rebuked they are by the apostle!

He is inspired, and yet he wants books!

He has been preaching for at least thirty years, and yet he wants books!

He had seen the Lord, and yet he wants books!

He had had a wider experience than most men, and yet wants books!

He had been caught up into the Third Heaven and had heard things which it was unlawful for a man to utter, yet he wants books!

He had written the major part of the New Testament, and yet he wants books!

The apostle says to Timothy, and so he says to every preacher, "Give attendance to reading" (1 Tim. 4:13).

The man who never reads will never be read.

He who never quotes will never be quoted.

He who will not use the thoughts of other men's brains proves that he has no brains of his own.

Brethren, what is true of ministers is true of all our people. You need to read. Renounce as much as you will all light literature, but study as much as possible sound theological works, especially the Puritanic writers and expositions of the Bible.

### III. How to Read

#### a. Plan

Francis Bacon, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few are to be chewed and digested."

##### i. Plan to read hard stuff:

5 pages/day, 5 days/week, 50 weeks/year = 1,250 pages/year = Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*

10 pages/day, 5 days/week, 50 weeks/year = 2,500 pages/year = 2 Vol. Edition of Calvin's *Institutes*

15 pages/day, 5 days/week, 50 weeks/year = 3,750 pages/year = Bavinck's 4 Vol. *Reformed Dogmatics*

##### ii. Read what you enjoy

##### iii. Read what others you trust recommend

#### b. Read to your children/grandchildren

C. S. Lewis, "A children's story that can only be enjoyed by children is not a good children's story in the slightest."

Emilie Buchwald, "Children are made readers on the laps of their parents."

### IV. When to Read

#### a. When you're awake! ☺

John Piper, "Fight for Your Life" in *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*:

I agree with Martyn Lloyd-Jones that the fight to find time to read is a fight for one's life. "Let your wife or anyone else take messages for you, and inform the people telephoning that you are not available. One literally has to fight for one's life in this sense!"

Most of our people have no idea what two or three new messages a week cost us in terms of intellectual and spiritual drain. Not to mention the depletions of family pain, church decisions, and imponderable theological and moral dilemmas. I, for one, am not a self-replenishing spring. My bucket leaks, even when it is not pouring. My spirit does not revive on the run. Without time of unhurried reading and reflection, beyond the press of sermon preparation, my soul shrinks, and the specter of ministerial death rises. Few things frighten me more than the beginnings of barrenness that come from frenzied activity with little spiritual food and meditation.

The great pressure on us today is to be productive managers. But the need of the church is for prayerful, spiritual poets. I don't mean (necessarily) pastors who write poems. I mean pastors who feel the weight and glory of eternal reality even in the midst of a business meeting; who carry in their soul such a sense of God that they provide, by their very presence, a constant life-giving reorientation on the infinite God. For your own soul and for the life of your church, fight for time to feed your soul with rich reading.

Reading to Encourage/Shape Your Reading:

Adler, Mortimer Jerome, and Charles Lincoln Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972.

Ascol, Thomas K. *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry*. Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2004. (chapters 12, 13, & 14)

Jacobs, Alan. *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Naselli, Andrew David. "D. A. Carson's Theological Method," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, Vol. 29 Num. 2 Autumn 2011, pgs. 245-274.  
([http://andynaselli.com/wp-content/uploads/2011\\_Carson.pdf](http://andynaselli.com/wp-content/uploads/2011_Carson.pdf))

Piper, John, C. Samuel Storms, and Justin Taylor. *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010. (chapter 25)

Piper, John, D. A. Carson, David Mathis, and Owen Strachan. *The Pastor As Scholar & the Scholar As Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2011.

Reinke, Tony. *Lit!: A Christian Guide to Reading Books*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2011.  
(Study questions by David Murray: <http://headhearhand.org/uploads/2012/03/Lit-Questions.doc> & <http://headhearhand.org/uploads/2012/03/Lit-Questions.pdf>)