

The High Calling

a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society

You Are What You Read

By Stan Key

The onslaught of eating disorders and the appearance of many food-related diseases have given rise to a plethora of movements promoting healthy eating habits. The campaign for a more nutritional diet has made us aware of the correlation between our health and our diet. Eating too much makes us fat. Eating too little makes us anorexic. Eating junk food makes us unhealthy. And bingeing and purging makes us emotionally unstable. As the slogan says, you are what you eat.

In a similar way, our spiritual health is determined by the books we read and the voices we heed. Just as there are eating disorders that destroy our physical well-being, there are disorders in the spiritual realm related to our spiritual diet. Tragically, many believers today either do nothing to nourish their soul or try to subsist on a



sporadic diet of spiritual junk food. Others are gluttons for fine spiritual cuisine, but lack of exercise has made them obese. Still others prefer to binge and purge. Brethren, these things ought not to be!

This issue of *The High Calling* is devoted to books, and our aim is to encourage you to read and to read wisely.

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Read, Read, Read!

By Gene Edward Veith



This article is an excerpt of the *World* magazine article, "Flex the Brain" (Issue: "Sciavo: Saved by the bell," Nov. 1, 2003, www.worldmag.com/2003/flex_the_brain).

Christianity depends on reading. Therefore, Christians have to read. These are overstatements—obviously, many illiterate persons over the centuries have had faith—but they emphasize that God has chosen to communicate Himself to us by handing us a Book. Christian spirituality is grounded not in having visions, not in hearing voices inside our heads, not in cultivating mystical experiences, but in receiving the Word of God. That is, by reading.

The word *bible* simply means "book," and in the Holy Bible, God speaks not just about history, theology, and objective information. He also speaks to its reader and hearer personally, to the heart and the soul. Every genre of literature is contained in the Holy Book, from gripping narratives to passionate poetry, from mind-teasing parables to personal letters. A personal relationship to God, like human relationships, is built on the medium of language, of two people communicating with each other.

The Christian speaks to God in prayer; God speaks back by means of His Word. So Christians dare not despise reading. In fact, where Christianity has gone, literacy has always followed.

Arthur W. Hunt in his book, *The Vanishing Word*, shows how Christianity and the written word have prospered together. He also shows what happens when the habit of reading is lost and people orient themselves instead to sensate images. Reading encourages thinking, reflecting, and cultivation of truth, but image cultures tend to be driven by subjectivism, superstition, hedonism, and propaganda.

Today we have become a nation of channel surfers, and we are paying the price in political apathy, moral indifference, and the mad pursuit of sensation. Even our books are often reduced to the entertainment formulas of the pop culture. The old problem was illiteracy, that many people could not read. Today, although illiteracy remains even in products of our school system, the bigger problem is aliteracy; that many *can* read but never do.

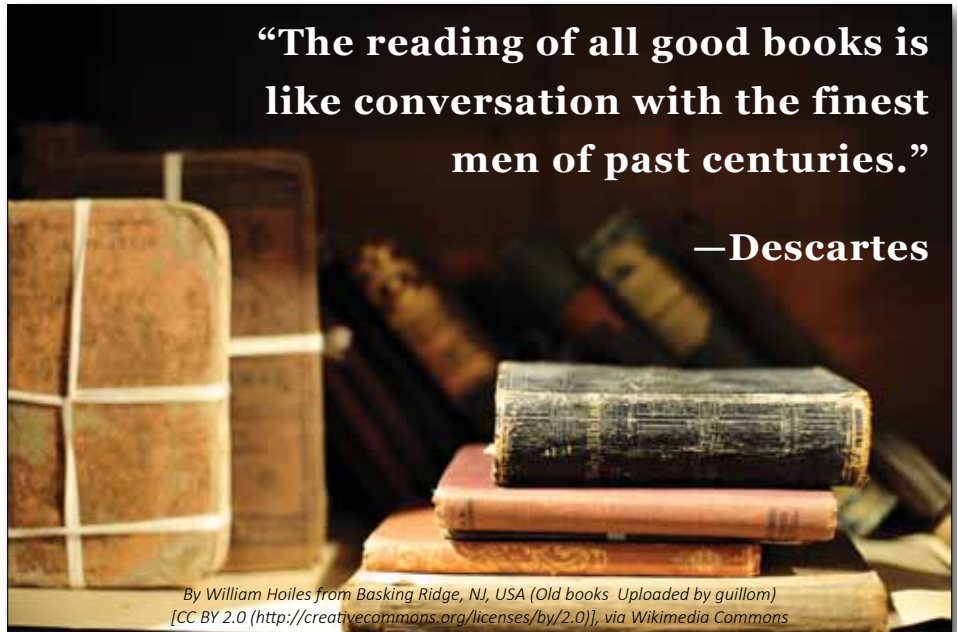
So what should we read? If the larger purpose of reading is to exercise our minds and our imaginations—and,

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Five Books that Changed My Life

Lists from Friends of The Francis Asbury Society

The *High Calling* asked a select group of people to list the top five books that changed their lives as Christians. The responses were enthusiastic, and the lists are fascinating. Several of the respondents noted how difficult the assignment was and acknowledged that, on a different day, they might have offered a different list. All were told to limit their list to five selections and to submit books “other than the Bible.” As you can see, our guidelines were not always strictly followed (😊). We allowed each respondent to explain briefly the reason for their selections, if they wished. As much as was possible, we’ve tried to publish these lists in the form in which we received them. We think you will be as intrigued by them as we are.



“The reading of all good books is like conversation with the finest men of past centuries.”

—Descartes

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John N. Oswalt

Author, Professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, and Speaker with The Francis Asbury Society



1. *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis (actually everything he wrote)—Christianity makes sense.
2. *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers—like a cold shower; realistic, full-bore, unsentimental Christianity.
3. *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross—makes one face the question, do I want God or do I want feelings of God?
4. *The Shadow of the Almighty* by Elizabeth Elliott—Jim Elliott’s devotion to God shaped my walk with God as a young man.
5. *The Dean’s Watch* by Elizabeth Goudge (almost all her books)—in my estimation, one of the finest novelistic explorations of the cost of Christianity in the death to self.

Timothy C. Tennent

Author, President of Asbury Theological Seminary



1. Augustine’s *Confessions*—through the most famous conversion story in the world, God brought me to personal faith in Jesus Christ.
2. *The Gospel of the Kingdom* by George Eldon Ladd—helped me to understand the role of the church in the world.
3. *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer—instrumental in helping me to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ and to yield my whole life to him.
4. *Basic Christianity* by John Stott and *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis (these two go together for me)—made the basic gospel message crystal clear to me.
5. *The Spreading Flame* by F. F. Bruce—first opened up the wonderful story of church history to me. I fell in love with the church and what it means to be the people of God under the headship of Jesus Christ.

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“Wall of Books” by benuski. CC by SA. (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/benuski/3502143020/>)

Kill the Commentators!

By Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)



Soren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher who discerned clearly the hypocrisy in the state church (Lutheran) of his day and wrote to expose it. He recognized that Christian scholarship, while claiming to help us understand the Bible, was actually undermining its authority. In this incendiary excerpt, Kierkegaard boldly encourages us to read the Bible as a love letter from God to us—without the “interference” of commentaries (from *Provocations: The Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard*. Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing, 1999. pp. 199–203).

If you wish to understand the Bible, then, be sure to read it without a commentary. Think of two lovers. The lover writes a letter to the beloved. Will he not read it all alone? In other words, would it ever occur to him to read this letter with a commentary! If the letter from the lover were in a language he did not understand—well, then he would learn the language—but he would certainly not read the letter with the aid of commentaries. They are of no use. The love for his beloved and his readiness to comply with her desires makes him more than able to understand her letter. It is the same with the Scriptures. With God’s help we can understand the Bible all right. Every commentary detracts, and he who sits with ten open commentaries and reads the Scriptures—well he is probably writing the eleventh. He is certainly not dealing with the Scriptures. Kill the commentators!

Of course, the commentators are not the only ones at fault. God wants to force each one of us out again into the essential, back to a childlike beginning. But being naked before God in this way, this we do not want at all. We all prefer the commentaries.

The current emphasis on getting back to the Bible has, sadly, created religiosity out of learning and literalistic chicanery—a sheer diversion. Tragically this kind of knowledge has gradually trickled down to the masses so that no one can read the Bible simply any more. All our Bible learning has become nothing but a fortress of excuses and escapes. We live under the illusion that we must first have the interpretation right or the belief in perfect form before we can begin to live—that is, we never get around to doing what the Word says.

The Church has long needed a prophet who in fear and trembling had the courage to forbid people to read the Bible. I am tempted, therefore, to make the following proposal. Let us collect all the Bibles and bring them out to an open place or up on a mountain and then, while we all kneel, let someone talk to God in this manner: “Take this book back again.” In other words, I suggest that we, like those inhabitants whose herd of pigs plunged into

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You Are What You Read *continued from page 1*

While recognizing that the Bible is by far the most important staple in our spiritual diet, the example of spiritual giants down through the ages teaches us the vital importance of wise “collateral reading.” We simply cannot grow into healthy, victorious, and fruitful Christians without an established discipline of feeding our minds and hearts on good books.

Locked in a Roman prison awaiting trial, the apostle Paul urged Timothy to come and visit him as soon as possible. “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments” (II Tim. 4:13). Though Paul was anchored in the supreme importance of the Holy Scriptures, he also knew the importance of other “books” that helped to equip him for growth, godliness, and ministry effectiveness.

The original impetus for the formation of The Francis Asbury Society some 35 years ago came when Dennis Kinlaw and Harold Burgess decided to republish an old book: *Wesley and Sanctification* by Harald Lindstrom (Francis Asbury Press, 1980). Our founders had a profoundly simple motivation: people need to read good books! Ever since those humble beginnings, we have understood that part of our calling involves urging people like you to read, read, read. As Wesley said to one of his preachers, “Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life.” ✦

Five Books that Changed My Life *continued from page 2*

Bob Fetherlin

President of One Mission Society



1. *Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer along with *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer—greatly increased my understanding of who God is, making me want to love, worship, and serve him whole-heartedly!

2. *Wholly Sanctified* by A. B.

Simpson—helped me understand the importance of living a cleansed life, dying to self to live for Christ.

3. *Search the Scriptures*, edited by Alan M. Stibbs—God used this book to take me through a three-year, inductive study of the Bible.

4. *Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders—taught me that there’s a spiritual dimension to leadership that is so essential. If we have the latest books and training on leadership but lack this spiritual component, our effectiveness as Christian leaders is seriously compromised.

5. *Improving Your Serve* by Charles Swindoll—painted a picture of what it means to live out Phil. 2:3–4 and Matt. 20:28. The Church and peoples of our world deeply desire servant leaders.

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Sandra C. Gray

President of Asbury University



1. *Our Lord Prays for His Own* by Marcus Rainsford—if I were to have a favorite scripture, John 17 would surely be it.
2. *The Holiest of All* by Andrew Murray—a devotional journey with Jesus, our High Priest.
3. *Safely Home* by Randy Alcorn—written as a novel, contains gripping realities of the persecuted church.
4. *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer—informed my own personal journey from prodigal back to Father.
5. *The Unshakable Kingdom and Unchanging Person* by E. Stanley Jones—the title alone is enough to capture the heart and mind. Our spiritual heritage: abundant life.

Chris Bounds

Chris is currently Associate Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Indiana Wesleyan University. In July, he will transition to Asbury University as the Wesleyan Scholar-in-Residence and Chair of the Christian Studies and Philosophy Department.



1. *A Song of Ascents: A Spiritual Autobiography* by E. Stanley Jones—gave me a vision of a life completely surrendered to Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit.
2. “First Theological Oration” by Gregory Nazianzen—established my understanding of what it is to be a theologian and the boundaries of the work of theology.
3. *The Catechetical Lectures* of St. Cyril of Jerusalem—a beautiful overview of Christian doctrine and practice from the 4th century, with holiness of heart and life in mind.
4. *The Scripture Way of Salvation* by John Wesley—provided an overview of the Christian journey with a focus on entire sanctification and the means by which it is experienced.
5. *Helps to Holiness* by Samuel Logan Brengle—nourished in me the desire for heart holiness and practical advice in experiencing it.

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**“A man is known
by the books he reads.”
—Ralph Waldo Emerson**

The Value of Old Books

By C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)



C. S. Lewis wrote the “Introduction” to *On the Incarnation* by Athanasius (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1993). As he introduced a new generation of readers to this fourth-century classic of the Christian faith, Lewis seized the moment to promote the value of old books.

There is a strange idea abroad that in every subject the ancient books should be read only by the professionals, and that the amateur should content himself with the modern books. Thus I have found as a tutor in English Literature that if the average student wants to find out something about Platonism, the very last thing he thinks of doing is to take a translation of Plato off the library shelf and read the *Symposium*. He would rather read some dreary modern book ten times as long, all about “isms” and influences and only once in twelve pages telling him what Plato actually said. The error is rather an amiable one, for it springs from humility. The student is half afraid to meet one of the great philosophers face to face. He feels himself inadequate and thinks he will not understand him. But if he only knew, the great man, just because of his greatness, is much more intelligible than his modern commentator. The simplest student will be able to understand, if not all, yet a very great deal of what Plato said; but hardly anyone can understand some modern books on Platonism. It has always therefore been one of my main endeavors as a teacher to persuade the young that first-hand knowledge is not only more worth acquiring than second-hand knowledge, but is usually much easier and more delightful to acquire....

It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should at least read one old one to every three new ones.

Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books.... The only palliative (to contemporary errors of thinking) is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books. Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer then than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. But not the *same* mistakes.... Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction. ✦



Kill the Commentators! *continued from page 3*

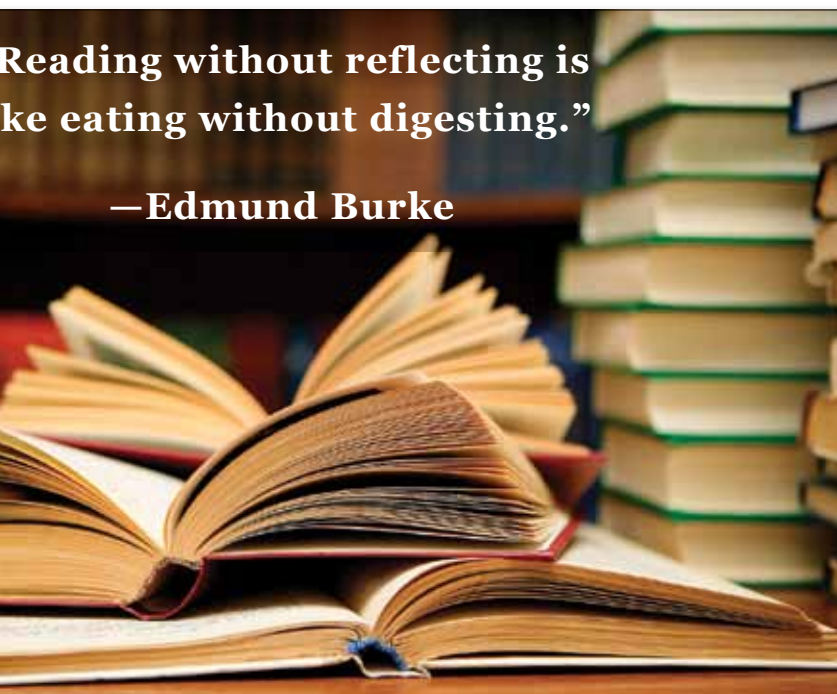
the water and died, beg Christ “to leave the neighborhood” (Matt. 8:34). This would at least be honest talk—something very different from the nauseating, hypocritical scholarship that is so prevalent today.

The Bible is very easy to understand. But we Christians are a bunch of scheming swindlers. We pretend to be unable to understand it because we know very well that the minute we understand we are obliged to act accordingly. Herein lies the real place of Christian scholarship. Christian scholarship is the Church’s prodigious invention to defend itself against the Bible, to ensure that we can continue to be good Christians without the Bible coming too close. Oh, priceless scholarship, what would we do without you?

“If you wish to understand the Bible, then, be sure to read it without a commentary.”

Dreadful it is to fall into the hands of the living God. Yes, it is even dreadful to be alone with the New Testament. I open the New Testament and read: “If you want to be perfect, then sell all your goods and give to the poor and come follow me.” Good God, if we were to actually do this, all the capitalists, the officeholders, and the entrepreneurs, the whole society in fact, would be almost beggars! We would be sunk if it were not for Christian scholarship!

It is true that we Protestants go to great efforts so that every person can have the Bible—even in their own tongue. Ah, but what efforts we take to impress upon everyone that it can be understood only through Christian scholarship! ✦



Five Books that Changed My Life *continued from page 4*

Robert A. Coleman

Author, former Professor of Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary



1. *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan
2. The sermons of John Wesley
3. The works of Jonathan Edwards
4. *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal
5. *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence

Al Coppedge

Author, Professor of Religious Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, Speaker with The Francis Asbury Society



1. *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers
2. *This Day with the Master* by Dennis Kinlaw
3. *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert A. Coleman
4. *Fifty-two Standard Sermons* by John Wesley
5. *The Trinitarian Faith* by Thomas F. Torrance

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Read, Read, Read! *continued from page 1*

further, to develop a distinctly Christian mind and imagination—some books are more helpful than others. Good books will be more helpful than bad or mediocre books. How do we tell which is which? Philippians 4:8 enjoins us to dwell on things that are “excellent,” “worthy of praise,” “lovely,” and “of good report.” Philippians 4 does not say to read only Christian works. If we are honest, we must admit that some Christian works are not “excellent” or “worthy of praise” or “lovely” or “of good report.” Many non-Christian writers are good to read because they unwittingly follow God’s aesthetic laws of craftsmanship and because they are honest.

John Milton—the Puritan, the revolutionary, and arguably the second greatest poet in the English language after Shakespeare—cited “the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.” He was advocating not promiscuity in the sexual sense but reading widely and broadly, in many fields, with many genres, and on many topics. It is not necessary, however, to read everything or to read everything with the same intensity. To draw on yet another insight from the past preserved in a book, that of Sir Francis Bacon in his essay “Of Studies”: “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.” ✦

Judge Z: Irretrievably Broken: A New Book

An Interview with Tim Philpot



Tim Philpot is a judge in family court and has been a state senator, trial lawyer, and president of CBMC International, a Christian outreach. He and his wife, Sue, have been married since 1971. His book is available in The Francis Asbury Society's Bookstore.

Q: Why did you write a book on marriage?

As the same-sex marriage issue heated up, I realized that, for the first time, we were being asked to define marriage. I began to ask judges, lawyers, and clergy a simple question: what is marriage? No one had a good answer. I got a lot of funny looks and shoulder shrugs, all indicating that no one was sure how to define marriage. I researched and realized the first legal definition of marriage was in 1998 in Kentucky—because we thought we knew what it was. So, I started with the lofty goal of defining marriage, both legally and spiritually.

Q: Why did you choose to write a novel?

This project started as a serious, even scholarly, book about marriage. My plan was to tell stories from family court along with insights I had learned from people like Dennis F. Kinlaw and John N. Oswalt, while my research assistant/attorney, Thomas Cothran, would provide deeper philosophic and spiritual meaning. After reading thousands of pages on the subject, I realized that no one would read a serious book, partly because the books already have been written.

I wanted to write a secular book, but literally discovered that I could not. Marriage is spiritual. To discuss it solely in any other context is absurd. So I decided to write a book that almost anyone might enjoy. The novel allows me to tell stories, which people like. As a judge, I'm not supposed to have opinions. The novel format allows me to express some ideas and lets readers decide for themselves what they think.

Q: What is the basic plot of the book?

The book involves family courtroom scenes, law school classes discussing marriage, and a country Methodist church where a young pastor preaches sermons on marriage. The story is told through its key characters, but

primarily through Judge Z. Atticus Zenas is a 50-year-old judge in family court. His personal metamorphosis from a lawyer/judge, who routinely divorces people with little or no thought, into a person of faith whose life is radically transformed by a new love relationship with God is the primary plot. His new perspective causes him to become a proponent for marriage and an advocate for a slower legal process of divorce, which provides plenty of tension in the book.

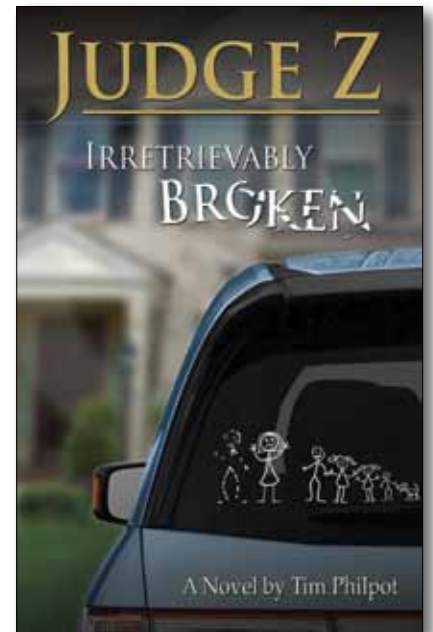
The novel is pedagogical, meaning “intended to teach.” I love teaching people that Beulah, the name of Judge Zenas's mother, means “married” in Isaiah 62. I love teaching that there is only one reference in the Bible to a lawyer. Paul told Titus: “Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer” (Titus 3:13 NIV). I had lots of fun with symbolism and special meanings throughout the book.

Q: Other than Judge Z, who are the key characters?

Beulah Zenas is the judge's mother, age 80. She is the primary voice of wisdom for her son. Her Sunday afternoon dinners provide an avenue for conversations about family and marriage.

Billy Hughes, age 27, is the student pastor of a small Methodist church. He offers a series of simple sermons on the meaning of marriage that cause the judge to struggle with the idea that marriage might be more important than he thought.

Brad Bertram, age 35, is a law professor specializing in family law. He teaches a five-week seminar that attempts to provide a history and definition of marriage from a legal viewpoint. Judge Zenas pulls the professor into a



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“This project started as a serious, even scholarly, book about marriage... [but] marriage is spiritual. To discuss it solely in any other context is absurd. So I decided to write a book that almost anyone might enjoy. The novel allows me to tell stories, which people like.”

divorce case to represent a wife who is fighting to save her marriage and family.

Jack and Mary Stirling, age 45, have filed a simple uncontested divorce in family court. Their case becomes the focal point for a battle over the question of whether the marriage is “irretrievably broken,” the finding that a judge must make before granting any divorce.

Harry Wolff, age 50, is a divorce attorney representing Jack Stirling in the divorce. He files ethics charges against the judge, which result in the judge’s own trial before the Judicial Conduct Commission. He also is a determined defender of the right to an easy, fast, simple divorce.

Q: Is the book based on real people?

The book is pure fiction, but I must admit I thought about some people as I wrote. For instance, I was thinking about Dr. Kinlaw when I wrote a Rabbi into the story. I thought about my Greek law partner, John Angelis, when I described the judge’s father. I thought about some people in India as I explained arranged marriages. The characters in court are totally imaginary but my imagination has been fueled by real courtroom memories.

Q: Who needs to read this book?

Everyone. I’m not kidding on that. The book itself may not be on the same level as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but I believe it has the potential to be as important culturally to family and marriage in the twenty-first century as Harper Lee’s book was to racial issues in the 1960s. Defining marriage and understanding God’s greatest metaphor, marriage, is a hot topic for 2016.

Q: What responses are you getting so far from readers/reviewers?

No one tells the judge the truth, so I presume there is some negative push back on the book from what I call the “divorce industrialist establishment.” To my face, I am receiving lots of compliments. Lawyers tell me they will practice divorce law differently. Many people describe reading it in one sitting because they couldn’t put it down. It brings laughter and tears.

I do caution people to be careful. This book is about the positive values of marriage. There is no intent to make single people sad or divorced people guilty. My hope is that readers—particularly those who are divorced or unhappily married—will move past their own pain and experience the grace of God.

Q: Do you envision any other ministry impact for this book?

Hopefully, Judge Z will be a platform to get invitations to speak on the issues of marriage, family, and divorce. In February, in conjunction with The Francis Asbury

It Is for Your Life

By John Wesley

Although John Wesley was passionately devoted to the Bible and even called himself “a man of one book,” he was one of the most well-read men of the 18th century. He often exhorted the early Methodists to read the Bible, yes, but also to read other books. Their very souls depended on it. This was especially true of his advice to his preachers. In a letter written to a pastor named John Trembath (August 17, 1760), Wesley spoke strongly about the importance of reading. (*The Letters of John Wesley*. Vol. IV. London: Epworth, 1931. p. 103.)

What has exceedingly hurt you in time past, nay, and I fear to this day, is want of reading. I scarce ever knew a preacher read so little. And perhaps, by neglecting it, you have lost the taste for it. Hence your talent in preaching does not increase. It is just the same as it was seven years ago. It is lively, but not deep; there is little variety, there is no compass of thought. Reading only can supply this, with meditation and daily prayer. You wrong yourself greatly by omitting this. You can never be a deep preacher without it, any more than a thorough Christian.

O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste which you have not: what is tedious at first, will afterwards be pleasant.

Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way; else you will be a trifler all your days, and a petty, superficial preacher. Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer. Take up your cross and be a Christian altogether. Then will all children of God rejoice (not grieve) over you in particular. ✦

Society, I helped sponsor a seminar on these issues for lawyers, judges, counselors, and others who work in or with the family court system. Stan Key and I hope to take this seminar “on the road.” (For more information, contact The Francis Asbury Society at 859-858-4222 or visit www.judgezbook.com.)

Every family I know (literally) has been impacted by negative family issues. The culture is bombarding us with the ideas that divorce is normal, children outside of marriage is normal, and fatherless homes are okay. My 12½ years in family court, plus listening to Dr. Kinlaw, Dr. Oswalt, and other godly people, not to mention studying the Bible itself, have uniquely positioned me to speak on the most debated issue of the day—marriage. I know it is not discussed on the debate stages of the Presidential election. But around coffee shops and kitchen tables, the issues surrounding marriage and family are the ones real people confront every day. ✦

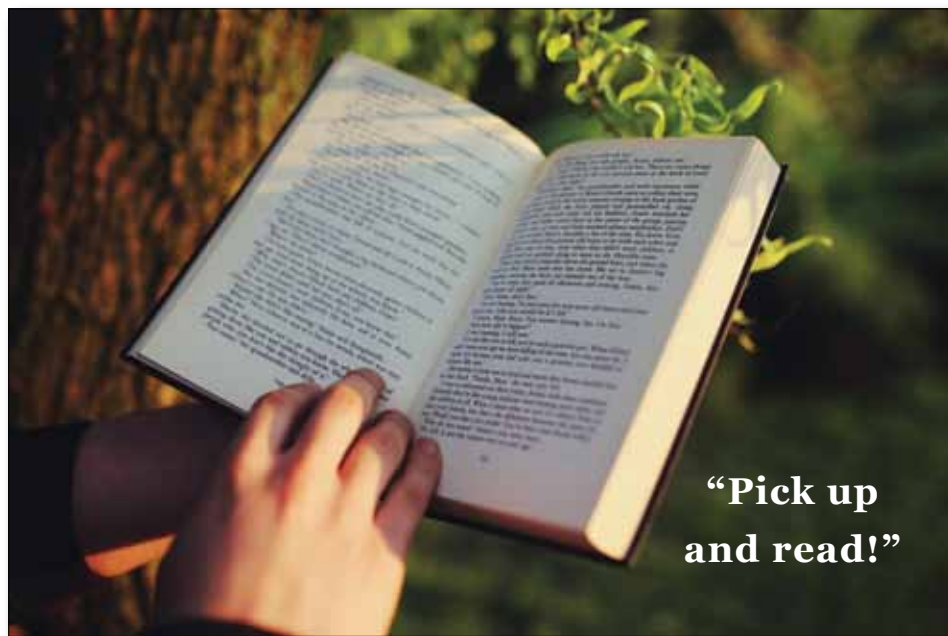
Tolle, Lege!

By Augustine of Hippo (354–430)



Augustine of Hippo, often called *Saint* Augustine today, began his life in pursuit of lustful pleasures, worldly accolades, and trendy heresies. At 32 years of age, in a garden in Milan, Italy, he experienced a profound conversion to the Christian faith. The pivotal moment came when he heard a voice urging him to “Take up and read! Take up and read!” The book he found and the passage he read changed his life (and the world) forever! In Book VIII of his *Confessions* (Translated by Henry Chadwick. New York: Oxford University, 1992), he describes what happened. The following is an abridged excerpt from that famous chapter (pp 133–54).

I will now tell the story of the way in which you delivered me from the chain of sexual desire and from the slavery of worldly affairs. I was an unhappy young man, wretched as at the beginning of my adolescence when I prayed to you for chastity and said, “Grant me chastity, but not yet.” I was afraid you might hear my prayer quickly, and that you might too rapidly heal me of the disease of lust which I preferred to satisfy rather than suppress.



The tumult of my heart took me out into the garden where no one could interfere with the burning struggle with myself in which I was engaged, until the matter could be settled. You knew, but I did not, what the outcome would be. But my madness with myself was part of the process of recovering health, and in the agony of death I was coming to life. I was aware how ill I was, unaware how well I was soon to be. So I went out into the garden.

As I deliberated about serving my Lord God, the self which willed to serve was identical with the self which was unwilling. It was I. I was neither wholly willing nor wholly unwilling. So I was in conflict with myself and was dissociated from myself. And so it was “not I” that brought this about “but sin which dwelt in me” (Rom.

7:17, 20). Vain trifles and the triviality of the empty-headed, my old loves, held me back. They tugged at the garment of my flesh and whispered: “Are you getting rid of us?” I hesitated to detach myself, to be rid of them, to make the leap to where I was being called. Meanwhile the overwhelming force of habit was saying to me: “Do you think you can live without them?”

This debate in my heart was a struggle of myself against myself. I threw myself down under a fig tree and let my tears flow freely. “How long, O Lord?” As I was saying this and weeping in the bitter agony of my heart, suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl (I do not know which), saying and repeating over and over again “Pick up and read, pick up and read” (Latin: *Tolle lege, tolle lege*). At once my countenance changed, and I began to think whether there might be some sort of children’s game in which such a chant is used. But I could not remember having heard of one. I checked the flood of tears and stood up. I interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find.

So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting. There I had put down the book of the apostle when I got up. I seized it, opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: “Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts” (Rom. 13:13–14).

I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled. We went in to my mother (Monica) and told her. She exulted and blessed you who “are powerful to do more than we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20). ✨

“I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is the knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*.”

The Standard Sermons of John Wesley. Vol. 1
(London: Epworth, 1935), 31–32.

What then Should We Read?

A good question to provoke meaningful conversation is to ask someone what book they would most desire to have with them if they found themselves alone on a desert island. G. K. Chesterton once answered this question by saying he would prefer to have a guide to shipbuilding!

Humor aside, the question highlights the importance not just of reading but of *good* reading. In a world filled with books of dubious value, how do we distinguish the wheat from the chaff? Is there a classical canon of books that every educated person ought to read during his/her life? More to point, as disciples of Jesus Christ, which books (other than the Bible) are most important to read and digest? In an effort to answer these questions, Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and others came up with a list of twenty-five books that they believe “every Christian should read.” The record of their labor is a book that is a valuable resource for serious Christians who desire to grow deep in their faith: *25 Books Every Christian Should Read: A Guide to the Essential Spiritual Classics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

The High Calling is sharing with its readers the list of 25 spiritual classics recommended by Foster, Willard, and their editorial team. Like the editors at FAS, you are not likely to agree with all of the choices on this list, but we believe that the work involved in arriving at such a lifetime goal of good reading is well worth the effort! Notice that the list has purposely omitted the Bible as well as

any living authors. The books are listed chronologically according to when they were written in history. Selections from Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox traditions are included. A variety of literary genres are represented. The men and women who chose the books on this list believed that “cumulatively, these books embody a rich treasure of wisdom and counsel for how to live the Christian life” (p. x).

1. *On the Incarnation* by St. Athanasius
2. *Confessions* by St. Augustine
3. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* by various authors
4. *The Rule of St. Benedict* by St. Benedict
5. *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri
6. *The Cloud of Unknowing* by an anonymous author
7. *Revelations of Divine Love* by Julian of Norwich
8. *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis
9. *The Philokalia* by various authors
10. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin
11. *The Interior Castle* by St. Teresa of Avila
12. *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross
13. *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal
14. *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan
15. *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence
16. *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* by William Law
17. *The Way of a Pilgrim* by an unknown author
18. *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky
19. *Orthodoxy* by G. K. Chesterton
20. The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins
21. *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
22. *A Testament of Devotion* by Thomas R. Kelly
23. *The Seven Storey Mountain* by Thomas Merton
24. *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis
25. *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri J. M. Nouwen ✨

Five Books that Changed My Life *continued from page 5*

Bill Ury

Author, former professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Wesley Biblical Seminary, Pastor at Elizabeth City Evangelical Methodist Church



1. *Methodical Bible Study* by Robert A. Traina—formed the way I come to the Word.
2. *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert A. Coleman—set the tone for every aspect of ministry to which Jesus has called me.
3. *Classic Christianity* by Thomas C. Oden—formed the entirety of my spiritual life, graduate theological education, and preaching.
4. *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis—alerted me to the breadth of the Anglicanism which enabled the Wesleys to move beyond continental Reformed thought.
5. *Let’s Start with Jesus* by Dennis F. Kinlaw—encapsulates the trajectory which the early church, and the best of the Catholic and Protestant traditions, pointed.

Continued on page 11

“There is a great deal of difference between an eager man who wants to read a book and a tired man who wants a book to read.”

—G. K. Chesterton

To Save the World We Must Save the Word

By Os Guinness



In this excerpt taken from his book *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994. pp. 94–100), author and social critic Os Guinness warns evangelicals about becoming “word-deficient” in an image-driven culture. He argues that we cannot save the world if we do not save the word.

Christians who [reject] the place of words in faith and join the Gadarene rush to embrace images are guilty of a monumental folly. What Jacques Ellul has written of as *The Humiliation of the Word*, which is the reverse side of the triumph of the image, is a defining feature of modernity. And it is a powerfully damaging pressure on the Christian mind.

The triumph of the image and the humiliation of the word are two sides of the same coin. Both go back to what Jacques Ellul described as the “greatest mutation known to humankind since the Stone Age.” Images now dominate words—the visual over the verbal, entertainment over exposition, and the artificial (including virtual reality) over the real and the natural.

At first sight, this revolution appears successful beyond challenge. The only question is whether we should join it and make the shift from words to images or whether we should resist it and become word-using Neanderthals. Many Christians have deserted their two-thousand-year commitment to words and have sided with the triumphant image. They have turned to the image either because they have been unknowingly influenced by the general cultural tide or because of high-minded commitments to such notions as “seeker-friendly” and “audience-driven.” The first say, “Isn’t this the world we live in?” And the second say, “How else will we reach people in an image-dominated age?”

Study the Scriptures and we find that the primacy of the word is constant and complete. God lives and speaks. The word is the way God creates and how he deals with us. Made in his image, we are the word-speaking, word-answering creatures who live response-able between his

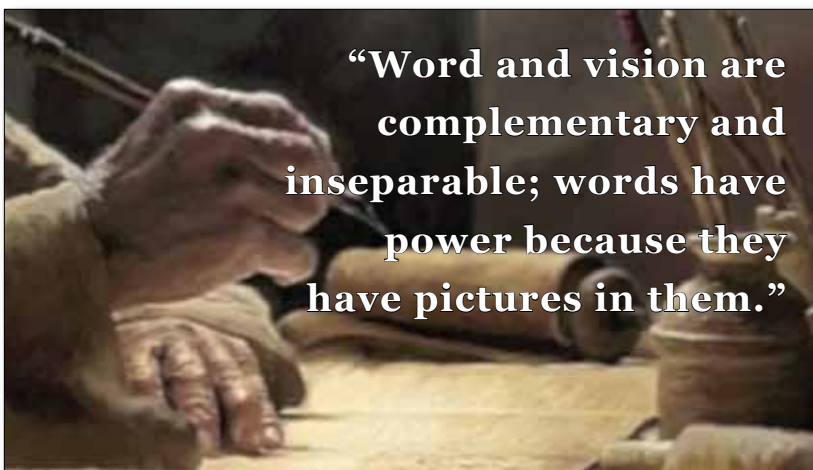
first word of creation and his last word of judgment. Of course, the Bible is not anti-visual. Jesus is the Word made flesh. Word and vision are complementary and inseparable; words have power because they have pictures in them.

No one who wrestles with this biblical heritage can be content with our evangelical irresponsibility about words today. What are some of the effects on the modern Christian mind?

First, our word-deficient culture is heavily biased toward image-dominated expression and perception. “Seeing is believing... A picture is worth a thousand words... The camera does not lie... Enough of words....” These modern truisms loyal to the primacy of the image trip off our tongues as self-evident, taken-for-granted Christian verities. Are images artificial? Fictitious? Easily manipulated? Potentially idolatrous? Never mind. We live in a world where images are reality in unarguable form. So evangelicals have followed suit and abandoned their Reformed heritage. At the highest levels this shift has opened the door to the more pictorial theology of Eastern Orthodoxy. At the lower levels it has welcomed in trash and what is worse still—idolatry. Too many evangelicals forget the biblical link between image, sin, and idolatry. They do not realize how our image-dominant culture is both essentially religious and decisively harmful to Christian notions of truth and falsehood.

Second, our word-deficient culture is biased against understanding. With an increasing reliance on visual communication, the trend is to appeal to the emotions rather than the understanding. In advertising, the concern is no longer to show what a product can *do*, but to use emotional imagery to show how a consumer can *feel* about it. Hearing and reading are slow, sequential, demanding, and analytical processes. They put a premium on truth, understanding, and judgment. Visual communication, by contrast, is faster, easier, more immediate, and more intuitive. But it is often so “obvious” that it bypasses critical thought. It moves by association, not analysis. The outcome can be a jarring blend of intense convictions and incoherent arguments that is anything but seasoned, spiritual wisdom.

Christians should be wary of images, ancient and modern. But iconoclasm and a general smashing of images is no response. One day, we confidently anticipate, there will be a long-desired reconciliation of word and image, truth and reality. But to bring forward that day prematurely is as false as to oppose word and image altogether. In the beginning was the Word and in the meantime there is the word. ✱



Katy Key

Mother, Bible teacher, wife of the president of The Francis Asbury Society



1. *No Exit* by Jean-Paul Sartre—as a college student asking the big questions of life, I realized my life would be meaningless and purposeless if it weren't for Christ. I would be an *existentialist* today if it weren't for Jesus, because without him there's no life, merely existence.
2. *People of the Lie* by M. Scott Peck—growing up in a *Christian* community, I was disappointed more than once by Christian leaders and other professing Christians, who professed a lifestyle they didn't live. I struggled to understand this conundrum of beliefs without practice. Peck gave me at least one way to explain it.
3. *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis—an apologetic for my faith.
4. *A Grace Disguised* by Jerry L. Sittser—helped me understand why we believe in a God who is good in light of the great suffering that he allows.
5. *Living Sacrifice* by Helen Roseveare—helped me understand the depth and breadth of the gospel and the reason people would suffer—or even give their lives—for it/him.
6. *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* by Jeanne Guyon—emphasizes the indwelling Christ working from the inside out, that we can know him intimately, experiencing him in such living daily communion that we can be at one with him.

“We read to know we are not alone.” —C. S. Lewis

Aletha Hinthorn

Author, Speaker with Titus Women, a ministry of The Francis Asbury Society



1. *Ablaze for God* by Wesley Duewel
2. *Faith Papers* by Samuel Ashton Keen
3. *Rees Howells: Intercessor* by Norman Percy Grubb
4. *The Fasting Key* by Mark Nysewander
5. *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer

“Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.” — Sir Francis Bacon

Dennis F. Kinlaw

Author, former President of Asbury University, founder of The Francis Asbury Society



- As the years have passed, I have realized that it is the *writers* of the books that have made such an impact on me.
1. *Samuel Logan Brengle*. His simple but profound little books on personal holiness introduced me to the Holy Spirit and the reality that God is triune and I can know him personally.
 2. *The Wesley brothers*, in their books, sermons, and poetry, taught me that God is love and that *agape* love is the nature of his divine being, that to seek God is also to seek love and that to find God is to find *agape* love.
 3. *Moses*. Through Moses, I learned that the original and ultimate reality behind all things and sustaining all things is a personal being who identified himself as the *I-AM*, who knows himself as the *HE-IS*, so that all others must say “I-Am because of the He-Is.”
 4. *The Apostle John*. In John, I learned with Tom Torrance that there is no God lurking behind the back of Jesus, that when you have seen Jesus you have seen all that there is to see of God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are one divine being and, as persons, live in each other; this one personal being is *holy love* itself and the absolute, single source of this perfect love.
 5. *Martin Buber*. In Buber's *I and Thou*, I learned that I cannot think of an “I” in a first personal way without implying a second or a third personal existence, so persons never, ever, come alone. Persons come in clusters, *family* clusters. Buber, a good Hasidic Jew, helped lay the foundations of my understanding of the Triune nature of the biblical God.
 6. *Peter L. Berger*. His *A Rumor of Angels* sealed for me the fact that God is everywhere and in everything whether anybody recognizes him or not. ✨

“As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place, where was a Den, and I laid me down in *that* place to sleep: And as I slept, I dreamed a Dream. I dreamed, and behold I saw a Man cloathed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a Book in his hand, and a great Burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him open the Book, and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, *What shall I do?*”

—from *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan (Westwood, NJ: Barbour, n.d.), 1.

Prayer

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**“You are the sum total of
the books that you read
and the voices you heed.”**

—Unknown

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