



BE Still.

The Leader & His Reading

from *Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders

THOUGHTS AND READINGS FOR MEDITATION

Please bring with you...the books, especially the manuscripts. — II Timothy 4:13, Phillips

Reading maketh a full man; speaking, a ready man; writing, an exact man. — Bacon

Paul's counsel to Timothy, "Give heed to reading," doubtless had reference to the public reading of the Old Testament Scriptures. His injunction is nevertheless most appropriate for other areas of reading as well. The books which Paul desired Timothy to bring to him were most probably a few choice works—Jewish history books exegetical and explanatory of the Law and the Prophets, and perhaps some of the heathen poets from which he quoted in his sermons and letters. He wished to spend his last weeks or months to the highest profit in studying his precious books—a student to the end.

There is a parallel story told of William Tyndale during his imprisonment and shortly before his martyrdom in 1536. He wrote to

the governor-in-chief asking that some of his goods might be sent:

a warmer cap, a candle, a piece of cloth to patch my leggings... But above all, I beseech and entreat your clemency to be urgent with the Procureur that he may kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible,

The power for good of even one book is impossible to estimate.

Hebrew Grammar and Hebrew Dictionary, that I may spend time with that in study.

Both Paul and Tyndale devoted the days before martyrdom to the study of the parchments. **The main preoccupation and paramount interest of the spiritual leader will be to attain a mastery of the Word of God**

through diligent study and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. However, it is supplementary reading that is our present concern.

The man who desires to grow spiritually and intellectually will be constantly at his books. The lawyer who desires to succeed in his professions must keep abreast of important cases and changes in the law. The medical practitioner must follow the constantly changing discoveries in his field. Even so the spiritual leader must master God's Word and its principles, and know as well what is going on in the minds of those who look to him for guidance. To achieve these ends, he must, hand in hand with his personal contacts, engage in a course of selective reading. Today, the practice of reading solid and rewarding spiritual and classical literature is seriously on the wane. In an age in which people have more leisure than ever before in the history of the world, may claim that they have no time to read. This excuse is never valid with a spiritual leader.

"When we are forgetting Thee, recall us to communion with Thyself by some text, some Word of Thine own."

"HE SHALL RECEIVE OF MINE, AND SHALL SHOW IT UNTO YOU." JOHN 16:14

John Wesley had a passion for reading and most of it was done on horseback. He rode sometimes ninety and often fifty miles in a day. He read deeply on a wide range of subjects. It was his habit to travel with a volume of science or history or medicine propped on the pommel of his saddle, and in that way he got through thousands of volumes. After his Greek New Testament, three great books took complete possession of Wesley's mind and heart during his Oxford days. "It was about this time that he began the earnest study of the *Imitation of Christ*, *Holy Living and Dying* and *The Serious Call*. These three books became very much his spiritual guides." He told the younger ministers of the Wesleyan societies either to read or get out of the ministry!

The determination to spend a minimum of half an hour a day in reading worthwhile books which provide food for the soul and further mental and spiritual development will prove richly rewarding to those who have been inclined to limited their reading to predigested or superficial books.

In a very perceptive series of articles in *The Alliance Weekly* on the subject "The Use and Abuse of Books," Dr. A. W. Tozer had some arresting things to say:

Why does today's Christian find the reading of great books always beyond him? Certainly intellectual powers do not wane from one generation to another. We are as smart as our fathers, and any thought they could entertain we can entertain if we are sufficiently interested to make the effort. **The major cause of the decline in the quality of current Christian literature is not intellectual but spiritual.** To enjoy a great religious book requires a degree of consecration to God and detachment from the world that few modern Christians have. The early Christian Fathers, the Mystics, the Puritans, are not hard to understand, but they inhabit the highlands where the air is crisp and rarefied, and none but the God-enamoured can come... One reason why people are unable to understand great Christian classics is that they are trying to understand without any intention of obeying them.

Why Read?

"Read to refill the wells of inspiration," was the advice of Harold J. Ockenga, who took a suitcase full of books on his honeymoon!

Bacon's famous rule for reading was:

"Read, not to contradict or confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tested, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested."

Another writer gave it as his opinion that if we read because we want to stock our minds

like a warehouse or because we like feeling superior or being thought intellectual, then it is useless or worse than useless.

The spiritual leader should read for spiritual quickening and profit, and this will strongly influence his selection of books for reading. There are some authors whose writings challenge heart and conscience, and hold us to the highest. **That reading which provides impulse and inspiration is to be cherished.**

The spiritual leader should read with a view to *mental stimulation* and should have on hand, among others, some book that involves him in mental gymnastics—something that calls for his utmost mental powers and stimulates fresh thoughts and ideas.

He should read for *cultivation of style* in his preaching and teaching and writing. For this, nothing can equal the writing of those masters who enlarge our vocabularies, teach us to think, and instruct us in the art of incisive and compelling speech. Bacon claimed that "histories make men wise; poets, witty, the mathematics, subtle; natural



philosophy, deep; moral, grave; logic and rhetoric, able to contend."

The leader should read, too, with a view to the *acquiring of information*. Never was there such a vast range of information within the reach of every reader as today. It is mainly through reading that information is assimilated. He should read, therefore, to keep abreast of his age, and should be reasonably well informed in his own field.

He should read in order to have *fellowship with great minds*. **It is possible to hold communion with the greatest and godliest of men of all ages through the medium of their writings.**

The power for good of even one book is impossible to estimate. In his *Curiosities of Literature* Benjamin Disraeli entitle one chapter "The Man of One Book", and gives a number of instances of the remarkable influence of a solitary work. In reading the biographies of a number of great Christians whom God used in a unique way in the past century, the author noticed time and again that the same book had induced a crisis in their lives and produced a revolution in their

ministry. The book was *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* by Charles G. Finney. On the other hand, who can measure the power for evil of a single book such as Hitler's *Mein Kampf*? Who can gauge the spiritual havoc wrought by Bishop Robinson's *Honest to God*?

What to Read

If it is true that a man is known by the company he keeps, it is no less true that his character is reflected in the books he reads, for they are the outward expression of his inner hungers and aspirations. **The vast number of books both secular and religious that are pouring from the presses today makes discrimination in reading imperative.** We can afford to read only the best, and what will be most helpful to us in the fulfillment of our mission. In other words, our reading should be regulated largely by what we are and what we do or intend to do.

An old writer who adopted the pseudonym Cladius Clear suggested that a booklover could divide his books as he would people. A few he would term "lovers", and they would be the books he would take with him if he were exiled. Others, and more than in the first class, he would call "friends." The majority he would designate "acquaintances," books with which he was on nodding terms and to which he occasionally referred.

Matthew Arnold gave it as his opinion that the best of literature was to be found within the covers of five hundred books. Daniel Webster preferred to master a few books rather than to read indiscriminately. It was his contention that reading a few great writers who have built up the permanent literature of the English language, well mastered, was better than skimming a multitude of ephemeral works. He maintained it was to them that we should turn for a real knowledge of the human heart, its aspirations and tragedies, hopes and disappointments. Hobbes the English philosopher once said, "If I had read as many books as other people, I would know as little."

Samuel Brengle had this to say about his preferences in poetry:

"I like the poets whose writings reveal great moral character and passion—such as Tennyson's and some of Browning's. The works of others have light, but I prefer flame to just light. Shakespeare? A mind as clear as a sunbeam—but passionless, light without heat. Keats? There's a sense in which they were perfect poets. But they don't move me. Beautiful—but word-mongers. There's an infinite difference between the beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty. One leads to the highest, loftiest, most Godlike character; the other often—too often—leads to an orgy of sensation."

Sir W. Robert Nicoll, for many years editor of

The British Weekly, found biography the most attractive form of general reading because **biography transmits personality**. One cannot read the lives of great and consecrated men and women without having inspiration kindled and aspiration aroused. The “lives of great men still remind us that we may make our lives sublime.” Who can gauge the inspiration to the cause of missions of great biographies like those of William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, Charles Studd or Albert Simpson?

Joseph W. Kemp, who exercised a wide preaching and teaching ministry, made a point of always keeping a good biography on hand. Ransome W. Cooper maintains that

“the reading of good biography forms an important part of a Christian’s education. It provides him with numberless illustrations for use in his own service. He learns to assess the true worth of character, to glimpse a work goal for his own life, to decide how best to attain it, what self-denial is needed to curb unworthy aspirations; and all the time he learns how God breaks into the dedicated life to bring about his own purposes.”

What satisfied those who follow him should not satisfy the leader in the matter of the books he reads. Nor should he be content to read only those books which can be easily read or books along the line of his own speciality.

Muriel Ormrod counselled:

“It is better that we should always tackle something a bit beyond us. We should always aim to read something different—not only the writers with whom we agree, but those with whom we are ready to do battle. And let us not condemn them out of hand because they do not agree with us; their point of view challenges us to examine the truth and to test their views against Scripture. And let us not comment on nor criticise writers of whom we have heard only second-hand, or third-hand, without troubling to read their works for ourselves... Don’t be afraid of new ideas—and don’t be carried away with them either.”

The leader, then, should immerse himself in books which will further equip him for a higher quality of service and leadership in the kingdom of God.

How to Read

Reading, in one of its senses, is defined as learning from written or printed matter; and this involves not only scanning the reading symbols but **meditating on the thoughts they express**. “It is easy to read. It is much more difficult to secure effectually the fruit of reading in the mind. And yet, to what profit is our reading if it does not achieve this end?”

When Southey the poet was telling an old Quaker lady how he learned Portuguese grammar while he washed, and something else while he dressed, and how he gleaned in another field while he breakfasted, and so on, filling his day utterly, she said quietly, “And when does thee think?” **It is possible to read without thinking, but we cannot profit from what we read unless we think.** Charles H. Spurgeon counselled his students:

“Master those books you have. Read them thoroughly. Bathe in them until they saturate you. Read and reread them, masticate and digest them. Let them go into your very self. Peruse a good book several times and make notes and analyses of it. A student will find that his mental constitution is more affected by one book thoroughly mastered than by twenty books he has merely skimmed. Little learning and much pride come of hasty reading. Some men are disabled from thinking by their putting meditation away for the sake of much reading. In reading let your motto be ‘much, not many.’”



The following rules for reading have been found to make reading more meaningful and of more lasting benefit:

- 1 Read little that is to be immediately forgotten since that only forms the habit of forgetting. *Exercise the same discrimination in choosing books as in choosing friends.*
- 2 Read with pencil and notebook in hand. Unless the memory is unusually vigorous and retentive, much reading will be a waste of time. Develop a system of note-taking, and it will be astonishing to discover how greatly this practice aids the memory.
- 3 Have a “commonplace book”, as it used to be called, a book in which to put what is striking, interesting, suggestive and worthy of permanent record. One’s own comments and criticisms can be added. In this way an irreplaceable accumulation of material will be preserved and indexed for future use.
- 4 Verify as far as possible historical, scientific and other data, and let no word slip past until its meaning is understood.

5 Let reading be varied, because the mind so easily runs into ruts. Variety is as restful to the mind as to the body.

6 Reading should be correlated where possible—history with poetry, biography with historical novels; e.g., when reading the history of the American Civil War, read the biographies of Lincoln and Grant and the poems written by Walt Whitman on Abraham Lincoln.

Canon Yates gives advice on reading which would be most helpful to those able to follow it. To some, however, the pressures of the space age might make it seem a counsel of perfection.

He suggests that **every solid book requires three readings**. The first reading should be rapid and continuous. The subconscious mind will then go to work on it and link it up with what you already know on the subject. Then take time to think what contribution it has made to your knowledge. The second reading should be *careful, slow and detailed*, thinking out each new point and making notes for later use. After an interval, the third reading should be *fairly rapid and continuous*, and a *brief analysis should be written in the back of the book, with page references to subjects and illustrations*.

A minister in the little manse of Lumsden in Scotland gathered around him no fewer than 17,000 volumes, among which he browsed with great delight. But of him and his books his son had to say: “Though he spent much time and pains on his sermons, he did not cut a channel between them and his reading.”

Here is a danger of which the leader must be aware. Ideally a book is a channel through which ideas can flow from one mind to another. The Lumsden minister did not fail to cut a channel linking his reading and his own spiritual life, but his congregation did not derive the benefit it should have enjoyed as a result of his wide reading. **It is for the leader to cut a channel between what he reads and what he says or writes, so that others may reap its benefits to the full.**

A country minister in Australia who is known to the author is a great book lover. Early in his ministry he decided that he would aim at developing a biblically and theologically literate congregation. He succeeded in conveying to members of his church his own love of books, and introduced them gradually to spiritual works of increasing weight and depth. The result is that in that district a number of farmers have accumulated libraries that would be no disgrace to a minister of the gospel. If they aimed at it, many more ministers could communicate their appreciation of spiritual books to their congregations by guiding them in a course of selected reading. ★

The Ripple Effect of the WORD

Thoughts on Reading and Writing

from *A Godward Life* by John Piper

I've been thinking again about the importance of reading and writing. There are several reasons I write. One of the most personally compelling is that I read. I mean, my main spiritual sustenance comes by the Holy Spirit from reading. Therefore reading is more important to me than eating. If I went blind, I would pay to have someone read to me. I would try to learn Braille. I would buy books on tape. I would rather go without food than go without books. Therefore, writing feels very life-giving to me, since I get so much of my own life from reading.

Combine this with what Paul says in Ephesians 3:3-4: "By revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ." The early church was established by apostolic writing as well as apostolic preaching. God chose to send his living Word into the world for thirty years, and his written Word into the world for two thousand years. Think of the assumption behind this divine decision. People in each generation would be dependent on those who read. Some people, if not all, would have to

learn to read—and read well in order to be faithful to God.

So it has been for thousands of years. Generation after generation has read the insights of its writers. This is why fresh statements of old truth are always needed. Without them people will read error. Daniel Webster once said,

If religious books are not widely circulated among the masses in this country, I do not know what is going to become of us as a nation. If truth be not diffused, error will be; if God and His Word are not known and received, the devil and his works will gain the ascendancy; if the evangelical volume does not reach every hamlet, the pages of a corrupt and licentious literature will.

Millions of people are going to read. If they don't read the contemporary Christian books, they are going to read the contemporary secular books. They will read. It is amazing to watch people in an airport. In airports alone, at any given moment, there must be hundreds of thousands of people reading. One of the things we Christians need to be committed to, besides reading, is giving away thoughtful books to those who might read them but would never buy them.

The ripple effect is incalculable. Consider this illustration:

A book by Richard Sibbes, one of the choicest of the Puritan writers, was read by Richard Baxter, who was greatly blessed by it. Baxter then wrote A Call to the Unconverted which deeply influenced Philip Doddridge, who in turn wrote The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul. This brought the young William Wilberforce, subsequent English statesman and foe to slavery, to serious thoughts of eternity. Wilberforce wrote his Practical Book of Christianity which fired the soul of Leigh Richmond. Richmond, in turn, wrote The Dairyman's Daughter, a book that brought thousands to the Lord, helping Thomas Chalmers the great preacher, among others.

It seems to me that in a literate culture like ours, where most of us know how to read and where books are available, the biblical mandate is to keep on reading what will open the Holy Scriptures to you more and more, and to keep praying for Bible-saturated writers. There are many great old books to read, but each new generation needs its own writers to make the message fresh. Read and pray. And then obey.

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The Eternal Son came to earth and lived the Christian life . . . visibly. But pause for a moment. The Eternal Son is the *second* member of the Godhead (the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit). Did it ever occur to you that your Lord . . . the Lord Jesus Christ . . . stated publicly that he could not live the Christian life? Of himself, he could not live the Christian life (John 5:30). Isn't that amazing! (So, if you're having a hard time, just consider John 5:30.) Now let us inquire of him, "How did *you* live the Christian life?"

Was the mainstay of his Christian life prayer and Bible study? He did pray, but was prayer the central pillar of his secret to living the Christian life? That just does not seem to fit, does it? The Son depending on prayer and Bible study to make it through the day? Actually, this idea, your Lord *needing* to read his Bible every day to get through life as a believer, is an insult (1) to his preexistence in eternity and (2) to the fact that his Father indwelt him. Your Lord did not live the Christian life by means of Bible study. But he quoted it, did he not? Does that not mean he was dependent on reading his Bible every day? And have we not often had pointed out to us his dependence on prayer and Bible study? And what of prayer? It is true that he rose early in the morning and went to a quiet place to pray. But do not read into such scenes the modern-day concept of what prayer is. Be careful, or you will see

a man who is out there on his own all day long, praying, reading his Bible, and trying hard to be a good Christian . . . even a man so much on his own that he has to pray every morning without fail to make it through the day (making it through the day being dependent on his reading the Bible and praying *that morning*).

The fallacies of that scene are endless, but this one stands out the most. All day long the Lord Jesus was *not* alone. There was not one second when he was outside of constant, conscious fellowship with his Father.

My grandpa was a Louisiana Cajun who loved His Lord boundlessly. He was a total illiterate. But that did not stop grandpa. He would ceremoniously pick up his Bible and hold it in front of him and stare at it intently for long periods of time. The problem was, he almost always held the Bible upside down! Now that is *really illiterate*; and, yep, that was my grandpa. And, yes, he loved his Lord and spoke of his intimacy with the Lord in a way that few literate Bible scholars or Greek-reading theologians could ever hope to match!

"Without the Father, I can do nothing."

"The life I live, I live by means of my Father."

—GENE EDWARDS

"Seek not to grow in knowledge chiefly for the sake of applause, and to enable you to dispute with others; but seek it for the benefit of your souls, and in order to practice... Practice according to what knowledge you have. This will be the way to know more...[According to Ps. 119:100] 'I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.'"

— JONATHAN EDWARDS —