

Our God is a writing God, therefore he chose to communicate through the written language. Our church is a reading church, therefore we read God's will from his written word. *This is an inescapable fact, that God's people have always been and forever will be people of the Book.* And, of course, there are many books available in our day – through various medium such as print and digital – inconceivable as such would've been before the printing press, but there is really only one book that we need to know. And that's the *holy* one: the Bible.

Unfortunately, there is a growing poverty of Bible reading in the church (not to mention the world) today. But that's not to say there isn't a hunger for it – no, people are hungrier than ever. It's just that some don't know it, or don't realize where they can satiate it; and so, instead, we have many who walk about spiritually emaciated for lack of the living water and bread of life – Christ Jesus who is the Word in the flesh. And it's in this state that some will seek for nourishment in the wrong places. 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 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."

But let me tell you about some other reading that could potentially be a game changer for you, reading that could profoundly change your perspective, enlighten your mind, motivate you towards maturity and development and, ultimately, enhance your walk with the Lord. God not only gave us the Bible so that we would come to know him better, but being the Giver of every good and perfect gift, he has also talented many people in this world to convey their individual thoughts – thoughts that have to power to change and impact your life. John Piper has a great perspective on this.

"There are bad reasons to turn to other writers besides the Bible. And there are good ones. One of the bad reasons we turn to other writers is that we find the Bible tame and tasteless. It is anything but tame and tasteless. One of the good reasons we turn to other writers besides the Bible is that we savor the taste of God not only in the Bible, but also in the way others savor Him. The best writers intensify our taste for the Bible, and especially for God Himself" (from the introduction of *Taste and See*).

Through their books, we should allow these talented writers to take us on a journey to know God better. I know that I'm not the only person who has benefitted personally from the writings of godly people – *many of the leaders here at the Brownsburg Church of Christ have too!* So what I want to do in these bulletin articles is to periodically ask one of our leaders "Hey, what's on your bookshelf?" In other words, what books have had the most profound effect on your life and why?

We want to start with **Josh Webber** in this article. Here's his top 5:

1. *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (2000; David A. deSilva).

A very common mistake we make when interpreting the New Testament is reading with our living-in-America-in-the-21<sup>st</sup>-century glasses. We assume they possessed a culture like ours, with the same feelings we have about things like love, war, or honor. In order to really understand accurately the books the biblical authors wrote, we have to try to assume their worldview. So Josh really appreciated this book for its ability to place him in the context of the first century world.

2. *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires, The Respect He Desperately Needs* (2010; Dr. Emerson Eggerichs).

Marriage was invented by God for both his glory and the thriving of his people. But we all know that sometimes it can be pretty hard to figure out. Eggerichs' book can be a powerful resource for grappling with the inevitable difficulties of bonding two sinners together in the covenant of marriage. Josh is very passionate about the subject of marriage and this is his favorite book on the subject, *after the Bible of course*. He appreciates Eggerichs' insight and his ability to help him understand himself, his wife and, ultimately, God's institution of marriage.

3. *Developing the Leader Within You* (2005; John C. Maxwell).

As a young leader myself, I can completely relate to Josh's confession of pride. This is something that afflicts many leaders in many varying contexts, whether it be in the home, at work and especially in the church. But Josh recommends this book as a necessary dose of humility – something crucial for all leaders to learn. "Something the book taught me was that leadership is not about position, nor power, but people. It's about empowering others. It's about service." Additionally, he recommends "They Smell Like Sheep" by Dr. Lynn Anderson as a good compliment to this read.

4. *Visioneering: God's Blueprint for Developing and Maintaining Vision* (2005; Andy Stanley).

In this book, Andy Stanley goes through the book of Nehemiah and thoughtfully applies many of the lessons to today's leaders. I've often thought that Nehemiah is a character from whom we have much to glean. This is the guy who pulled off rebuilding the walls of God's sacred city in a period of 52 days – and with violent antagonism from his enemies to boot! According to Josh, it's a great book on having goals and overcoming challenges. Let's not fall into the trap of forgetting that people working together effectively doesn't happen by accident; no, it often comes from good leadership, that is, leadership with

vision.

5. *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (2000; Douglas Groothuis).

Let's face it. We live in a culture that winces at absolute truth claims, and that's because we live in a *postmodern* culture. But what does the church do when (a) they live within a postmodern culture and (b) their faith book is filled to the brim with moral absolutes? Josh says that maybe they should read Groothuis' book. This read is particularly suited to explain the overall thought behind a postmodern culture and can equip the church with some tools on addressing the resistance to absolutes.

Overall, Josh's picks seem like good tools for all of us in dealing with the ever-pertinent topics of leadership, marriage and culture. And the more informed Christians are on these topics, the more we'll be uniquely equipped to handle the curveballs life commonly throws our way.

Henry David Thoreau once wrote something that has never left me: "Read the best books first, or you may not have the chance to read them at all." So much wisdom for our lives can be gleaned from those who have gone on before, and we miss out on a lot of life's lessons when we fail to sit at the feet of these wise men and women and the thoughts they've shared. Either way, the good news is that we'll gain wisdom; life has a way of knocking some sense into us (usually). But the better news is that you can learn from the mistakes of others – without making them yourself! But, again, it might take a little reading – and a little reading, as Thoreau said, might take a little time. Are we willing?

Let me put it this way. The average person can read 300 words per minute. Conveniently, the average novel has around 300 words per page. So, we're at a minute for every page. This means that if you commit to spending only 15 minutes a day reading, and then only five days per week, you'll be able to read around 3,900 pages! That's like 20 average size novels or three to four large detailed works on any subject. Fifteen minutes a day? That's doable.

We hope you found this article encouraging and that maybe you might think to pick up some books – like Josh's - that would help you in your journey towards a better relationship with Christ, and a better you.

You can look forward to future entries in this series from some of the leaders of the church as I hope to sit down and ask some of the elders what's occupying their shelf or nightstand.

What's on *your* shelf?