

How Can I Prepare for a Lifetime of Bible Learning?

Building a Personal Library

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the last 3 books you've read, not for school? When did you read them?
2. What are the last 3 books about Christianity you've read, and when did you read them?
3. What are topics that your group members are extremely versed in (besides school subjects)? These could be hobbies, sports teams, issues, etc. List the books that have helped your group member(s) become well versed in these topics.

A Lifetime of Learning

Paul prays that people grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And studying the Bible is a chief way towards that goal. Reading books besides the Bible aids your understanding and application of the Bible. Truly, for a person to continue growing as a Christian (or just as a person), we must commit to a lifetime of learning.

For many of us, a lifetime of learning means a lifetime of reading. (There are some cultures and circumstances that make reading impractical or impossible. And there are plenty of godly Christians who are non-literate or whose spiritual growth will not be primarily fueled by reading the latest volumes of theology. We must be careful to not project a specific type of intellectual Christianity on everybody. But that being said, for college students in the west, reading must be a part of Christian growth.)

“When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments...” (2 Timothy 4:13). The Apostle Paul wrote this to Timothy in his final letter of the New Testament. Paul believed he his execution was imminent, yet he still wanted to read.

Howard Hendricks is a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. When asked why he kept reading well into his 80s, he replied, “I would rather my students drink from a running stream than a stagnant pool.”

“If you stop growing today, you stop teaching tomorrow...” Howard Hendricks

Limited Resources: Time, Books, and Money

“According to an AP-Ipsos poll released in 2007, 22% of liberals and moderates said they had not read a book within the past year, compared with 34% of conservatives... Among those who had read at least one book, liberals typically read nine books in the year, with half reading more than that or less. Conservatives typically read eight, moderates five.”¹ That same survey found one in four Americans read no books the previous year.

Reader Type	Books/Year	40 Years	Total Books Read
Avid	9	40	360
Moderate	4	40	160
Sparse	2	40	80

How many books will your reading your next 40 years? How does this insight influence your selection of books? Enoch’s suggestion: read the best books regardless if you’re reading fiction for entertainment, or non-fiction for personal enrichment.

On the flipside, I’d encourage you to consider: “Can I afford to read books that are not as helpful or useful? Is it worth reading this book?” Or ask yourself this, “If there was a topic or book that would be really helpful for me to read, what would it be?”

If you have made a personal budget, it probably includes lines for food, clothing, and entertainment. Does it contain a line for your continued education, growth, or reading?

READING AND CONFIDENCE

Complete these statements.

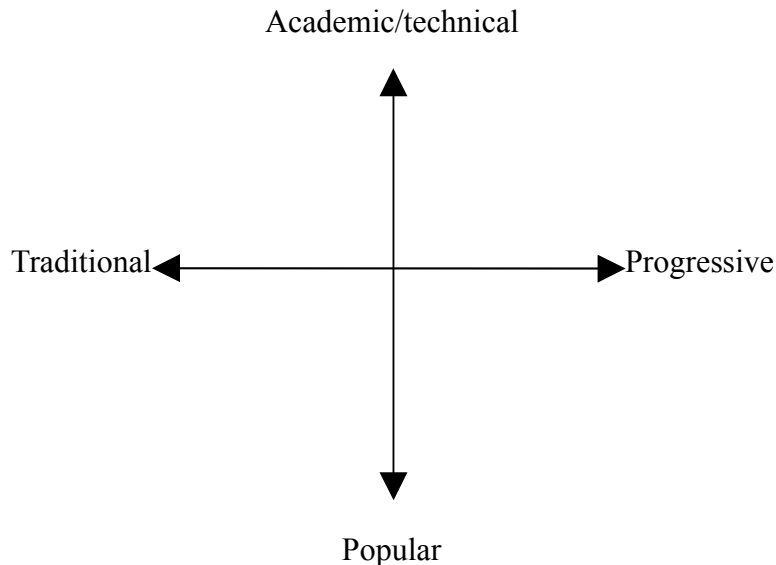
1. If you don’t read any books on a subject, but accept what one teacher (or school of thought taught you, then....
2. If you read two or three books on a subject, then...
3. If you read 6-7 books on a subject, then...
4. If you had to read just 1 book on a subject, should you read a book that is in line with your view, or an opposing view?
5. If you had to read just 2 or 3 books on a subject, then...
6. If you had to read 6-7 books on a subject, the...

¹ http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-08-21-publishing-chief_N.htm accessed on Sunday, April 11, 2010.

THINKING BY READING, READING BY THINKING²

What you think will determine what you read. And what you read will determine what you think. The influences and books you engage with have the power to change your views, solidify your views, or challenge your views.

For any book I read, I find it helpful to know where the author/stands in relation to other writers in that particular field. I suggest a basic graph that is probably overly simplified, but still helpful.



Enoch's Suggestions:

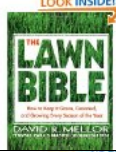
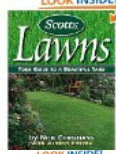


1. If you only read 1 book... read the best book that has your current view so you can at least understand one view adequately
2. If you only read 2-3 books, read the best books on variations of your view, or multiple introductions to various views. On the first method, you'll really know one view and its varying positions well. But on the other hand, you'll have a superficial understanding of multiple views.
3. If you read 5-6 books, read the best books from multiple views... from multiple levels (both popular and scholarly).
4. Talk to someone who you respect who understands at least one view, if not multiple views.

Becoming "Well Read" in an Issue: You're just 5 books away...

Since most people in America just don't read, or at least, don't read issues beyond their immediate needs, if you just read one or two books on an issue, you know a lot more than probably 80% of the people you'll ever meet. And, if you read 5 books from the fuller spectrum of viewpoints, you will likely become an amateur expert on the topic.

² This section taken from Enoch's previous Trellis handout "Growing as a Thinker, Reader, and Believer" in the Apologetics series, June 21, 2009.

Consider how much an “expert” you’ll be on lawn care by reading:

	<p>The Lawn Bible: How to Keep it Green, Groomed, and Growing Every Season of the Year, by David R. Mellor</p>
	<p>Scotts Lawns: Your Guide to a Beautiful Yard.</p>
	<p>The Organic Lawn Care Manual: A Natural, Low-Maintenance System for a Beautiful, Safe Lawn by Paul Boardway Tukey.</p>
	<p>Lawn Care for Dummies by Lance Walheim</p>

It’s kind of sad, but true. That if you read a handful of books on a subject, you’ll probably know more than your parents, your pastors, and your friends!

Building a Christian Theological Library

I intentionally use the terms “Christian Theological Library” for that’s what we’re talking about. Every Christian needs to learn theology. “Theology” is technically “the study of God”. If Christians are called to love the Lord with all one’s heart, mind, soul, and strength, then reading high quality Christian books are vital.

Where to start? See the Internet or Mark Driscoll’s books on the NT or OT for help on building a theological library. For now, I’ll just give a few suggestions.

1. **Get a good English translation of the Bible.** (ESV, NAS, NIV, NKJV, NLT, are perhaps the most popular while also respected.)
2. **Get a “study Bible”** which is a regular Bible but with study notes, maps, charts, and other helpful information right on the same page to help you better understand the Bible.
3. **Get good commentaries** on the Bible by respected authors.
 - a. A commentary may be on the entire Bible (or OT, NT) or on individual books. I’d start with a good one on the whole Bible because it’s cheaper. If you disciple someone, teach anyone, or want to get deeper, consider getting commentaries of single books of the Bible.
 - b. There are different levels of commentaries: popular, expositional, and exegetical. The difference being how much Greek/Hebrew you need in order to understand them.
4. **Get a good Systematic Theology volume**, like “Christian Theology” by Millard Erickson, or “Systematic Theology” by Wayne Grudem. These are large volumes that cover a wide range of issues like God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, salvation, angels, spiritual gifts, church ministry, etc.
5. **Go easy on getting & reading “Christian Living” books.** These are popular books, usually by well known pastors/authors on contemporary topics. By far the most common genre of books bought (and maybe read) by Christians, but perhaps the most likely to be outdated soon.