

Bring the Books

II Timothy 4:13

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C. H. Spurgeon preached on II Timothy 4:13 on Sunday morning, Nov. 29, 1863. He noted, *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 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 are they by the apostle! He is inspired, and yet he wants books! He has been preaching at least for thirty years, and yet he wants books! He has seen the Lord, and yet he 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 NT, and yet he wants books!

The apostle says to Timothy, and so he says to every preacher, "Give thyself unto reading." . . . Brethren, what is true of ministers is true of all our people. You need to read. . . We are quite persuaded that the very best way for you to be spending your leisure, is to be either reading or praying. You may get much instruction from books which afterwards you may use as a true weapon in our Lord and Master's service. Paul cried, "Bring the books"--join in the cry (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, IX, 668).

I. THE SCRIPTURES MUST HAVE THE PREEMINENCE.

- A. Set Aside Anything That Dulls Our Taste For Scripture.
- B. Use Varying Approaches.
 - 1. Plow work.

Oh, that I knew how all thy lights combine,
And the configuration of Thy glory.
Seeing not only how each light doth shine,
But all the constellations of the story (George Herbert).

2. Spade work.
(Exp: Topics and single great chapters. Exodus 20 and Deut. 5; Psalms 19, 23, 103, 110, 119. Isaiah 53, Zechariah 12-14.)
3. Memorization.

II. THE WRITINGS OF THE CHURCH'S BEST TEACHERS AND PREACHERS.

(Quote: Spurgeon wrote, *It seems odd, that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others (Commenting and Commentaries, 9).*

- A. Teachers Are Christ's Gift To His Church.
(Exp: What they write is God's ministry to the eye, just as what they preach is God's ministry to the ear.)

All things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas (I Cor. 3:21-22a).

- B. The Church's Most Gifted Teachers Are All Available Through Their Writings.

(Exp: Their writings continue to be published and read because they are truly classics. Leland Ryken, quotes various authors about what a classic is. A masterpiece that *modifies our very being and makes us feel. . . that we are not the same men and women we were when we began. . . lays its images permanently on the mind [and] is entirely irreplaceable in the sense that no other book whatever comes anywhere near reminding you of it or being even a momentary substitute for it. . . in some sense a landmark in our intellectual, spiritual, or literary experience. . . a multiplicity of both content and technique that makes them inexhaustible (Realms of Gold: The Classics in Christian Perspective, 1-2).*

(Note: A word about help with commentaries. An excellent annotated commentary bibliography is *Commentaries for Biblical Exposition*, by James Rosscup (published by Grace Books International). D. A. Carson's, *New Testament Commentary Survey* and Tremper Longman's, *Old Testament Commentary Survey* are useful, but often lack conservative discrimination.)

III. THE LIVES OF THE CHURCH'S FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS.

*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise (Prov. 13:20).
. . . whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation
(Heb. 13:7).*

- A. Those With Whom We Agree.
- B. Those With Whom We Disagree.
- C. Choose By Author Rather Than Subject.

(Exp: Many fine men whose lives have been written so dryly that it has ruined the good brother's influence. Calvin like this. John Stott (by Timothy Dudley-Smith). Marsden's life of Edwards. John Brown's life of John Bunyan.)

Examples of well-researched and written biographies:

- 2 vols. of Hudson Taylor's life by Mrs. Howard Taylor
- Borden of Yale*, by Mrs. Howard Taylor
- But Now I See*, life of John Newton, by Josiah Bull
- Mountain Rain*, life of James Fraser, by Eileen Crossman
- John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides* (autobiography)
- Life of David Livingstone*, by William Blaikie
- To the Golden Shore*, life of Adoniram Judson, by Courtney Anderson
- Isobel Kuhn's autobiographical writings
- Mary Slessor of Calabar*, by W. P. Livingstone
- C. H. Spurgeon: The Early Years*
- C. H. Spurgeon: The Full Harvest*
- Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon*, Charles Ray
- Andrew Bonar: Diary and Life*
- Man of the Word*, life of G. Campbell Morgan, by Jill Morgan
- Five English Reformers*, J. C. Ryle
- Anything by Iain Murray (*Jonathan Edwards; David Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (2 vols.); *A Scottish Christian Heritage*; etc.)
- Anything by Faith Cook (*Singing in the Fire; Sound of Trumpets; Samuel Rutherford and His Friends; Selina: Countess of Huntingdon; Our Hymn Writers and Their Hymns*; etc.)

(Note: The best survey of the history of preaching is David L. Larsen's, *The Company of the Preachers*. Thorough without being tedious, factual though not exhaustive, interesting and well indexed.)

IV. THE DEVOTIONAL LITERATURE.

- John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress; The Holy War*
- L. E. Maxwell, *Crowded to Christ; Born Crucified*
- A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God; The Divine Conquest*
- E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*
- David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression; Revival*
- G. Campbell Morgan, *Discipleship, The Life of the Christian*
- William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*

Anything by F. B. Meyer
Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*
C. H. Spurgeon (any of his sermons in *The New Park Street Pulpit* or *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*)

V. OTHER LITERATURE.

(Quote: Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote to a friend in school, *Beware of the atmosphere of the classics. It is pernicious indeed; and you need much of the south wind breathing over the Scriptures to counteract it. True, we ought to know them; but only as chemists handle poisons—to discover their qualities, not to infect their blood with them* (Andrew Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne*, 29).)

For Guides:

David L. Larsen, *The Company of the Creative*
Leland Ryken, *Realms of Gold: The Classics in Christian Perspective*

VI. SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR READING.

- A. Surrender your reading to the Lord (love Him with all your mind).
- B. Be very careful about reading known error.

(Exp: In novels, science fiction, poets, plays, etc. For instance, C. S. Lewis occasionally suggests error in *Chronicles of Narnia*. Your mind is more biased toward error than truth.

II Tim. 2:16-18 But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. (17) And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; (18) Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

- C. Pray about what to read/pray when you read.
- D. Read those books which "call" to you
- E. Consider charting out yearly reading objectives.
- F. Read books of varying difficulty and interest to you.

(Exp: Read what you want to read, what you don't want to read, and what you should read.)

(Quote: Austin Phelps wrote, *A third object of a pastor's study of books [is] assimilation to the genius of the best authors. There is an influence exerted by*

books upon the mind which resembles that of diet upon the body. A studious mind becomes, by a law of its being, like the object which it studies with enthusiasm. If your favorite authors are superficial, gaudy, short-lived, you become yourself such in your culture and your influence. If your favorite authors are of the grand, profound, enduring order, you become yourself such to the extent of your innate capacity for such growth (Men and Books, 220).)

(Exp: If you have difficulty with the mechanics of reading, give some attention to Mortimer J. Adler's, *How to Read a Book*.)

- G. Do not dismiss a writer simply because you encounter something with which you disagree (the only errorless book is the Bible!).
- H. Be careful not to allow yourself to lose objectivity about a man.
- I. Do not be enslaved to finish books.
- J. Note what you read in the margin of your Bible for future use.

(Quote: *Never read without taking notes: all other reading is self-indulgence and an occasion for sleep (John Hutton, That the Ministry be Not Blamed, 152).*)

- K. Share what you read with someone else.
- L. Purchase books for others to read.

Thomas a Kempis, "If he shall not lose his reward, who gives a cup of cold water to his thirsty neighbour, what will not be the reward of those who by putting good books into the hands of those neighbours open to them the fountains of eternal life? (Quoted by Sinclair Ferguson, *Read Any Good Books?*, p. 18)

CONCLUSION:

(Quote: Andrew Bonar, at age 45 wrote in his journal, *Led today to notice that all my books, my many suitable and profitable books that come to help my study and suggest what I might preach, as well as those papers, and the like, that stir up the soul, are all part of God's calling of me. By these He carries on what He began. . . (Monday, Nov. 12th, 1855).*