

**READ—
You've Got To!**

Randy Mayeux

I recently visited with the preacher at one of our largest congregations. I enjoyed the visit. But I was so distracted. It was in his office. Comfortable chairs. Comfortable surroundings. But I kept wanting to go to his bookshelves. They were filled with volumes that I longed to consume. His church has grown. His book collection gives a strong clue to the reasons.

Readers grow. Churches with readers as leaders grow. An old Indian proverb states that "pale ink is more powerful than the greatest memory." Great thoughts written on paper change lives.

Need I remind us of the obvious? Our greatest hymns are written. We read them in a hymn BOOK. The Bible is a Book—or a collection of books. History proves it: nothing is as powerful as the printed word. IF IT'S READ!

It was printed copies of speeches and other pamphlets that shaped the grass roots support for the American Revolution.

Oppressive governments have, as a primary strategy, a plan to seriously restrict the printed word.

Both illustrate that the printed word is a powerful, shaping, history-changing tool. And in the history of the church, great progress has always been brought by two partners: preaching and writing (thus, listening and reading). When the "closed" church of the day refused to let people even have the Bible in their own language, William Tyndale, (later strangled and burned to death for his courage), wrote that it was:

impossible to establish the lay people in truth, except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue.

The history of our world would simply be dramatically different if there were no printing press, no writers, no readers of what is written. And when any group of people (a nation, a church) quits reading, it starts dying.

Gordon MacDonald, in *Ordering Your*

Private World, sounds an ominous warning:

In our age of mass media, the younger generation is finding it harder and harder to acquire the discipline of reading, and that may be one of the greatest losses of our time. Nothing substitutes for what can be found when we master books.

Our own fellowship is suffering from a serious lack of reading. Our periodicals seldom venture into new frontiers. Our most popular books are not current (I realize that older books are also significant and worth reading—but only if you are able to also speak and to understand today's culture. All "old" books are significant precisely because they did speak so powerfully to their own culture.)

What should you read? I'll mention the obvious: the Bible, devotional books, Christian magazines. But then, read to argue. Read authors with whom you disagree. Read books that challenge your thinking. Read books that stretch your vision. Read books that call you higher. Read to be changed. And read expecting to be changed.

I remember an afternoon spent with a different preacher. His library consisted of a handful of volumes. I asked him what he had read recently. He responded that he had not had time to read a book in years. His church had declined yearly for a number of years. His sermons were dated. The people were starving. He stood as quite a contrast to the preacher mentioned in the first paragraph, and to the well-read Paul, who could quote pagan poets as well as inspired Old Testament writers.

Near the end of Paul's life, he wrote: "Bring my scrolls, especially the parchments." He had more to read, and more to write. And because he did, our lives are different.

Read. Change. Grow. You'll be better for it. So will the church.

Read. You've got to.

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IMAGE, Oct 1, 1985, p. 24.