



Annual Book Review 2011

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It is time for my annual pre-summer book review and suggested reading list. Last year I lamented how little reading I'd gotten done the previous year. Though I resolved to try to do better this year, I'm not sure that any perceived improvement is more than a figment of my imagination. I heard someone say that theologian D.A. Carson reads 500 books a year. Like I needed something else to make me feel bad!

The summer months are on us and I trust that they will bring opportunity to imbibe deeply in some good books! So, if you are looking for some good ideas, I offer the following from my own list of completed readings from the last year.

Theology

Issues in Dispensationalism (Moody Press, 265 pages.) was written by a number of authors, many of them staff at Dallas Theological Seminary, as a response to *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, written by another Dallas professor, Darrell Bock, and Craig Blasing.

The book is a well-reasoned refutation of the "New Dispensationalism" which, in seeking common ground with Covenant Amillennial Theology, ends up sacrificing the distinctives of dispensational theology. Issues such as immanency, the Rapture, the timing of the Rapture, and prophetic hermeneutics are all

discussed. A great book and a good refresher on a lot of these subjects. Heavy reading.

I finished the first volume of the two-volume set on ***The Existence And Attributes Of God*** by Stephen Charnock (Baker Book House, 524 pages.) a couple of years ago. I finally finished **Vol. 2** of the set. Being written in the 1600s made this a challenging and yet very satisfying book. In each chapter (numbering approximately 100 pages each), Charnock discusses one attribute of God's nature and how that one attribute relates to others. This volume includes discourses on the *Power of God, Holiness of God, Goodness of God, Dominion of God* and *Patience of God*. I read it in sporadic, bite-size pieces, sometimes only a page or so a day.

I have been wanting to read ***The Freedom of the Will*** by Jonathan Edwards (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 348 pages.) for a good number of years. I had expected that it would be a daunting undertaking, and sure enough, it was. To read the book once is to read it three times, since I had to read and reread most of it, just to catch what Edwards was saying.

It has been said that Jonathan Edwards was the greatest intellect ever produced on American soil and this book is certainly a testament to his staggering unrivaled mind.

Edwards shows that man not only has a will, but that that will is entirely free to do whatever man wishes or desires to do. The question at the heart of the book is "what does it mean to

have free will?" Does it mean that man is merely a fatalistic robot? Or is man genuinely free to do as he pleases?

What is the will? How is it influenced? How does it operate? All of these questions are addressed by Edwards in a thorough and biblical fashion. No serious counter has ever been published against Edwards and his work on the will. This was, by far, my toughest read of the year – yet very rewarding.

This year I picked up and read ***The Forgotten Trinity*** by James R. White (Harvest House Publishers, 219 pages.) for the second time, the first being about thirteen years ago. My reason for reading was simply a review to prepare for a sermon on the doctrine of the Trinity. This book is written for everyone, not just apologists and theologians. Highly recommended! (Of course, anything by James White is highly recommended.)

We bought a case of ***God is the Gospel*** by John Piper to make available to our church family, so I figured I'd better give it a read (Crossway, 179 pages.). As with all the other books by John Piper, this one fleshes out the implications of what Piper calls "Christian hedonism": namely, that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. This book explains how the greatest gift that God has given to us in the gospel is Himself. The goal and point of the gospel is that we find in God the fulfillment of all our longings as we behold the glory of God in the face of Christ, and that we find our delight in the Giver of the gifts, not the gifts themselves.

Apologetics

The Jesus You Can't Ignore: What You Must Learn From the Bold Confrontations of Christ by John MacArthur (Thomas Nelson, 212 pages.) was a quick but engaging read. When MacArthur first published ***The Truth War*** he was roundly criticized for his harsh criticism (oh the irony!) of false teachers within the modern church, including Word-Faith teachers and Emergent Church leaders. MacArthur's

critics charged him with being incendiary and un-Christlike. This book takes a look at Jesus' confrontations with the false religious system of His day: the false teachers and false doctrines promoted by those teachers. Did Jesus seek common ground? Did He avoid moral judgments and sweeping condemnations of false doctrines? No! Never. In ***The Jesus You Can't Ignore***, MacArthur takes a look at Jesus' confrontation of the religious establishment in John 2, 5, and 6 and Matthew 23, as well as other passages. Jesus did not seek common ground, but instead stressed the points of disagreement when speaking to or about the Pharisees. How did Jesus treat false teachers? You might be surprised. This is an excellent book!

God Has a Wonderful Plan For Your Life: The Myth of the Modern Message by Ray Comfort (Living Waters Publications, 130 pages.) boldly confronts the "Jesus-has-a-wonderful-plan-for-your-life" gospel message of modern evangelicalism. With his typical wit, humor, and memorable illustrations, Ray Comfort shows how the gospel should be preached and why the modern selling of the gospel as a "life enhancement" product falls miserably short of producing true converts. Comfort shows what should be obvious to all who read the New Testament: that the promise of a better life in Christ, or as some might say, "*Your Best Life Now*," is nothing close to the promise of trials, tribulations, and temptations which Scripture says we should expect in this life. Highly recommended.

Does God Believe In Atheists by John Blanchard (Auburn: Evangelical Press, 2000.) was a bit daunting at 586 pages (plus endnotes). I wasn't sure that anyone could write a book about atheism that would justify 586 pages, but I was wrong. This book is a great primer on the history of philosophy, both ancient and modern, the history of atheism and modern arguments against theism.

Blanchard offers a **very** comprehensive and yet readable and enjoyable critique of materialism, humanism, and evolutionary

cosmology. Atheistic arguments based on the “problem of evil” are all dealt with very thoroughly, and the case for the existence of God is laid out in a compelling and engaging manner. This is a book I will turn to time and again for a refresher. A great one-volume resource for your library. Excellent!

Jesus Under Fire (Zondervan, 232 pages.) is written by various authors in response to the liberal Jesus Seminar. The book is a very good refutation of the claims of those who assert that the Gospels cannot be trusted. The liberal, self-contradictory, baseless claims of the Jesus Seminar are thoroughly and effectively refuted, while the reliability of the New Testament record is defended. A scholarly yet readable book.

Biographical

I love to read biographies (so it is surprising that I don't read more). I also enjoy books on latter 20th Century history (WWII and Cold War), and I found both interests satisfied by ***Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy, A Righteous Gentile Vs. The Third Reich*** by Eric Metaxas (Thomas Nelson, 542 pages.).

My knowledge of Bonhoeffer and his theology was scanty at best prior to reading the book. I have never read any of Bonhoeffer's writings apart from an occasional paragraph quoted elsewhere.

Like Samson in the Old Testament, Bonhoeffer seemed to me to be a study in contrasts. His theology was liberal compared to mine, but conservative compared to the culture in which he was raised. He wrote, believed, and did things which are utterly incongruous for a believer. At the same time, he wrote, believed, and did things which seem completely out of character for an unbeliever.

Metaxas did a superb job of telling the story of the rise of the Third Reich, the change in German culture and thinking, and the political landscape which all served as a backdrop to Bonhoeffer's life. The details of some assassination attempts on Hitler are a

fascinating read, notably Bonhoeffer's role in the Valkyrie Plot of June 20, 1944, the final attempt to assassinate the Fuhrer.¹ I watched a movie on the Valkyrie Plot, and a documentary, and neither mentioned Bonhoeffer's involvement, nor the religious faith (Catholic) of Stauffenberg, the main conspirator. Bonhoeffer was arrested and executed because of his suspected involvement, though the Third Reich never did prove his connection. I highly recommend the book! A fun and engaging read.

In honor of the 100th Anniversary of Ronald Reagan's birthday, I read to my kids ***Operation Rawhide*** by Paul Thomsen (Institute For Creation Research, 70 pages.) which tells the story of the failed assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan from the perspective of the Christian heart surgeon who operated on President Reagan and saved his life. It is a short book, an easy read, and written for kids. I probably shouldn't even mention it, but I needed to fill some space. Hey, just being honest!

Miscellaneous

It took me a long time to read ***The Economics of Public Issues*** by Roger LeRoy Miller, Aniel K. Benjamin, and Douglass C. North (Pearson, 207 pages.), a book given to me by my friend Dave Rich. It was a most interesting book, but one I only read aloud to Diedre while she was cutting my hair. We only managed a chapter at a time, about every 6 weeks. So it took us a long time.

This is a great book which applies the principles of economics to a number of current hot topics like airlines, ethanol, obesity, prostitution, drug use, and others. With chapter titles like *(Why) Are Women Paid Less?*, *The Effects Of The Minimum Wage*, *Big Oil, Big Oil Prices? And College Costs (. . . and Costs and Costs)*, you will find plenty to think about! The authors apply the realities and actions of the free market to the environment, trash

¹ A movie titled *Valkyrie* starring Tom Cruise was released in 2008.

collection, water usage, price fixing, health care, gas prices, crime and punishment, and many more topics. This should be required reading for anyone in or aspiring to public office. **One warning: the authors are not Christians and make no attempt to address the public policy issues from a Christian perspective.**

I finished reading ***How To Talk To A Liberal - If You Must*** by Ann Coulter (Crown Forum, 344 pages.) during this last year. It took me about three years to read it since, like the previous book, I read this out loud while Diedre cut my hair.

This book is a collection of her weekly columns from as far back as the Clinton Administration. A few of them I had already read, but most were published before I was ever exposed to Ann Coulter.

I enjoy her humor, wit, and satire and this book did not disappoint.

Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach To Finding God's Will, or How To Make A Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleeces, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing In The Sky, Etc. has a title that is almost longer than the book. Weighing in at a short and concise 124 pages (Moody Publishers), Kevin DeYoung offers a very practical guide for knowing and discerning God's will without all the subjectivism typical of those who want to "hear from God" outside of Scripture. It is well written, theologically sound, and to the point. I highly recommend this book and will be buying a couple extra copies to have on hand to give to others in need. Every teenager and young adult should own and read this book. Oh, the countless hours and frustrations one would be saved!

DeYoung takes the same approach to God's will that I have advocated for years in the *Hearing the Voice of God* series of articles. This is the book I wish I had written. DeYoung beat me to it! Oh, well. Now I can focus on other things.

Audiobooks

Though I have a hard time following audiobooks with my undivided attention (I am easily distracted), I have found them to be a great way of taking in books while driving, working, or exercising.

It took about five hours, but I was able to take in the abridged version of ***The Ezekiel Option*** by Joel C. Rosenberg. It has been over a year since I listened to the first two books in this five-book series, but that didn't keep me from picking right up where I left off. I have enjoyed this series of political thrillers.

The unabridged version of ***The Copper Scroll*** by Joel C. Rosenberg, and the fourth installment in his political thriller series, took me twice as long in listening. I didn't enjoy *The Copper Scroll* as much as some of the other books. It struck me as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* meets *National Treasure* with a bit of scripture twisting to make the whole story work. The story is an engaging one, but felt a little forced, particularly the gospel presentations.

Dead Heat finished off Rosenberg's political end-time thriller series. All in all, a good series of stories. They would make a good movie some day.

Upon review, it looks as if I have read a lot of books by John Piper this last year. That was not by design, at least not mine. It just so happened that a couple of them providentially crossed my path. Such it was with two audiobooks by Piper, which I was able to acquire via download for free. I couldn't pass that up!

Jesus: The Only Way to God: Must You Hear the Gospel to be Saved

(www.christianaudio.com) by John Piper was written to answer the aberrant theologies of universalism and annihilationism, which both undermine the gospel effort of the church among the nations. The book offers a great challenge to the church to guard its evangelistic fervor and missionary endeavors.

Don't Waste Your Life by John Piper

(www.christianaudio.com) shows that we are too ready to settle complacently for small visions, small goals, and self-gratifying endeavors rather than seeking the glory of God in Christ by God-centered living and risk-taking.

John Trapp once said, "As water tastes of the soil it runs through, so does the soul taste of the authors that a man reads." I know you must be looking forward to summer. With all that cries out for your attention, don't forget to give proper attention to reading. Read widely and read wisely. Above all, don't forget to read your Bible! That is the most important book of all.

Without Wax -

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be the name 'Jim Osman', written in a cursive style.