

Annual Book Review 2012

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It is time for my annual pre-summer book review and suggested reading list. A wise mentor once told me that a man is the product of the books he reads and the people he associates with. Through reading we associate with great men and women of the past and present as we spend time with them through the books they write. What type of company do you keep?

Every year I publish a review of my past readings in hopes of encouraging you to pick up and enjoy some good company during the coming year. The summer months are upon us and I trust that they will bring opportunity to imbibe deeply in some good books! So, if you are looking for some suggestions, I offer the following from my own list of completed readings from the past twelve months.

Theology

I have read a lot of John Piper's books, but not until this year did I finish his landmark book ***Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*** (Multnomah Books, 312 pgs.). This book defines, describes, and defends Piper's foundational principle of Christian Hedonism, namely that "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." This philosophy is worked out in the various areas of Christian life, with chapters on conversion, worship, love,

Scripture, prayer, money, marriage, missions, and suffering. I always enjoy Piper's books and this one was no exception. I would recommend beginning with this book before reading Piper's other offerings.

The more books I read by Randy Alcorn, the more titles by him make it on to my *Best Books I Have Ever Read* list. His latest tome, ***If God Is Good: Faith In The Midst of Suffering And Evil*** (Multnomah Books, 494 pgs.) has certainly found its way onto that list.¹

The book addresses the issue of the goodness of God and how the orthodox theology of the nature and character of God can be reconciled with a world full of suffering and death. This is a full-orbed theodicy, dealing with the ancient question of how or why a good God could allow human suffering. The style is **very readable** and enjoyable. The tone is sympathetic and compassionate, and the theology is exceptionally biblical. If you pick one book to read this coming year out of all these reviews —**pick this one!** I say that without a moment's hesitation. (But read Alcorn's ***Heaven*** first!)

Slave by John MacArthur (Thomas Nelson, 240 pgs.) was a soul-refreshing

¹ *Heaven* is the other title by Randy Alcorn that cannot come too heavily recommended.

read. MacArthur unfolds the riches of our salvation contained in the slave/master relationship to which we have been brought by God's grace. The New Testament does not hide the fact that we are God's slaves. However, many modern translations obscure this reality by translating the Greek term *doulos* as "servant," or "bond-servant," instead of the culturally unpopular word "slave." However, the truth of Christ's Lordship and our slavery to Him is inescapable in Scripture. This is a fascinating and convicting read.

While preaching through John 6, I read **On The Gift of Perseverance** by Augustin from *The Works of St. Augustin* (Still Waters Revival Books, 27pgs.) on the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (commonly referred to as eternal security). This is a concise theological work treating some of the common objections to this reformed doctrine. Augustin shows the connection of perseverance to God's other gifts, including election, faith, and repentance.

Apologetics

I first read the paradigm-changing book **Overrun By Demons: The Church's New Preoccupation With The Demonic** by Thomas Ice and Robert Dean, Jr., in 1992 (Harvest House, 194 pgs.). Over the course of this last year, I have read through this indispensable resource again as I have been writing a series of articles on spiritual warfare. This is at least the third time I have read through this book! If you own one book on the subject of spiritual warfare, this should be it. If you have read the article series on spiritual warfare,² then you have seen this book quoted a number of times.

Biographical

² All these articles are archived on our website at www.kootenaichurch.org.

The fourth book in John Piper's "The Swans Are Not Silent" series is **Contending for Our All** (Crossway Books, 174 pgs.) and is as good as the first three. This book contains biographical treatments of Athanasius, John Owen, and J. Gresham Machen, showing each man's fight for the truth of Scripture in his own generation, and what that fight cost him.

I have found Piper's biographies a great way to familiarize myself with some of the saints of the past. This was a thoroughly enjoyable read!

Piper's biography on John Owen whet my appetite to read more on and by this great saint. So I decided this year to begin reading through the sixteen-volume set on my shelf titled "The Works of John Owen." What better place to start than with **Volume 1**, which contains a biography of Owen written by Rev. Andrew Thomson, B.A., of Edinburgh titled **Life of Dr. Owen** (Banner of Truth Trust, 100 pgs.). This short biography was intended to be published with the complete works of Owen and does an excellent job of describing the times in which he lived and the order in which he published his books. John Owen is a fascinating man and you will be seeing more reviews of his books in my annual book-review article for years to come.³

Peril and Peace by Mindy and Brandon Withrow (Christians Focus Publications, 207 pgs.) is not the type of book I read often: a children's novel. This is the first in the "History Lives" series of five books which tell the stories of Christians from the first five centuries of the early church. Each chapter is a treatment of a different historical figure, detailing the time in which that person lived and his contribution to church history. Written as a novel, the dialog and details of each

³ Other great sources on John Owen would be the mini-biography written by John Piper (also reviewed here) or **John Owen on the Christian Life** by Sinclair B. Ferguson.

short story draw the reader into the lives and times of the characters. The stories of Polycarp, Jerome, Constantine, and Patrick are all given in an exciting and engaging format that kids 9-14 (and me) will enjoy.

One caveat (which some will appreciate and others will not) is that the facts of history are retold without the authors making any judgments of those facts. For instance, the story of how Benedict established a monastery and rules for monastic life is told without any discussion as to whether such actions were at all legitimate or biblically warranted. Some of those events were just part of the life of the church as it then existed.

Second in the "History Lives" series is ***Monks and Mystics*** by Mindy and Brandon Withrow, covering the years 500-1500 in the history of the Christian church. This was an age marked by dominance of the Roman Catholic Church and its lust for political power. The stories of some popes and their conquests, the rise and influence of Islam, and the contributions of various saints are told in an engaging novel format geared to teenagers. You will read about Constantine, Gregory the Great, Boniface, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, John Hus, John Wycliff, and many more.

It looks like a great series of books, and one I will continue to read. If you are looking for a resource to give kids a primer on church history, this would be a good one. Each book tells stories from a different time period detailing the Early Church, The Dark Ages, the Reformation, Early American Colonial Life, and the Modern Church Era.

You might not expect to read a review of an autobiography by Peter Falk here, but I have always appreciated the acting and talent of the man who made Lieutenant Columbo an international icon. **Just One More Thing: Stories From My Life** (Carroll & Graf Publishers, 281 pgs.) is a very quick

and easy read. This is the second time I have read and enjoyed this book. Falk died last year, and as far as I know, he died without Christ. The book is not written by a believer, or about a believer, so there are a few profanities as Falk recalls conversations with various directors and actors. It is very interesting to get the "behind the scenes" account of the development of Lieutenant Columbo.

Miscellaneous

Writing does not come easy for me, and writing well is even harder. I received some encouragement by reading ***On Writing Well*** (HarperCollins, 303 pgs.) by William Zinsser. An excellent book! Whether I actually end up writing better or not remains to be seen, but the book is thoroughly enjoyable.

The first third of the book deals with principles for becoming a better writer. It's common-sense stuff that we probably could've learned in high school if we had been paying attention.

The second third of the book, dealing with different forms of writing, lost my interest quickly.

Then the last section, which addresses the attitude of the writer, seized my attention all over again.

The book is filled with great illustrations and examples of both good and poor writing. This will be a reference work that I return to again and again, I am sure.

This year I read my first book on a Kindle e-reader: ***Sexual Detox*** by Tim Challies.⁴ This is a treatment of the theology of marriage, sex, and moral purity. Challies talks about the effects of impurity, pornography, and fantasizing on our relationship with God and our spouse (current or future). This book also contains great advice to singles. It is a healthy and well written antidote to the over-

⁴ [Http://www.timchallies.com](http://www.timchallies.com)

sensualization of the church and culture.

I borrowed **The Road to Serfdom** (University of Chicago Press, 241 pgs.) from a friend. Written by Austrian economist F. A. Hayek after World War II, this book traces the development of totalitarianism in Germany. Hayek explains how a nation can go from being a free people to a totalitarian state in little more than a generation.

Written as a defense of individual freedom, the book explains how and why people are willing to forfeit their freedom for what they perceive to be a noble end—economic prosperity and equality. Ultimately oppressive totalitarian force must be used in order to achieve that end. The result is always the opposite of what was intended. I particularly enjoyed Hayek's explanation of how it is that well-meaning and compassionate people can support policies which will inevitably result in the oppression of other people. Amazingly insightful! Though written sixty years ago, you will feel like you are reading a description of our modern-day political debate.

Since I love football, I occasionally read books that profile either players or coaches. So I was delighted when a friend gifted me with an autographed copy of **Uncommon: Finding Your Path To Significance** by former NFL coach Tony Dungy (Tyndale House, 260 pgs.). I enjoy reading about stories from behind the scenes in the NFL, and some of the players that Dungy has encountered and coached. It was a light and quick read. The book is geared to young adult males who are desperately in need of mentoring, something Dungy excels at. Dungy is straightforward about his faith and how it affects his life, though he does not go into any depth in either doctrine or the gospel presentation. The real value of the book for me was in the NFL stories, and the autograph. I thoroughly enjoyed it, and am very grateful for the gift.

Audiobooks

I downloaded **The Hiding Place** by Corrie ten Boom (audiobook, 8.75 hrs.). This is a book I have wanted to read for years and was thrilled to see I could get it on audio. This is the fascinating story of the Nazi occupation of Holland and ten Boom's efforts to save people, many of whom she did not know, from persecution and death. She spent time in a concentration camp with her sister who died just days before Corrie was released. A thrilling testimony to the faithfulness of God in times of suffering. Excellent!

I read **The Holiness of God** by R.C. Sproul about fifteen years ago, so when I saw it available as an audiobook, I downloaded it (6.5 hrs.) from Christianaudio.com. It was as edifying in audio as it was fifteen years ago in print format. Sproul's study of the nature of God's holiness as revealed in Scripture stirs the soul to awe, reverence, and worship.

The Millennials is not only the title given to the generation born between 1980 and 2000, but that of a book by Thom and Jess Rainer. This is a fascinating study of a generation that cannot remember life without cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It is a very encouraging look at the morals, beliefs, convictions, and principles which characterize those who will lead us in the years to come. It is not *all* good news, but there is enough good to encourage us. This generation is unique in a number of ways, and those in leadership, business, and ministry should understand the people they will be interacting with and leading in the years to come. This book was well worth the 7.5 hours of listening.⁵

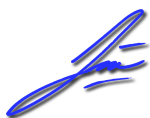
Only Part 1 of **A History of Money and Banking in the United States** by Murray N.

⁵ Actually, I have a player that plays audio files at 2x, so it was only half that! What is better than having someone speed-read to you while you work? Amazing what you can learn!

Rothbard⁶ is available as a free audiobook download. Part 1 takes up only 180 pages (4 hours of audio) of the 490-page book. The book is a survey of the monetary system and the mistakes made by those who tampered with currency and trade in an attempt to acquire or spread wealth. The gist of the book: anytime the government begins to tamper with the money supply for its own political ends, disaster ensues. The free market always does a better job of regulating the value of currency and the price and availability of products than the government can.

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 -



6 The entire book is available as a free .pdf download from the Ludwig von Mises Institute (<http://www.mises.org/books/historyofmoney.pdf>). A search for that title will find the same audiobook reading available on YouTube.com.