

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.
Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

A

Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens

Paul David Tripp
291 pages

What an encouraging and challenging book for parents. Tripp doesn't pull any punches in this outstanding book that challenges parents to be more deliberate and intentional about their parenting. The primary emphasis of the book is getting through to parents that raising children is not about how they look, how well they score on some standardized test, or how many touchdowns they score, but ultimately if they have a heart for God. Tripp first deals with the perspective of parents on this issue refocusing them on what's really important, then he dives in to encourage parents to pursue their teens and accept this stage of parenting as a God-given opportunity instead of dreading it and working to avoid it at all costs.

Tripp encourages parents to find a balance between protecting them from the world and allowing them to assimilate themselves into the world. Tripp knows that many parents of teens are tired and worn out – but he thinks that the reason is because they are spending too much time and energy addressing the wrong thing. Tripp warns parents that they should not focus on behavior modification, but be willing to spend the time and energy to find out the root causes which underlie their behavior. One theme constantly running through *Age of Opportunity* is the emphasis given to conversation – parents making the effort to talk with their children

While the intended audience is parents with teenage children, much of the sage advice is applicable to parents with any age children and the book might be a better read for parents *before* their children hit the teen years. Outstanding book, easy-to-read, biblically sound, challenging and encouraging – *Age of Opportunity* has my highest recommendation.

Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business

Neil Postman

Ever wonder why you can't stop watching TV to pick up a good book and read – Postman will tell you why – you can't! It's not your fault; you've been conditioned by television to NOT THINK – reading is antithetical to your mind-numbing existence that seeks only entertainment and amusement. Want to prove Postman wrong – read this book!

Seriously, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* is a must read for every thinking Christian – or every Christian who wants to think deeply about the world around them. Postman hits the nail on the head with his assessment of the current condition of the state of man and the incredible (but silent) impact television has had on reshaping the way that we process information and contemplate truth – television has reprogrammed our epistemology – our manner in which we understand things, the concept of what knowledge is. Television bombards us with images, entertains us with useless facts, removes us from the immediate concerns around us to far away places, and ultimately makes the concerns of life, in a word – silly. What we don't realize is how this manner of "thinking" has affected and transformed our ability and the manner in which we proclaim the Truth of the Gospel – to a generation that can only sit for three minutes at a time – just visit your church's youth group and see for yourself what condition our culture is in!

I would suggest this book to any student from about the age of sixteen and up – and all the way up to anyone who's grown up with a television in their home! It's not an easy read – on a "difficulty" scale of 1-10, I would put this as an 7 or an 8, but it's worth the effort. The book is 163 pages in length and can be ordered online or found in most bookstores. I have the Penguin Book edition which retails for \$14.00.

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Anchor Man: How a Father Can Anchor his Family in Christ for the Next 100 Years

Steve Farrar

288 pages

Vintage Farrar. This is an in-your-face, no-nonsense-kind-of-book for dads. Farrar states that it is the responsibility of the father to be the anchor for his family – to prevent “drift” away from the values and principles upon which family is built. Farrar points fingers at the men in this country who are far more concerned with other things far less valuable than their families and warns them that they have accepted the responsibility of a family with marriage and with the bearing of children – it is not a choice that is made after the fact, it is one that has already been made and many men are either neglecting their duty or walking away from it!

The best part about Farrar is that while he’s chastising you, he’s entertaining you with his stories and wit. The book is written in a manner that men will actually enjoy and find humorous at times – but the message is anything but funny. Farrar talks about the generations of devastation resulting from the poor decisions of one man who neglects his responsibility to his family.

Farrar ends this clarion call to fathers with some practical suggestions about having a devotional time with their children as well as working to produce memorial stones or markers of spiritual growth and development to measure and prevent against drift. I would suggest this book to every father, especially a young man about to get married or just having his first child – the patterns of a good father need to begin early before the pattern of this world squeezes a man into its mold.

Ask Me Anything: Provocative Answers for College Students

J. Budziszewski (aka Professor Theophilus, from Boundless webzine)

170 pages

What issues are college students dealing with today – the same sex, drugs and rock n’ roll from the ‘60s, or have they added some new ones, too? Well, to find out, you need to ask Professor Theophilus on the popular Focus on the Family college website called Boundless. The good professor is none other than UT philosophy and government professor J. Budziszewski, author of the incredible book *How to Stay Christian in College*. And Budziszewski ought to know what he’s talking about, he lost his faith while in college only to return like the prodigal son to his Father and now he devotes himself to answering the longing questions of the truly seeking. The book is simply a written version of these Internet blogging conversations and they make for very, very interesting reading.

One student wants to know if Catholics can be Christians since he is interested in dating a Catholic girl, but understands that the Bible teaches not to be unequally yoked. Another student wants to know why she doesn’t feel comfortable at church. Another student writes to ask how to apologize to his girlfriend who he has wronged. Another one needs wisdom in dealing with her roommate.

The questions are poignant and telling, Budziszewski’s answers are humorous at times, but always Biblically-based, brutally honest and covered with compassion for the individual and their situation. The book would be a great read for any college student, but it might be best to have parents read this to get a feel for the issues facing their children as they head off to college. And it’s nice to know that if parents don’t have all the answers to all the questions their students are asking, they can turn to Professor Theophilus for wisdom and direction to pass along!

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B

Better Dads, Stronger Sons: How Fathers Can Guide Boys to Become Men of Character

Rick Johnson
238 pages

I was pleasantly surprised by this book. Rick Johnson is the founder of Better Dads, a fathering skills program designed to equip men to be more engaged in the lives of their children and he writes from the experience of a less-than-adequate father turned “super dad” following his conversion to Christ. Johnson shares his own failings, fears and weaknesses as a challenge to other dads to encourage them that they, too, can and should be more diligent about their fathering. The book is full of practical advice mixed with godly wisdom and would make a great gift to any father young or old, especially for that dad who feels overwhelmed or under-equipped for the task of spiritually leading his family.

Johnson addresses pretty much all areas of concern for a man. He deals with the importance of fathers bonding with their children, especially the need for an older man to bond with a younger man – he argues that true manhood is something that is caught by being in the presence of men, not something that a woman can teach and definitely not something that the culture is promoting or endorsing. Johnson also deals with the issues of sex and the important role that the father plays in this issue as well as discipline. Johnson is seeking to help fathers produce men of honor...not simply successful by the world's standards, but successful by God's standard – men who live by a code of honor that is greater than themselves and are willing to pay the price necessary to achieve “greatness.” Johnson was one of those worldly successes who found that when he reached the top of the ladder, it was leaning against the wrong building – but he has changed directions and now is not only a successful husband and father, but a mentor and equipper of others!

Blah, Blah, Blah: Making Sense of the World's Spiritual Chatter

Bayard Taylor
241 pages

Taylor is a worldview and apologetics guy and the book is an excellent resource to prepare young people for evangelism and engaging the culture around them. Taylor is correct when he points out to the reader that every person is a “walking billboard” for their particular worldview and that it would be advantageous for students to learn more about worldviews which stand in opposition (or even competition) to the Biblical belief and life system. The book is really about what Taylor describes as the six fundamental worldviews: The Haunted Worldview, The Biblical Worldview, The WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) Worldview, The Dueling Yodas Worldview, The Omnipresent Supergalactic Oneness Worldview, and the catch-all Design Religion category. Taylor spends the rest of the book exploring how these various worldviews address particular questions of life, noting similarities and differences and giving the reader enough ammunition to engage a person from any of the six schools of thought on a variety of topics.

Taylor also identifies at the end of the book that most of his readers are not as well equipped in the essentials of their own Biblical worldview – specifically that Christian students today are far too ignorant of their own faith and belief system and if they are going to prepare to engage those of another worldview, they must have a solid and substantial grounding in the Truth as revealed by God through His creation and His divine Word. Students who read this book will see almost daily in the movies and television they watch or the music they listen to a variety of worldviews as described by Taylor. I thought the most powerful message that Taylor delivered in the book was that many other people have a more comprehensive understanding of their particular worldview and how it influences their lives and the way in which they engage the world around them than most Christians do. The book challenges young Christian students to “take every thought captive to Christ” and begin to think critically and Christianly about the world around them.

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C

The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life

Os Guinness
247 pages

In life, one of the big questions you have to answer is “What am I going to do when I grow up?” To help you wrestle with the concept of what God has planned for you in terms of ministry and vocation, let me suggest an excellent book entitled *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*. Author Os Guinness explores the concept that God has a calling for each and every Christian – a purpose for your life, something that will enlist and enthrall you, even captivate you! For most of you, your job will not be your calling; for some, it will be. But what’s the difference, you ask – read *The Call* to find out!

The concept of a calling has been misunderstood and misapplied for centuries. Guinness even classifies the common misconceptions as the Catholic myth and the Protestant myth. But the idea remains important, even central, to every Christian’s life and there is no time more critical to explore and answer the age old question about meaning and purpose in life than before you chart a course for your life in the waters of your career.

Guinness writes, “[C]alling is not what it is commonly thought to be. It has to be dug out from under the rubble of ignorance and confusion. And uncomfortably it often flies in the face of our human inclinations. But no idea short of God’s call can ground and fulfill the truest human desire for purpose and fulfillment.”

While the underlying concept of this book may appear to parallel Rick Warren’s immensely popular *The Purpose Driven Life*, the similarity really ends there. Guinness’ *The Call* is not an “easy read” and is written at the college level, in terms of vocabulary and depth of insight. This book is worth its weight in gold and your time to read. Dostoyevski wrote that “The secret of man’s being is not only to live, but to live for something definite.” My prayer is that you find that purpose to which God has called you to and prepared you for – *The Call* will be an invaluable resource in that journey.

Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth

Richard J. Foster

“The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.” With this line, Foster correctly positions this book as a tool for all Christians to use as part of their spiritual journey. I read this book almost ten years ago and still find it to be one of the most useful, practical and challenging books I’ve ever read. *Celebration of Discipline* is a treasure for the Christian who wants to draw closer to God.

Foster breaks down the spiritual disciplines into three categories: (1) The Inward Disciplines: Meditation, Prayer, Fasting and Study; (2) The Outward Disciplines: Simplicity, Solitude, Submission and Service; (3) The Corporate Disciplines: Confession, Worship, Guidance and Celebration.

At just over 200 pages, the book is a pretty easy read – about a 5 on the difficulty scale of 1-10. I would suggest that this book as a great gift for a student as young as eighth grade – and there is no upper age limit for this great resource. I have the HarperSanFrancisco 20th Anniversary Edition – and there is now a 25th Anniversary Edition as well – this book has been blessing generations of Christians for over 25 years! You should be able to purchase this book online or in any Christian or mainstream bookstore for \$15 - \$20. It will be one of your most treasured resources and makes an excellent gift to another brother or sister in Christ.

Child Training Tips: What I Wish I Knew When My Children Were Young

Reb Bradley
187 pages

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What is the *telos* [the desired result of a goal-oriented process] of parenting? Bradley suggests that our desired result should be that our children mature in their walk with the Lord to the point of self-control. How can we accomplish that goal? Bradley suggests that Scripture clearly teaches that this responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of the parents and that maturity can be accomplished through consistent and loving discipline.

This book is an essential read for Christian parents, especially in today's culture that encourages young people to be self-centered and irresponsible. Bradley counters the messages of the culture and challenges Christian parents to "rear" [twist unto greatness] their children to be other-centered, responsible and well-mannered. But, he warns, this process won't be easy! Control and consistency are the keys – parents must establish control in the home and must apply discipline in a consistent manner.

Bradley counters the message of the culture that children will behave in a manner consistent with their age – the proverbial "terrible twos" or the phrase that "boys will be boys" are constant excuses parents use to distract from the fact that their children are not well disciplined or obedient. Bradley encourages parents to insist on first-time obedience in rearing their children not only for safety's sake, but in preparation for their walk with the Lord who requires obedience as well.

Child Training Tips is filled with practical advice and biblical wisdom. Christian parents with any aged children will find this book foundational to establishing a home that pleases the Lord.

A Christian Manifesto

Francis A. Schaeffer

138 pages

An incredible book that I first read back in eighth grade, *A Christian Manifesto* is Schaeffer's examination of the conflict between the Christian worldview versus the humanistic worldview as it plays out in law and government. It is that shift in worldview which Schaeffer identifies as the fundamental issue in our culture today – and the fact that far too many Christians are fighting this war on various battlefronts, missing the totality of the conflict in which they are ultimately engaged! The battle, according to Schaeffer, is a conflict over Truth, whether there is a comprehensive and absolute Truth about all reality or not.

Schaeffer does an excellent job of reviewing human history and demonstrating clearly and convincingly that Christians have in almost every generation and every culture been at the heart of this continuous battle for truth. Setting the stage from the Protestant Reformation, Schaeffer then turns to the uniqueness of the legal and governmental status found in the United States – a government established on the principle that God supersedes law and that law supersedes man. But, warns Schaeffer, that uniqueness has been slowly eroded away by the humanist worldview and its invasion of the public policy arena with the fallacy that the state is supreme in the absence of the existence of God.

Schaeffer encourages Christians to be an active presence in the political process – and warns that when the state violates the liberties granted by God, civil disobedience is not only an option, but a commandment as well – to submit to an authority in clear violation of Biblical principles is not an option for a follower of Christ – "citizens have a *moral* obligation to resist unjust and tyrannical government," he writes.

Looking at the United States in the early 1980s, Schaeffer sees a window of opportunity for Christians to make their presence felt in the process, but warns that this window is slowly closing. Schaeffer uses the issue of abortion as his example of an issue where Christians must be a part of the solution, and gives various strategies that can be employed to make a difference in the culture on this particular travesty of humanistic reasoning.

A Christian Manifesto is a great read, especially for a Christian who wants to engage their culture for Christ in the public policy arena. Schaeffer's reasoning is solid, challenging and relevant even today!

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The Chronicles of Narnia

C.S. Lewis

It's hard to know where to start in the explanation of this classic work by one of the greatest Christian authors C.S. Lewis. *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a fictional work, a tale of fantasy and exploration of four youths into the land of Narnia. Lewis and Tolkien were contemporaries and friends – and many people are now familiar with Tolkien's work *The Lord of the Rings*.

Hollywood is about to introduce America to the most famous of the 7 books in the Narnia collection – *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (which is actually the second book in the series) with a movie by the same name to be released in December 2005.

Since the books read like a fairy tale, they are perfect for a young reader – I read them for the first time probably in sixth or seventh grade – and then reread them later in high school. I look forward to reading them to my own children sometime in elementary school. The spiritual concepts are profound and deep, but even young children will be fascinated by the story of heroes and witches and four young children lost in this fantasy land.

Be careful when purchasing *The Chronicles of Narnia* – the books are sold both individually and as a boxed set...you might think you're ordering the entire set, but only end up with one book. The entire set is seven books – Book 1: The Magician's Nephew; Book 2: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe; Book 3: The Horse and His Boy; Book 4: Prince Caspian; Book 5: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader; Book 6: The Silver Chair; Book 7: The Last Battle. I have a boxed set published by HarperTrophy and it is excellent. You can purchase *The Chronicles of Narnia* almost anywhere for about \$20.00 - \$30.00.

College Bound: What Christian Parents Need to Know About Helping Their Kids Choose a College

Thomas A. Shaw

173 pages

This is an outstanding book that begins with the philosophical considerations that parents need to help their students think through regarding the decision about life after high school and ends with very practical advice about options on how to pay for college. The intended audience for this book is the parent themselves, not the student; and the advice is solid, well-research and presented in a easy-to-understand manner that parents will appreciate. One caveat about the book, it ends when the student goes off to college – it is not a book about parenting through the challenges of college, only the decision-making process of selecting a college and the work necessary to get a student to that right next step. But, in what it does present, *College Bound* is really a very good read.

Shaw begins with helping parents think about the various options for their soon-to-be-graduating student – including presenting the option of taking a year off of school to mature, work, travel, etc., which is excellent advice and needs to be presented as a viable option to parents today. However, if college is in the future for a student, Shaw makes sure that parents help think through the various options of community vs. four-year college, and Christian vs. secular. Not every school fits every student and sometimes the choice that parents made isn't going to be the same as their children – a good reminder that Shaw drives home early and often.

College Bound is full of useful and practical wisdom for narrowing down the college choice as well as tips for admission, financing the college experience and the transition from high school to college. It's like having a college guidance counselor at your fingertips! Shaw ends with an encouragement to Christian students to make sure they plug into a good church home in their new community as soon as they settle down and then gives a few pages of valuable Internet resources as a final parting gift for those who still need more information. I found the book to be easy to read, very informative, and written with a sound Biblical foundation and would suggest this book to any Christian parent of high school-aged students.

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

College Roadmap: Your Guide to Becoming a Freshman in Life

Jeannie Robins

200 pages

This is the book that every mother wants to give to her son who thinks that he is going to live like a slob in college and take home his laundry every month for mommy to do. The book is chalked full of helpful, very practical and extremely useful suggestions for the young college student to organize their lives for a successful college experience. I'm not sure Robins didn't think of everything – from how to sort whites and darks before doing laundry, to how to functionally accessorize your dorm room, budgeting suggestions, dieting tips, and hints for making friends, taking tests and keeping fit! Robins has obviously dealt with and received the input from dozens, if not hundreds, of college students – the book is everything a parent would want to tell their student and so much more!

The book is all filled with quotes from various college students from across the country as well as sage wisdom from Biblical quotations placed cleverly here and there. The book doesn't come across as "preachy," but Robins doesn't back down from critical issues like drinking, sex, and the "freshman 15" that students will face either. *College Roadmap* is a good read, helpful for students who want to start off college on the right foot instead of trying to play catch up after blowing their first year as an adult by acting like a child.

The Compleat Gentleman: The Modern Man's Guide to Chivalry

Brad Miner

237 pages

What does it mean to be a gentleman? That is the concept that Miner seeks to explore and does so by examining history, delving into the great concept of chivalry and the time-honored traditions that have transcended generations and cultures to give a foundational view of the concept of a gentleman. While some cultures in some eras associated the concept of the gentleman with social status, title, wealth or birth; Miner argues that the concept is better represented by the concepts of true nobility – character, dignity, restraint and discernment.

Miner is a lover of history and traces the concept of manliness from the days of the knights and the proverbial Round Table to the "women and children first" mentality found on the sinking Titanic. He writes that three masculine archetypes emerge – the warrior, the lover, and the monk – to combine in the character that Miner calls "the compleat gentleman."

Miner's warrior is a man who has something to live for – and is willing to sacrifice his life either to protect it or even to further it. The warrior is not necessarily a man of war, but a man prepared to do battle for that which he loves. His life is marked by preparation for something great and then is lived out pursuing those ideals to which he is called. One great line Miner uses to explain his warrior is from the writings of the great philosopher Epictetus who said, "For it is better to die of hunger, exempt from fear and guilt, than to live in affluence with perturbation."

If Miner's gentleman is willing to die for something he loves, it is because he loves deeply and with great passion. While romantic love definitely makes the list, it is not the sole occupant – love of God, country, and cause are also worthy objects of a gentleman's passions.

Finally, Miner's gentleman is a monk. I loved this one. Miner tells us that the word *monk* comes from the Greek *monakhos*, meaning solitary – but Miner's concept of aloneness is time for reflection and study – viewed another way, the monk is a lover "of learning and of truth."

Running throughout the book is the theme *sprezzatura* – a concept Miner says underlies this "compleat gentleman." It is a self-awareness and self-restraint and differs like night and day from self-centeredness or even apathy. The concept is what Christians might refer to as *meekness*, a trait often associated with Christ, and clearly as misunderstood. *Sprezzatura* is the ability to think before one speaks, to grasp the gravity of words and actions; and even to know when inaction or silence is the best avenue. It carries with it a "James Bond" like

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

persona where actions speak louder than words, and the words flow like honey from the lips of a man with a license to kill.

Miner doesn't delude himself or the reader into thinking that this "complete gentleman" is around every corner; quite to the contrary, "all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare" writes Miner. He gives men something to strive for, something to hold up as an ideal and an understanding that throughout history there have been men who have risen above the standards of the day to truly be called gentlemen – and we sure need more of these in this day and time!

The Compleat Gentlemen is not a Christian book, nor does the author purport it to be so; but Christian men will agree with Miner's argument that men need to be men of honor and integrity. The book is a challenging read, but well worth the effort and I would suggest it for any man, especially for a young man considering the path of his journey.

D

Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America

D.G. Hart
170 pages

If there is one individual in American history that punctuates the struggle in the church to prevent the separation from reason to religion, fact to faith, it is J. Gresham Machen (1881 – 1937). Hart does an incredible job of putting this larger-than-life character in his proper historical significance and the book is a must read for any person who wants to more fully understand why the church is so impotent in her ability to relate in a relevant manner to the real issues of the day.

Machen's struggle was primarily against the efforts within the Presbyterian church at the turn of the century to modernize and become more relevant to the cultural around them. Machen strongly believed that God's Word was timeless and the emphasis need to remain on educating and equipping the leaders of tomorrow with a strong foundation of theology and understanding of the truth and tenets of Scripture and the celebrated historical creeds of the faith. He became one of the most celebrated professors at Princeton Seminary, but was forced out of this position because of his unwillingness to compromise on the importance of solid biblical scholarship as well as his refusal to kowtow to the political structure within the church. After leaving Princeton, Machen and a few others founded Westminster Theological Seminary, which has gained a reputation for its Calvinistic theology as well as a reputation for solid scholarship, especially in the fields of biblical studies and theology.

Machen's primary battle was with the church's move toward anti-intellectualism, the embrace of the emotional and sensational evangelicalism of the day that "won soles" but didn't change lives. Machen was an incredible figure that clearly demonstrated the power and influence of the church's slide away from her historical roots and moorings into the cultural drift we can so easily see in a vast percentage of our churches today – especially in Machen's beloved Presbyterian Church!

The historical significance of Machen is only matched by his amazing and colorful personality. He passed away at a relatively young age really at the peak of his significance to the movement attempting to reestablish the importance of intellectual pursuits in the Christian walk; but his legacy is felt today through the lives and works of those who picked up the torch and continued the battle including the works of Francis Schaeffer, Cornelius Van Til, B.B. Warfield, and even Nancy Pearcey.

Devotional Classics

Edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

Not sure what to read – read this. My wife and I were given this book as a wedding gift, and I think it's the best gift we got! *Devotional Classics* is broken into six sections: Preparing for Spiritual Life, The Prayer-Filled Life, The Virtuous Life, The Spirit-Empowered Life, The Compassionate Life, and The Word-Centered Life. Each section has excerpts from outstanding authors and their works – from recent authors like Dallas Willard and Watchman Nee to the great saints of the faith including Jonathan Edwards, Francis de Sales, St. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Thomas a Kempis, William Law, John Bunyan, John Wesley, and Francis of Assisi to name a few!

While the entire book is 350 pages, each selection is only about 5 – 7 pages long...so the book is broken down into manageable reading segments – but the great treat is that this book exposes the reader to over 50 of the greatest Christian writers of all time – and gives you a brief excerpt from one of their works. If you like what you read, you can always get more by ordering and reading the entire book on your own. This is a great gift for a high school or college aged student and beyond (hey, makes a great wedding gift). On the difficulty scale from 1 – 10, *Devotional Classics* is about a 7 – not overwhelming, but some of these authors take a little more time to read and understand. The book is about \$10.00 – but for that price, you're really getting over 50 books...so, think of it as an outstanding investment into your continued spiritual development. There is a sister book entitled *Spiritual Classics*, which I've just ordered, and it looks outstanding as well.

Did Man Just Happen? A Pointed Answer for Evolutionists

W. A. Criswell

140 pages

This is an exceptional book that addresses the fallacies of the theory of evolution by looking at the scientific evidence presented in biology, embryology, geology and anthropology. The book is actually a compilation of Criswell's sermons, which is simply an amazing feat once you read the book and understand that he stood and delivered this information in a series of messages to his congregation at First Baptist Dallas. Criswell's arguments and reasoning are impeccable, first-rate, simply outstanding. The book is as relevant today as when it was first delivered all the way back in 1957!

One of the most important issues that Criswell addresses in this book is destroying the concept that one can be a theistic evolutionist. He emphasizes the point that the theory of evolution according to Darwin actually set out to destroy the concept and need for God as the creation force – it replaced God with naturalism and natural causes and forces. So combining naturalism and theism is simply dishonest and ignorant.

Criswell does a great job of explaining the impact of the embrace of the theory of evolution – the destruction of purpose and meaning in life. Indeed, if man is simply an evolving product of time and chance, then his entire existence precedes his essence – his only meaning comes from being, the here and now, the temporal is all there is. Criswell clearly communicates the fallacies of this view and the destructive forces that stem from it.

The book also has several chapters that address the specific "evidences" that have been used to support the theory of evolution – from the fossil record to several hoaxes in anthropology (finding the proverbial "missing link" connecting man to pre-human forms). Criswell demonstrates conclusively that there is no factual evidence that supports a transitional evolution that is cross species – meaning that one particular species evolved from an entirely different species (man coming from ape, for instance).

Criswell ends the book with an outstanding short chapter on the miracle of the human body and how its intricacies and profound balance and harmony point to a Creator as opposed to a random accident in nature. The book is short, only 140 small pages, but packed full of great and useful information, poignant arguments and solid reasoning. I was amazed that everything I read was like reading something straight from the headlines today, but realizing that this was presented nearly 50 years ago – made me appreciate the book even more!

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Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

Do Fish Know They're Wet: Living in Your World—Without Getting Hooked

Tom Neven

167 pages

Neven is the senior editor for *Plugged In* magazine and the former editor of *Focus on the Family* magazine, so as he writes primarily to a teen or young adult audience, he is very familiar with them and their mind set. The book is a wonderful and easy-to-read examination of the concept of a Christian worldview and exactly how that affects a person's daily interaction with a postmodern and relativistic culture. Neven starts by laying down a few basic rules, as he calls them:

Rule No. 1: God is.

Rule No. 2: God is the God of truth. All truth is God's truth.

Rule No. 3: Because we are created in God's image, we have the ability to recognize truth, although that ability is tainted by sin.

Rule No. 4: The ability of a person to recognize truth diminishes the closer that truth is to his or her own heart, to the very nature of being a person.

Neven then does an excellent job of giving a history of some of influential thinkers and their contribution to cultural transformation over the years. After that he turns from principles to practical and begins to examine modern culture exploring how a Christian worldview interacts with and runs counter to much of modern thinking in areas such as public policy/government, family, art, music, literature, science and history. Neven concludes by reminding the reader that all worldviews are religious in nature and that the reader must not back down when engaging the culture because of attack or perceived prejudice or bias.

Do Fish Know They're Wet is a pretty good read, especially for someone new to the worldview concept. Neven is an excellent writer and communicator and gives the reader just enough without complicating the issues beyond his intended audience's appetite.

Don't Waste Your Life

John Piper

189 pages

If Green Bay Packer coach Vince Lombardi were alive today writing a book as a follower of Christ, this would be it. Lombardi was a demanding coach who not only trained his athletes for success on the gridiron, but in life as well. Piper expects nothing less than greatness from his readers – and greatness defined not by the world's standards, but by the transcendent principles that truly give this life meaning and purpose. Piper is equally challenging and encouraging – a great mix that makes the book enjoyable to read while at the same time hitting you over the head with a 2 x 4 (in love, of course)!

The great thing about this book is that the reader can't avoid Piper's primary point that he drives home again and again – it's not about you! A life well lived is about bringing glory to the One who has not only given us life, but given that life meaning and significance. And Piper notes that every follower of Christ should expect some of the same reception that the One they follow received while He was walking this earth – one marked by suffering and sacrifice. Piper makes it perfectly clear that if the reader has no battle scars, then he might want to check to see if he's actually in the battle or sitting on the sidelines of life!

But the book isn't just a good spiritual pep talk, it's practical as well. Piper takes a good hard look right at the heart of the matter – our time, talents and treasures – and challenges the reader to use what they already have, where they already are, to the glory of God! At the end, Piper reminds the reader that the Christian walk is not solely relegated to their own personal growth and maturity, but that each follower of Christ is a model for others to examine the claims of Christ in the lives of each and every profession Christian. Christians are to be mission-minded, other-centered and self-sacrificing for the Kingdom – Piper writes that if these characteristics mark a person's life, it will have been a life well-lived – and wasting your life isn't an option for a person whose life was redeemed by God!

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

E

The Epidemic: The Rot of American Culture, Absentee and Permissive Parenting, and the Resultant Plague of Joyless, Selfish Children

Robert Shaw, M.D.

240 pages

While the title might be a little long, it is very accurate in its description of Dr. Shaw's book. A child and family psychiatrist practicing in Berkeley, California, Dr. Shaw has seen it all – and the diagnosis for the American family isn't pretty. Dr. Shaw's solution – stop being so self-centered – isn't aimed at the children; he's talking to the parents!

While not written from a Christian perspective, Dr. Shaw's assessment of the American family is wholly accurate and his solutions parallel biblical principles. It was obvious to me in reading the book that Dr. Shaw probably has a Jewish background since his support of the Judeo-Christian ethic is so strong, but there is no evidence in his writing of a personal Christian testimony.

Dr. Shaw's book is like Dr. Phil on steroids – not nice and not intended to be! He challenges parents who are more concerned about the way their appearance and worldly success than the quality of children they are rearing. But Dr. Shaw isn't fooled by thinking that many of these parents are even rearing their own children – nannies and TV account for much of the “parenting” in today's fast-paced and self-centered world.

Dr. Shaw uses his dry wit like a knife to cut to the heart of issues and also laces the book with a steady stream of real-life examples of families and family situations that probably hit way too close to home for most American parents. *The Epidemic* is an outstanding read, but since anyone buying the book is probably giving it as a “gift” to a friend who needs a wake-up call, I wouldn't say this will be a popular read! Filled with practical and timeless wisdom, *The Epidemic* is an important book sounding an alarm to our culture that giving everything to our children only makes them more discontent and more unlikely to provide for themselves and others in the future – we're not doing them any good or anyone else by not allowing our children to struggle, work and learn what the term “old fashioned hard work” really means.

F

Finishing Strong: How Can a Man Go the Distance

Steve Farrar

220 pages

There are a lot of men who have started the Christian life, but few finish strong. Steve Farrar, one of the most prolific writers on men's issues, addresses this phenomenon in his book *Finishing Strong*. He begins the book by getting the reader's attention with some amazing and heart-wrenching stories and statistics demonstrating that nearly 9 out of 10 Christian men will fail to finish the race strong for Christ. By finishing strong, Farrar is talking about living a life worthy of their calling, remaining faithful to one wife for life, still sharing the good news of Jesus in their old age as they did in their youth, walking in a manner consistent with biblical teachings and principles – while many men may start this journey, few will finish with their faith intact!

If these stories and statistics are true, Farrar moves to the next step – finding practical ways to be the exception to the rule. First of all, he addresses those things that so easily and quickly can take a man out of the race – pursuit of money and worldly significance, and a neglected and distant family. Farrar encourages the reader to become more deliberate in his efforts to remain faithful to the course by establishing a personal and family mission plan that includes a plan for reading Scripture as well as for personal accountability. Of course, Farrar

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

also addresses the issue of infidelity and encourages the reader to establish clear and impenetrable boundaries with women who are not his wife.

Finishing Strong is an excellent read for every man – Farrar does a great job of mixing biblical stories with relevant characters of modern life to make his point hit home. He is an outstanding encourager, but he doesn't soft-peddle anything – he speaks man-to-man in a very pointed and direct manner that most men should welcome and appreciate. And, while the book is philosophical in manner making a man think about what he really wants in life and the legacy he wants to leave, it is also practical and down-to-earth giving real suggestions that a man can incorporate into his life to help him finish strong!

First Love: Renewing Your Passion for God

Bill Bright
126 pages

Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, wrote this wonderful little gem near the end of his miraculous life. The book uses the Church in Ephesus and the remarks that Christ made to that church in Revelation 2:1-7 where it described how hard working the church is and that they don't tolerate evil...but, says the Lord, there is one complaint against this church – they have fallen from their first love!

Bright talks about how so many Christians lose their first love – their love for the Lord – during their journey and many of these face difficult trials and tribulations as the Lord deals with their decisions in an effort to bring them back. Bright gives hope to those who have strayed from their first love, talking about the importance of repentance and a return to a close personal relationship with a loving and caring God. He describes his own journey and how he daily has to work to remain diligent to his first love, comparing his relationship with the Lord to his loving relationship with his wife and describing how practical his efforts are to maintain a connection with his wife Vonette even while he's traveling and away from home. Bright encourages each reader to have the same diligence and effort that they are putting into their earthly relationships put into their heavenly one as well!

The best part about the book to me was in the beginning Bright described his early life as a believer and those whom God surrounded him with to encourage and teach him the faith. One of my personal favorites in the faith is Dr. Henrietta Mears who was the teacher of a young adult Bible study at First Presbyterian of Hollywood where Bright and many others (including Billy Graham) found themselves enthralled by this outstanding woman of faith – this little section of the book reminded me that generally speaking our faith is caught, not taught. Henrietta Mears was a person that overflowed with the power and presence of Christ in her life – overflowed into the lives of hundreds of young people who ended up touching the lives of millions! It's an amazing thought to realize that God can and does use anyone and everyone fully surrendered to Him for His glory – regardless of the earthly limitations or man's perspective, God sees the heart of a person!

First Love is a very good read – a really great look at the life of one of the giants of the faith in contemporary times and Bright has some great wisdom to share with those who invest the time to read this book.

Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What To Do About It

Author: Os Guinness

This corner is devoted to exposing you, the student reader, to a variety of resources that will challenge your thinking, expand your horizons, mature your mind – and this book is the best place to start that journey! Os Guinness is probably my favorite contemporary author and cultural critic with such outstanding works as *The Call*, *The American Hour*, *The Great Experiment*, *Prophetic Untimeliness* and *The Long Journey Home* just to name a few. But *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds* is an excellent beginning for the simple fact that today's youth are the primary audience for this book.

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

Guinness argues that Christians have a responsibility to use and develop their minds as part of their walk with the Lord. As he examines our current cultural chaos, Guinness points out eight hurdles to developing a “Christian mind” – all eight begin with the letter “p” obviously indicating that Guinness is attempting to relate to Baptist readers! Guinness presents the claim that the wave of anti-intellectualism that swept across this country following the Civil War has had damaging effects on the relevancy of the gospel to our culture and that efforts to reclaim the Christian mind are critically important to reclaiming our culture for Christ.

Of course, Guinness points out, that reclaiming our culture for Christ won't be easy – we must first reclaim the importance of the word taken captive by our image-obsessed society. It will take study – reading in particular – for the development of the Christian mind. Guinness quotes Oswald Chambers who wrote, “God will not make me think like Jesus, I have to do it myself; I have to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

If you are interested in bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, or if you've ever wondered why reading and your studies here at PCA are important to your Christian walk, you need to read *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*. Tipping the scales at only 152 pages, this book is perfect suited to begin exercising your brain and building your intellectual prowess to match your muscular physique.

G

Good News about Injustice: A Witness of Courage in a Hurting World

Gary A. Haugen

196 pages

Haugen is the president of the International Justice Mission, an incredible organization that seeks to demonstrate the compassion and justice of God in nations around the world. The book is first and foremost a defense of this concept – that we, as followers of Christ and children of God, serve a compassionate God who is concerned with and passionate about the particular travesties of injustice in every corner of the globe. Haugen takes the reader through dozens of scriptural passages and principles to make his point and leaves the reader asking what they can do to make a difference in the world.

Haugen next gives the reader not only a bird's eye view of the various injustices across the globe, but also a very personal look at several severe situations of injustice where IJM has made a difference in the lives of real people. Haugen calls for the body of Christ to be a body of action, engaged in various efforts to promote justice and compassion for the lost and hurting. A strategy is presented for the interested, but the primary thrust of the action is done through the channels of organizations like IJM who are already established and connected with resources to assist.

The book is an excellent read for any person who either is ignorant of the conditions of others across the globe or is questioning the concept that one person can't really make a difference. IJM is an outstanding ministry and opportunity for Christians everywhere to use their God-given time, talents and treasure to defend the defenseless. Micah 6:8 is a favorite verse of many and it reminds the follower of Christ what the Lord has told us is important in life – to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. Justice is obviously a key component of God's character and must be a key facet of the ministry of God's people here on earth as a demonstration of His nature and goodness in this lost and dying world. Good News about Injustice is a great reminder of this principle meant to shake a self-absorbed culture from its comfortable La-Z-Boy rocker!

The Great Experiment: Faith and Freedom in America

Os Guinness

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

Do you believe that faith and religion played an essential part in the formation of our nation and are a vital element to the sustaining of our liberty? Alexis de Tocqueville thought so as he wrote *Democracy in America* in the mid 1800s and Os Guinness makes a compelling argument to support this in *The Great Experiment*. This outstanding book is part of the Trinity Forum Study Series – which are all outstanding resources produced by the Trinity Forum.

Guinness does a remarkable job of making the study of government interesting and informative. This book is a must for every Christian who desires to be a good citizen in America – to understand that the involvement of those with religious ideas and convictions in the public policy arena is absolutely essential for the health and vitality of our nation. Guinness claims that the Founding Fathers understood this “eternal triangle of first principles” – that “Liberty requires virtue, virtue requires religion, and religion requires liberty, which in turn requires virtue.”

The book does a great job of comparing and contrasting the American Revolution to the beginnings of other great nations – the winning, ordering and sustaining of liberty which our Founding Fathers took such great care to avoid so many of the mistakes of history. Excellent excerpts are included from a variety of authors to support Guinness’ argument that religion is absolutely imperative to the well being of our nation.

The Great Experiment is published by NavPress as part of their *Bringing Truth to Life* series. This is a great resource for a high school or college aged student, especially those students interested in law and government. It is an easier read than many of the authors Guinness quotes from, so from that perspective this is like getting parts of some of the great works on government without having to read thirty different books! I’ve found this book in numerous places – online and in various bookstores for anywhere from \$10 - \$20.

H

Has Democracy Had Its Day?

Carl F.H. Henry

62 pages

This is an incredible book for any Christian to read to help them understand the absolute importance of Christians being actively engaged in our culture. Henry begins the book by looking at the historical forms of government and concludes that “[a] democratically chosen and constitutionally limited government seems to be the political structure most compatible with the Christian insistence on human worth and liberty and most likely to accommodate the promotion and protection of human freedoms, justice, and peace.” That is, of course, dependent one thing – the quality of the people involved in the governing process. And that is the challenge of this book – that Christians, with the much-needed quality of internal self-control, are deafeningly silent on the crucial issues of our day – to the detriment of our entire nation!

Of course, Henry asks some pressing questions: 1) Should we as Christians actually be engaged in cultural and political issues, 2) If we do engage, is our current strategy of “confrontation” better or worse than what he describes as “penetration” into the culture, and finally 3) Are we as Christians willing to do the work necessary to “reoccupy the public square” – to build consensus through the power of persuasion (as opposed to coercion) by giving and defending reasonable arguments for our positions? All important questions to which Henry answers that we must not only be willing to engage, we are commanded to do so by our Christian worldview, which in essence should determine our actions and behavior.

Has Democracy Had Its Day? may be short in length, but it is profoundly deep and poignant and will be a challenging read for most apathetic Christians today! Carl F.H. Henry calls for Christians to think outside our little boxes and look for opportunities and even alliances beyond the norm or the traditional as we engage the culture for Christ. This book is a must

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

read for any young person who wants to make a difference in the world, especially for those looking to do so in the public policy arena.

How Now Shall We Live?

Charles Colson & Nancy Pearcey

491 pages

Colson and Pearcey have put together an outstanding cultural apologetic for Christianity. The key to cultural influence, according to Colson is to begin with the understanding that Christianity is a complete worldview or life system that addresses all facets of life and reality. Using the creation, fall, redemption (and restoration) model for Biblical truth and revelation, Colson puts forth chapter after chapter of evidence, analogies and personal stories to demonstrate that Christianity is the only worldview that comports to reality.

How Now Shall We Live is a wealth of information that defends Christianity in the realms of science, philosophy, religion, art, music – you name it! Colson believes that if an individual begins with a Christian worldview, centered on Christ and grounded in the truth of Scripture, they will be equipped to address every personal and cultural issue with a reasonable and rationale solution that is actually effective in changing not only a person, but a nation as well.

The only knock on this book is that it really is too long. While Colson's stories are intriguing and informative, they are really not necessary to the arguments presented in the book – the book could be shortened by almost 100 pages making it far more attractive to the average reader who wouldn't think of touching a nearly 500 page monster like this!

Great read for the thinking Christian or any Christian who wants to be better equipped for raising children and engaging the culture for Christ.

How to Stay Christian in College

J. Budziszewski

Worried about little Johnny or Suzie going off to college and walking away from their faith – you should be! Some studies show that as many as 70% of professing Christian teens walk away from their faith during college. How can you prepare your teen for the challenges that lie ahead – learn from a man who did walk away from his faith in college and returned with a vengeance years later. J. Budziszewski is a professor at one of the most liberal universities in the country – the University of Texas at Austin – not a place for the faint at heart. During his tenure as a professor, Budziszewski has seen Christian students come and go – many falling prey to the antagonistic worldview that challenges their faith, others falling prey to the liberties of college life and the various distractions and temptations like sex and alcohol.

How to Stay Christian in College is a must read for every high school student as part of their preparation of the challenges that lie ahead on the college campus. If you need a graduation gift for your senior, this has to be part of that college survival kit. If a potential college student won't make the time to read this, the handwriting is on the wall and it's not good!

I have two versions of this outstanding book – you can still find and order the older version, but the newer version is published by TH1NK Books, an imprint of NavPress and should cost about \$10.00. It's not too long (178 pages) and not too difficult to read for its intended audience. Buy this in conjunction with another Budziszewski book *Ask Me Anything: Provocative Answers for College Students* and your college student is ready for anything even UT can throw at them!

How to Study the Bible: Practical Advice for Receiving Light from God's Word

Watchman Nee

146 pages

I really enjoyed how this book began – the focus was placed squarely on the shoulders of each individual to prepare himself to receive insight and truth from God's Word. The problem with

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

interpretation, according to Nee, isn't with the Bible itself or the words on the page, it is with the heart of man. J.I. Packer once wrote, "One of the many divine qualities of the Bible is that it does not yield its secrets to the irreverent and the censorious." Nee would agree wholeheartedly. In *How to Study the Bible*, Nee writes, "Don't ask what the Bible teaches, ask whether you are willing to obey." And, again, he reiterates his point that "spiritual things can only be communicated to spiritual men."

With this caveat in mind, Nee moves on to suggest that a student of Scripture needs to be cautious, focused, diligent and objective in their approach to study. Once a student of Scripture has learned to navigate with care, Nee encourages them to connect with the Spirit of the Living God who is alive and active in giving light and understanding to those who will seek Him. Nee writes, "[t]he ministry of the word is the release of the spirit."

The second half of the book moves from preparation to practice where Nee gives dozens of examples of how to study the Bible. He begins with a few "keys" to studying Scripture including memorizing and mediating on Scripture, two infrequent spiritual disciplines. Finally, Nee gives several suggested plans for studying the Bible including the examination of biblical main characters, the study of the various women of the Bible, a look at the significance and meaning of biblical prophecies, a study of the miracles and the parables of Christ, an in depth examination of biblical prayers and even a study of the significance of biblical geography. Nee encourages the reader to truly be a student of Scripture, to examine and evaluate with great care and diligence not merely to mine great truth from the Word of God, but with the end goal of drawing close to God in the process.

How to Study the Bible is a great read, but a rather difficult one in my opinion. Nee's examples and suggestions are tremendously valuable, but he sets the bar very high and his expectations might be a little intimidating for most people!

Human Dignity in the Biotech Century

Charles W. Colson and Nigel M. de S. Cameron, editors

242 pages

Colson and Cameron do an outstanding job putting together a compilation of essays and articles from some of the top thinkers in the world on the issue of biotechnology and bioethics. Contributors include a who's-who of lawyers and doctors from groups like the Family Research Council, The Mayo Clinic, and the International Task Force on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide. Dr. Cameron himself is a research professor of bioethics at Chicago-Kent College of Law and the president of the Institute on Biotechnology and the Human Future. He also directs the Council for Biotechnology Policy (Washington D.C), chaired by Charles W. Colson.

The twelve essays alert the reader to the ethical and legal challenges facing our generation involving embryo research, stem cell research, cloning, generic engineering, gene therapy, pharmacogenomics, cybernetics, nanotechnology, and abortion. The papers are well researched and well reasoned and provide for the reader an excellent insight into the future of this debate from a biblical foundation.

The fundamental issue raised by the book regards the direction of our nation, especially in the area of public policy. Colson notes that the government's responsibility is not the greatest good for the greatest number (utilitarian theory), but rather the protection of the weak from the strong who would exploit them. That foundational biblical principle should be our guiding light as we enter this public debate – what kind of society do we want for the generations that follow – one that seeks to create life only to destroy it for the immediate benefit of those alive or one that seeks to protect and promote life based on its intrinsic value as a special creation of God.

I

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

J

K

Keeping Your Faith in College: Students from over thirty-five schools across the nation share their experiences living as a Christian in college

Abbie Smith

186 pages

A very remarkable book, Abbie Smith basically compiled several articles and letters from students all across the country attending colleges from Emory to Washington University and almost everywhere in between. These students wrote about their own experiences addressing the issues that every Christian will face on a college campus. Smith begins with the transition from high school and living at home to college and living alone. She moves to some excellent wisdom from students addressing the academic expectations of the college life followed by the various encounters of dorm life! Several students share meaningful insight from lessons learned about peer pressure, Greek life and dating in college.

The other chapters in the book cover clubs and extracurricular activities, college sports, studying abroad, racial relations, and God's surprise encounters. Smith is very encouraging in how she presents this collection of essays on various topics – the reader is definitely encouraged to be prepared to walk onto a college campus and live a life counter to its prevailing hostile culture.

The book is a good read, not my top recommendation for students preparing for the college experience, but definitely a worthwhile read for the interested student.

Know What You Believe: Connecting Faith and Truth

Paul Little

146 pages

The front cover description by Billy Graham of this book is amazingly accurate – “Scholarly, articulate, simple.” Paul Little really does an amazing job of addressing the core essentials of the faith in less than 150 pages – from the nature of God, to the nature of man, from the importance of Christ's substitutionary death on the cross to His imminent return for His Bride, the Church. I especially liked the way that Little handled controversial issues, by giving an adequate description of both sides without seeking to interject his own opinions on several matters.

I also liked the flow of the book, beginning with the essential element of Scripture from which God has revealed Himself to man in a special manner to a chapter on the nature of God Himself. From there, Little explores the historical person of Jesus Christ and the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, upon which the entirety of Christianity rests. Once the concept of God's creation and the god-head itself are addressed, Little turns to the problem with the world – sin and the separation of man from his designed status as a child of God. Little then follows that with the chapter on the Holy Spirit, introducing the reader to the remainder of the Trinity and the special work of the Holy Spirit to convict man of his sin. Following this, Little turns to the good news of salvation and the redemption of man through the blood sacrifice of Christ. The remaining three chapters deal with other spiritual issues facing believers, including angels, Satan and demons, the role of the Church in the life of the believer, and the fundamentals of eschatology, or the “things to come” as Little phrases it.

The book is simply profound in its ability to cover such a wide gamut of ideas and principles giving just enough to address the issue without either boring the reader or leaving the reader without a proper understanding. A great book to suggest to every believer, regardless of where they are on their spiritual journey.

Knowing God

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

J.I. Packer

279 pages

I've heard for years that this book is a classic, now I know why. What started as a good read turned into a very challenging read – challenging on a personal and spiritual level. The book just continued to go deeper and deeper wetting my appetite for more with each turn of the page. The 279 pages definitely didn't fly by, though, this was a very serious read – but Packer does a great job of weaving together his thoughts with Scripture as well as the words and works of other various Christian authors and artists. I especially liked Packer's constant use of classic hymns and Christian poets – at the same time the book was taking my mind deeper, it was broadening my scope as well.

The primary object of the book is to remind Christians that knowing God is their primary purpose in life and should be their primary pursuit. Packer does a great job of putting forth the nature and character of God as revealed in Scripture as well as in nature and gives the reader a tremendous appreciation for the majesty and holiness of God. And Packer doesn't back down or try to skirt several difficult issues including the wrath of God and the attribute of jealousy in God's nature.

Like climbing Mount Everest, the final few chapters are the precipice of his work and well worth the time and effort once the reader gets there. One might think that after writing over 200 pages, Packer would be repetitive or boring by this time – just the opposite is true. The final couple of chapters demonstrate that Packer was just hitting his stride and it seemed like he could have written, and I could have read, another 200 pages. The Christian walk, while difficult, is so worth the effort; and Packer drives that point home again and again. The reason being is that our effort produces not only changes in our own lives and in the lives of others around us, but it also results in a closer and more intimate relationship with Christ – and that is ultimately what we are made for, to commune with the Living God!

While I thought that this book might be an excellent suggestion for a young Christian, the further I read the more I thought that a little maturing might be necessary to digest all that Packer was saying – but, either way, *Knowing God* is a classic and should be read and reread by all Christians!

L

Lessons from a Father to His Son

John Ashcroft

220 pages

This book may be one of the most practical examples of how to integrate one's faith with one's life – Ashcroft writes about how his own father took every opportunity, from the bizarre to the mundane, to teach John about God and the truths of Scripture. The stories are sometimes humorous, but always profound and moving – it really is an outstanding read, especially for dads with sons.

Ashcroft also gives several very personal examples of how he learned the life lessons that his father had taught him years before, but until that moment he hadn't caught. One such lesson came after Ashcroft lost his bid for Congress early in his political career. His father taught him that the Bible teaches that every crucifixion has a resurrection. Ashcroft learned this following this loss when the Governor's office called him and asked him to serve in the newly elected Missouri administration. From there, Ashcroft obviously entered ran for and won elected office, serving as a U.S. Senator from the state for years. It was interesting to note, that when I was reading the book, it was at the very same time that Ashcroft lost a bid to be the governor of Missouri to the widow of the governor who ran in her deceased husband's stead. Again, Ashcroft would learn the lesson that every crucifixion has a resurrection – newly elected President Bush would pick up the phone and ask Ashcroft to serve our nation as the Attorney General!

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

The book is so open and honest, very personal and really a very entertaining and challenging read. It places the importance of family and the Psalms 78 principle of passing the baton of truth from one generation to the next exactly where it belongs on the priority list of life – at the very top!

A Life Well Spent: The Eternal Rewards of Investing Yourself and Your Money in Your Family

Russ Crosson

241 pages

This book was suggested to me by a friend with his highest recommendation and it lived up to my expectations. While on the surface the book may seem to be about finances and money, it is so much more than that. Although, even at the level of money, it is still a very valuable read for those wanting to put their finances in order. For, according to Crosson, to put your finances in order, you have to order your life and priorities as well.

The primary theme of Crosson's book is that we need to be deliberate about the training of our children (or our posterity) in a spiritual sense. Crosson's idea is that how we use and manage our money is one tool that we can use to train our children – and if that tool is misused, Crosson has seen the devastation and heartache that it can cause. As a financial planner, Crosson is sharing not simply financial strategies, but life lessons and plans that will help nurture godly young men and women more devoted to the cause of Christ because of his insight and knowledge being put into practice.

Crosson hits one issue very hard over and over again – how we use (or invest) our time. The ability to use money to buy time is such an attractive concept – but Crosson shows how good intentions in this area have turned to poor decisions – the use of some “time-saving” devices have enabled us to waste more time, or work longer hours, or even have been the cause of a disconnect between parents and children – Crosson warns against falling prey to the misuse of technology. Crosson also drives home the point that time, not money, is our most precious commodity – and something that cannot be purchased in any greater quantities than what others have regardless of our income or financial status – we all have 24 hours in a day to use how we choose – and if we are not deliberately carving our time for our posterity, training our children will be done in bits and pieces with a hit or miss strategy that is unreliable and detrimental to our children.

In the final couple of chapters, Crosson warns against retarding our children with ease and comfort making them weak, unable (or unwilling) to work and earn a living. In their desire to make things “better for our children,” far too many parents end up actually making things considerably worse literally crippling their children with cash!

A Life Well Spent is a good read for every parent and I would highly recommend this book to every dad. I would also highly recommend the book to those Christians blessed with significant financial abilities – along with that blessing comes equally high responsibility to use that treasure to draw closer to the Lord, to be dependent upon Him for your strength and guidance, and to support the work and ministry of the Lord with the treasure God has given.

M

The Mark of the Christian

Francis A. Schaeffer
35 pages

What is it that sets the Christian apart from the unbeliever – it is faith, or devotion, or piety? Schaeffer explores this question in light of the fact that today it is nearly impossible to tell the difference between professing followers of Christ and anyone else. Schaeffer believes that this is a unique quality of the Christian life that should be present in their lives that would not only clearly demonstrate their relationship with the Lord, but would also transform those around them in the process – that quality is love.

An incredibly short book, less than 40 pages long, *The Mark of a Christian* is a powerful and poignant book for every Christian today. In the era when denominational struggles reign and Christianity is presented to mainstream audiences highlighting the most extreme antics of gay-bashing and anti-abortion demonstrations where young women are labeled as murderers, it's not difficult to see why the world views all religious people as "fanatical" and "extremists." Some radicals are "called by God" to fly planes into tall buildings, others cut the arms off their infant children. The world is left wondering what kind of God these people worship. Schaeffer agrees with them.

True Christianity, Schaeffer argues, is marked by this one great principle – love. Love for God is demonstrated by a love for His greatest creation: man. Which means that one fundamental principle of the Christian walk is truly loving one another. While this may sound simple, Schaeffer explains that this is the greatest contradiction to the self-centered human nature of the unredeemed and when faced with the concept of a sacrificial love for another, the world will be turned upside down!

We all know those self-professed followers of Christ who we definitely wouldn't describe as embodying the quality of love – this short and powerful book is for them; and for all Christians as a reminder that what the world needs more is love, sweet love...it truly is the only thing that's worth living (and dying) for.

Mere Christianity

C.S. Lewis

Where to begin with one of the great classics of the Christian faith? Well, from the beginning, it must be noted that *Mere Christianity* truly is a must-read for all Christians and that is exactly the intent of the author himself. Lewis set out to write or at least describe the fundamentals of the faith – actually to the truth – to which he himself had been called to almost against his own preferences. Christianity, to Lewis, isn't a mental asset to some sort of religious dogma or doctrine, rather it truly is a confrontation with the greatest truth known to man – that the person of Jesus Christ truly is the Son of the Living God, and only by the redeeming work of Christ can man be restored to a right relationship with our Creator. *Mere Christianity* is an attempt, and a very good one at that, to describe the concept of how God has woven this inextricable truth into the hearts and minds of mankind. Lewis argues this concept by stating two universal truths that he defends throughout the book:

1. That human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot get rid of it.
2. That they do not in fact behave in that they.

Lewis is describing the concept of natural law, or the "Law of Nature" which puts forth the concept that God created man with eternity set in their hearts and that man's own sinfulness acts as a veil shrouding this truth, but now fully, so that man knows right from wrong, but is enslaved by sin nature to a life of unrighteousness. The chapters of *Mere Christianity* are arranged in various arguments that address this universal truth, and the final conclusion, once

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

Lewis has demonstrated his premise, is that if true, this argument demonstrates beyond a reasonable doubt that man is indeed created by an Intelligent Designer who has revealed Himself to mankind through general and specific revelations.

Lewis' concept of Christianity is really very simple – the problem really is that man complicates things, either by mistake or on purpose. But Lewis' concept of Christianity can be summarized by the Creation-Fall-Redemption model. Christianity is a simple, straight-forward explanation for the world not only as we know it and experience it, but also as it was intended to be and what when wrong with it. God's creation is perfect; man's corruption of that original nature is the problem with the world – and now, we live in what Lewis calls "enemy-occupied territory" where the "rightful king has landed" and is *working through the church (individual Christians) to take back what is rightfully His. Amazingly, as you read through Mere Christianity, you can see so much of the creative imagery that Lewis brings to life in his wonderful Chronicles of Narnia series.*

Lewis also argues that to live the Christian life one must follow the example set by Christ – they must die. Living the Christian life is not a matter of daily ritual or routine, but rather daily sacrifice and surrender. To truly live out the ideals of Christianity one must surrender themselves to the greater authority of the Christian walk – Christ Himself. If we are created for His purposes and for His glory, then we must realize that our understanding of His ways are lower and pale in comparison – the Christian life is not about raising our standards of living, but rather about us dying to self and being made alive in Him. Of course, Lewis then writes about seven "virtues" by which one can measure their Christian life, not in an attempt to live more righteously on our own accord, but rather for the world to measure our surrender to our God – literally for others to see the nature of God transcribed on our lives as we live out who He is before a watching and listening world.

Lewis' concept of Christianity is a very positive approach – it is not a set of rules and standards that a person compares themselves to – rather the Christian life is an appreciation for the ideal, and a pursuit of that ideal through the grace and work of Christ in and through the life of each and every believer. To Lewis the greatest sin is pride – a concept that man, by his own regard and on his own strength, could live a life worthy of God's calling. "Pride," writes Lewis, "is spiritual cancer; it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense."

Christianity, while "easy" to explain for Lewis is not easy to live. Christianity takes work, hard work, and Lewis sets before each reader a pretty stout challenge at the end of *Mere Christianity* to truly live out this transformed life worthy of our calling as a follower of Christ. He contends that there is nothing ordinary about the Christian life – and, just as men have been great tyrants or great saints, to Lewis the concept of Christianity should force men into thoughts of greatness – not for themselves, but to represent the greatness of the One Whom they serve and represent.

A great read for every Christian, *Mere Christianity* is simply a classic to be read and reread time and time again.

The Most Important Place on Earth: What a Christian Home Looks Like and How to Build One

Robert Wolgemuth

226 pages

An absolutely outstanding read – very uplifting, very challenging. Author of *She Calls Me Daddy!*, Wolgemuth explores the various unique elements that make a Christian home different than just any other home. While the book has many practical suggestions that Wolgemuth shares from his own experience (good and bad), the primary emphasis of this book is to get the reader to feel, not think, about the importance of the Christian home. Wolgemuth begins with the smell of a Christian home – the aroma that brings back memories of family, food and fellowship within the home. He talks about the words that are used in the home – how they need to be encouraging, loving and tender. And he talks about the home

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

being a safe place, one where children feel like they can be themselves, even if that isn't always perfect.

Wolgemuth probably says in the book a dozen times that he's "old school," and he is. He believes that the family ought to sit down for dinner together, he believes that electronic devices (TV, video games, etc) disrupt family conversation time and result in disconnected children, and he believes that the parents should view themselves as the "priests" of their home. I guess I would have to say that I'm "old school" as well and wish that more people would be!

Wolgemuth is also very honest about his own learning curve as a parent and gives numerous examples of where he blew it as a dad and a husband. The book is an excellent read – slows down a little in the final couple of chapters, but still one of the best books I've read on the importance of the home and the family...especially in our culture today!

N

The Normal Christian Life

Watchman Nee

197 pages

I struggle even how to describe this book other than saying it is definitely one of my all-time favorite books. Nee's depth of insight and ability to communicate with colorful imagery and language is simply amazing – it really makes for not only an informative read, but an entertaining read as well. Nee's concept of "the normal Christian life" is that it is a life marked by sacrifice – identified with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ – and if only more followers of Christ really understood this biblical principle, Nee believes that the world would witness truly transformed individuals by the power of God.

Nee uses as his backdrop the Book of Romans and walks the reader through the writing of Paul to demonstrate the significance of the blood sacrifice of Christ, the death of Christ on the cross and then the resurrection of Christ from the grave. There are far too many wonderful examples that Nee uses to vividly describe the biblical principles put forth in Romans and other books of the Bible – in fact, one of the amazing things about this book is how comfortable Nee is with the entire Word of God; he continuously drops in references and verses from almost every book of the Bible, Old and New Testaments!

Two things that really stood out to me in this book were Nee's insistence on the believer truly understanding the significance of the Body of Christ, the church, and each person's role in being an vital part of that body. The other part that really struck me was his last chapter where he talked about a life of service being a life poured out at the feet of Jesus – the essential element is that our lives satisfy Christ, because He is worthy, and that our primary concern is not taking care of the poor or the homeless, but rather satisfying our Lord and Savior – it really is about perspective and focus – Christ is the only thing we should have our eyes on as we evaluate our lives!

There is a new version out of *The Norman Christian Life* and I intended to read that one as well. My version was my dad's and was published in 1957. I would give *The Normal Christian Life* to almost any Christian, especially one interested in a book that will really challenge his walk with the Lord – an outstanding book!

Not Even a Hint

Joshua Harris

The acclaimed author of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* takes aim at one of the foundational struggles of young people today – lust. Harris dives right in and states emphatically that Christians do not have a high enough standard for addressing sexual temptations – he uses

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

Ephesians 5:3 as his basis: “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.” Zip, zero, nada – not even a hint of sexual immorality – and Harris then does an excellent job of telling the reader why this standard is so high and so important.

The reason that the believer should lead a pure and holy life is because that is what God has called him to do. And, in reality, that life is the best for the person to fully experience the gift of sexuality as God intended so that it can be fully embraced and enjoyed within the boundary of marriage.

Harris then turns to address those who continue to struggle with lust without realizing the victory that is theirs in Christ. He does a great job of laying out a proper theological framework to clearly demonstrate that the same power that is capable of saving an individual is the power that is able to justify and set apart that person for the Lord’s service. Harris claims that the reason that so many Christians are not experiencing victory over temptation is because they are trying to do so on their own power – the power of the flesh to resist flesh instead of the power of the Holy Spirit.

He doesn’t back down from there – next Harris addresses masturbation and states that it is a self-centered sexual activity in contrast to God’s design for sexual activity – marriage and its other-centeredness. From there, Harris moves into a practical strategy including accountability for those wishing to move forward in the battle to resist temptation. The end of the book was far less powerful and significant than the earlier chapters and Harris seems to fall prey like so many others to the concept that avoidance of all things impure is the only way to avoid thinking impure thoughts – at the end of the book a person might think that avoiding church is a good idea since there are so many attractive women who attend! *Not Even a Hint* is a quality book and comes with a pretty good study guide to help stimulate questions and conversation within a group. While I liked the book, my overall impression went down with the final couple of chapters – but the majority of the book was really very good.

O

The Opening of the Christian Mind: Taking Every Thought Captive to Christ

David W. Gill

138 pages

This is a very good book to encourage all Christians to take very seriously the commandment of Christ to love the Lord our God with all of our *minds*! Gill examines some of the common obstacles in today’s world that serve as excuses for many which has resulted in a loss of the “Christian mind.” He challenges Christians who are well-educated by today’s standards to examine if they are thinking and applying their Christianity to their fields of study or expertise – most are not. Gill then dives in to explain what he thinks are the six characteristics which define a Christian way of thinking: (1) a theological mind; (2) a historical mind; (3) a humanist mind; (4) an ethical mind; (5) a truthful mind; and (6) an aesthetic mind. Gill goes on to encourage the reader to develop a plan that would strengthen their Christian mind, and learn to apply this Christian worldview in practical ways even at work. Gill obviously encourages a greater emphasis on reading and challenges Christians to redeem their time, not waste it watching TV!

The primary audience for the book seems to be college-aged students or young professionals who are looking to engage the world for Christ, but are lost as to what that looks like. The book is easy to read, and gives the reader some practical insight into developing a personal plan for self-examination as well as setting forth a comprehensive reading plan based in Scripture but fortified with the great works of the faith.

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.
Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

P

The Pilgrim's Progress

John Bunyan

Pilgrim's Progress has been printed, read and translated more often than any book other than the Bible – and if you haven't read it yet, don't hesitate...make this the next book you buy and read! This isn't a short read, coming in at 379 pages in my version, but it is a relatively easy read. *Pilgrim's Progress* is a story of a pilgrim named Christian on his journey to the Celestial City. Along the way Christian encounters various trials and tribulations, is encouraged by various friends, is distracted by various temptations, and continues to see the hand of the Lord in his journey. This is an amazing book that speaks to every Christian's walk today even though it was written over 400 years ago!

If you had a Top Ten list, *Pilgrim's Progress* is definitely on it – no matter what your interest, no matter what your age – this is a book that every Christian should make the time to read. On a difficulty scale of 1 – 10, *Pilgrim's Progress* is about a 5 or a 6 (depending on the translation). I have a BarbourBook publication and I love it – there are notes in the margin with references to Bible verses or explanations for the names of the characters. You can find this book anywhere books can be found usually for about \$10.00. This would be an outstanding book for a mature junior high student or any high school and older Christian. Don't be one of the only Christians in heaven not to have read this classic!

Prophetic Untimeliness

Os Guinness

119 pages

Prophetic Untimeliness is a clarion call to the church, and one that will hopefully be heard and heeded. Guinness examines the current condition of the church and concludes that the church is pursuing a wrong goal: relevance. His claim is that the timeless truth of the Word of God is always relevant to the condition and nature of man; therefore, the church need not pursue relevance, it should be acting from a position of relevance. But, unfortunately, many churches today are missing that point and are spending countless hours, energy and untold resources to *appear* relevant, rather than *being* relevant!

Guinness writes that Christians today need to practice what C.S. Lewis called "resistance thinking" – or counter-culture thinking. He notes how Christianity is unique in that it is both world-affirming (loving what God has created and died for) and also world-denying (hating sin and the fallen nature of this world). Obviously Christ taught that His followers were to be in the world, but not of it and that is the point that Guinness is reiterating as well. But that world-denying part isn't easy, today or ever – Guinness examines the lives of various Old Testament prophets who spoke the truth of God's word to a deaf and stubborn people, similar to the condition of those speaking God's truth can expect today as well.

While not easy, the call to be set apart for the service of the Lord is the calling for all followers of Christ. Christians need to begin to take practical steps to develop their resistance thinking – reading old books is the first suggestion that Guinness makes! He also warns that the Christian should not examine his life, ministry and calling in light of his own day, but realize that only truth and eternity will give relevance to "relevance."

This is an outstanding book, but if the reader is unfamiliar with the style and other writings of Guinness, they may not appreciate his critical analysis of the American church and culture. While Guinness is critical, he is not without his redeeming and constructive suggestions for change – in fact, redemption is the cornerstone of the Christian faith – the ability to examine one's life in light of the work of Christ and allow Him to live through you...for in your weaknesses, He is made strong! Guinness suggests that this is the only way for the church to really be relevant to the ever-changing conditions of the world – to allow the unchanging Author and Perfector of our faith live through us each and every day!

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

The Purity Principle: God's Safeguards for Life's Dangerous Trails

Randy Alcorn

93 pages

A powerful little book, *The Purity Principle* addresses the issue that seems to take so many Christian men out of the race – lust. Alcorn addresses the issue at its root – a battle for the mind. In fact, the purity principle itself is simply stated: *Purity is always smart; impurity is always stupid!*

Alcorn makes the argument that if Christians thought differently, they would act differently – the problem is with our thinking – we haven't given our minds over to the Lordship of Christ because we want to maintain control of that area of our lives. But, Alcorn warns, we must be careful because the lure of sex is so powerful, not many can resist its tempting call on their own absent the power of God. Learning to control yourself is more an exercise of understanding who really controls your decisions – and if you are a follower of Christ, then you need to learn that your body is not your own, that you've been bought with a price. The process of renewing our minds, then, is a daily practice for believers – to sanctify our minds, set it apart for the Lord's service, filled with God's Word – that is a mind that is armed and prepared for the attacks of this world!

Alcorn also goes on to state that “it's always easier to *avoid* temptation than to *resist* it.” He gives several practical suggestions for avoiding those various temptations – including the Internet and TV. This chapter is interesting – while I agree in principle, one has to balance the concept that the battle truly is in the mind and that the believer needs to be able to remain in the world for the glory of God, but yet not be of the world taken captive by its vain philosophies. So, to those who say that you can't be on the Internet or watch TV, I may in fact disagree – within appropriate boundaries, of course.

The Purity Principle is a good read, short and simple in its delivery, but still a very good read.

The Pursuit of God

A.W. Tozer

128 pages

Short, but powerful. I started this book nearly a decade ago, but never finished. This is an absolute treasure of a book – Tozer is a great communicator who is able to get the reader to peer deeply into their own souls while fixing their gaze on the heart of God! I loved so much about this book, it's difficult to really even summarize. Tozer helps the reader how incredible the Christian life really is – beginning with the fundamental concept that those who follow Christ do so only because they have first been pursued by God Himself! The book seeks to simply the Christian life down to its fundamental core – that being a real and profound relationship with a loving, caring and holy God.

One of my favorite chapters is titled *The Speaking Voice* and describes how God is still speaking today. Many Christians, Tozer asserts, view God's written Word as His only Word – but that is simply too limiting of a view according to Tozer. God is still speaking, and that includes the fact that He is still speaking through Scripture into our lives today!

Tozer isn't kind to the modern Christian. He asserts that today's follower of Christ lacks a spiritual receptivity, has trained his ears not to hear the word of God, is undisciplined and lazy in his pursuit of a real, profound relationship with God; and it's very difficult to argue with his assessment. But he doesn't dwell on the negative, but rather he refocuses the reader on the glorious pursuit of God as the only remedy to our God-given appetite. While the world attempts to fill us on earthly significance and substance, Tozer reminds the reader that only God satisfies. And Tozer reminds the reader as Augustine did thousands of years ago, that our hearts were made for God and are restless until they find rest in Him.

The Pursuit of God is a great read both for the new believer and a mature Christian. It lends itself well to a book study with a group for just a great read for an individual.

Q

R

Raising Confident Kids

Dr. Robert G. Barnes, Jr.
171 pages

Good, solid biblical advice to parents about raising their children to be responsible and mature – or as Scripture would put it, lacking in nothing. Barnes is the director of a boy's home in Florida so he has experience working with numerous children and families as well as raising his own children. The primary emphasis of this book is countering the perception that as parents, we must protect our children from all failures and provide for their every need, even to their own detriment. Barnes begs to differ. While he is careful to establish clear boundaries, provide adequate avenues for communication and emphasizes appropriate discipline, Barnes encourages parents to let their children mature by giving them opportunities to succeed.

Barnes writes that children need a stable, safe and encouraging environment to be able to mature properly. He encourages parents to establish family traditions to help produce that stable environment as well as giving the children age-appropriate responsibilities. He warns parents not to short-circuit the training by either not allowing the child to fail, or not providing shift and appropriate discipline to establish clear lines of authority and boundaries in which the child can operate and flourish. Setting rules and sticking to them is fundamental parenting, according to Barnes.

While the book wasn't earth-shattering, it was good. He balanced his examples using children from stable homes and children from broken homes so that all parents can identify with and apply the biblical wisdom given. I especially liked his chapters where he encouraged parents to talk with their children about sex at a much earlier age than it is usually done and the end of the book where he addresses the difficulties of raising adolescents going through the litany of life changes. I think most Christian parents would find this book practical, useful and worth the time and energy to read.

Real Family Values: Leading Your Family into the 21st Century with Clarity and Conviction

Robert Lewis
265 pages

There is much about this book that I really liked, but I will find it difficult to highly recommend it to others because of its length and complexity to read. That doesn't mean that I wouldn't suggest it to a serious reader who is looking for an excellent book on how to better prepare their family for the spiritual chaos of the world – Lewis does a very good job of confronting several very complicated issues with the skill of a fine surgeon using the wisdom of God's Word to counter the wisdom of the world. Lewis begins by laying the foundation for the family – the biblical model that has been challenged and is becoming much more of a rarity in society today. But once Lewis has the reader on this issue, he turns to the issues confronting the family in the world today.

Lewis doesn't back down from anything in this book – he addresses the issue and impact of divorce and the need for men to step up and be the leaders of their homes. He also tackles homosexuality, racism and abortion from a biblical and practical perspective. In the final pages, Lewis lays out the "Lewis Family Values" and gives guidance how any family can come up with their own guidelines and principles to effectively communicate (and pass on to the next generation) the characteristics of a successful and godly family.

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

Again, *Real Family Values* is an excellent book and well worth the read, but at over 250 pages written in more of a “sermonic” tone, not many will realistically finish the course set before them in this book.

The Renewing of the Mind

Watchman Nee

60 pages

What this book lacks in length (it’s only 60 pages long) it makes up for in depth. Watchman Nee tackles the complicated issue of renewing your mind, an idea and concept that seems to have faded into obscurity in Christian teachings. Nee’s premise is that Christians must have a renewed mind to understand the things of God, to discern God’s will for their lives, to make decisions and walk by faith. He introduces the reader to the Greek term for the mind or understanding: *nous*, which according to Nee is used twenty-four times in the New Testament. Then with surgical precision, he explores the concepts of the body, the spirit and the soul as well as diving into the important issue of the heart. While Nee believes that many Christians may have had a “salvation” experience, they are not walking and living in victory because they do not understand or are not willing to renew their minds everyday, and it is that spiritual discipline that must return to the Christian life – the renewing of the mind is an act of the will, an act of obedience and surrender for which we are responsible. God has already given us a new heart and the mind of Christ, but we must surrender of our will to the will of God by renewing our mind – consecrating our thoughts to the Lord.

Again, while the book is short in length, it took me quite a while to read through it because of the nature of the material and Nee’s writing. He seems to be saying the same thing in a variety of ways to get his point across, but in the end you’ll be glad you stuck with it and finished this wonderful spiritual gem. I believe Nee is absolutely correct and that this concept of renewing the mind is the proverbial lost art in Christianity today – we learn so much, have access to so much information, but seem to use so little of it – Nee would say it’s because our minds are “dirty,” unfit for God’s use – and we need to renew our minds daily to prepare us for service to God.

I wouldn’t suggest this book for a new Christian or a younger person – I would think this would be an excellent book for a more mature reader and thinker – although the concept of renewing the mind is something that a new believer may grasp onto much more quickly than another person. I would still think that this book would go in one ear and out the other for a younger person.

S

The Search for Satisfaction: Looking for Something New Under the Sun

David H. McKinley

162 pages

This is the first book written by Prestonwood Baptist Church teaching pastor Dr. David McKinley. *The Search for Satisfaction* is a modern guide to the biblical book of Ecclesiastes, penned by the wisest man in the world King Solomon. Just as King Solomon searched for meaning and significance in all corners of the world, so too are many people today searching for purpose and meaning in every facet of life save one – Jesus Christ. McKinley addresses the modern world’s approach to happiness and significance and knocks down each and every argument that either avoids the issue or clouds it with worldly wisdom opposed to Biblical truth and the reality of life.

As McKinley knocks down the world’s wisdom in comparison with God’s truth, he also notes that many of the things that the world says are the central aspects of life are, indeed, important...just not of central importance as compared to a person’s standing and relationship with God. But friends, family, food, hard work, and just the enjoyment of each day take on a

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

whole new meaning when given a proper perspective and a proper purpose to a servant of the Lord. McKinley avoids the pitfall of stating that this fallen world is evil; to the contrary, this fall world was created by God and is being redeemed by God through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ and the saints who have been called to serve as His ambassadors. So, each day, each life, each activity carries meaning and significance in the life of a follower of Christ and McKinley reminds the believer to live life in such a manner as to be worthy of our calling.

In my opinion, the primary audience for this book is either a person who is not a believer, but is looking for purpose and meaning in life or the proverbial “carnal” Christian who is far too comfortable with the world and is seeking affirmation from others instead of God. The book is short, easy-to-read and very contemporary with its language and examples – in addition, the examples are very personal as David draws much wisdom from his own experiences and shares many of his life lessons with the reader.

A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life

William Law

If you're looking for a challenge in your spiritual walk – this is the book for you. Law's classic book was the transforming resource in the lives of the Wesley brothers as well as abolitionist William Wilberforce – just as it changed their lives, this book will not leave you the same!

I've read an abridged and edited version for the modern reader by John Meister (158 pages) – but it wasn't enough – I had to order the small type 317 page version! This is not an easy read – on the difficulty scale of 1 – 10, this would be a solid 9. I wouldn't suggest this book to anyone in high school or even college – Law deals with real world issues and a little seasoning in life is necessary to get the full effect of his challenge. This is a perfect book for the Christian man who wants more than a Purpose Driven Life, the man looking for a profound, insightful, and challenging read that will deeply impact the core of his being!

You can find these books online. The longer version is a Vintage Spiritual Classics edition and retails for around \$13.00. Rare will be the person that will want this book – but if you're the one, don't pass this one up! I give this my highest endorsement and recommendation.

Law deals directly with the concept of devotion to God – and asks some difficult questions about where man places his true devotion in life – in the things of this world, or in the Kingdom of Heaven? Law argues that a wise and reasonable man will wholly devote himself to the things of the Lord for they are far superior to the temporal and worthless things of this world. In fact, Law says that a lack of this devotion is a clear indicator of gross ignorance! The book gives several practical elements necessary for a devoted life including prayer, study, humility and confession. But it is not the elements about which Law writes, it is the manner in which he presents them to the reader that makes this book so exceptional – Law raises the bar and challenges the follower of Christ to live an exemplary life, a life worthy of their calling, a life comparable to the great saints who have walked before us or even to angels who minister above us!

Serious Times: Making Your Life Matter in an Urgent Day

James Emery White

161 pages

An absolutely outstanding book based on the statement from a letter written from John Adams to his good friend and colleague Thomas Jefferson near the end of both of their lives – Adams wrote, “My friend, you and I have lived in serious times.” White begins with the premise that serious times call for serious lives and expands to the concept that the Christian life is a serious and devout journey with the Lord. Every believer, according to White, has an opportunity to live a meaningful and profound life that could impact all of human history for the glory of God – and, of course, the reader is supposed to wonder why they would settle for anything less!

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

White then turns to a brief examination of our current cultural crisis and makes that case that Christians must and should be engaged in the great debate of the day. He turns to history to demonstrate how followers of Christ have consistently been cultural agents of transformation – literally allowing the God of the Universe to work in and through their lives to transform others around them. And then finally, White gives some practical guidelines to produce a life worthy of our calling – to deepen our souls with a compassion for humanity and develop our minds with the sound reasoning from Scripture which combined can be a culturally-relevant tool for believers to use to engage others for the cause of Christ.

Of course, White stresses the importance of reading as well as having an awareness of history as we seek to prepare ourselves for the calling of God on our lives. He also emphasizes the importance of the church as the body of Christ and our role within that institution. Finally, he concludes with the warning against apathy, against the sin of slothfulness and the lie that the problems of the world are on someone's shoulders. White challenges the follower of Christ to step up, even in the face of adversity or apathy, and take their rightful place as the sons or daughters of the King in this enemy-occupied territory to claim victory for our Lord and Savior against the false ideas and principles of this world.

Serious Times is an excellent book which also does an incredible job of introducing the reader to a host of great men and women of the faith who comprise that "great cloud of witnesses" of Hebrews 12. The book would be an ideal read for any young person to encourage them to live a life of significance and purpose as well as to any person more seasoned in years to challenge their comfortable lifestyle which has made them ignorant and apathetic to the great issues of life surrounding them everyday.

Shepherding a Child's Heart

Tedd Tripp

211 pages

To be perfectly honest, I was expecting more from this book. Tedd's brother Paul David Tripp is the author of *Age of Opportunity*, which is a fabulous book that I would highly recommend to every parent. *Shepherding a Child's Heart* has some great points, but it just seemed to me that these little gems were surrounded by personal stories of Tedd that just were, for want of a better word, odd. It just didn't seem like Tedd was raising his children in the same world I am. Now, I understand that the biblical principles that he is exploring are transcendent to time and location – and the book does a wonderful job really exploring the fundamentals of parenting and gives some great examples. But too often I found myself disconnected from Tedd on several issues – from taking my daughter to dance class to allowing my children to play sports – things that Tedd frames as harmful to the spiritual and character development of my children – I couldn't disagree more.

There are some great takeaways from the book – as I said, little gems in almost every chapter that make the book worth reading for any parent. But, unless you're home schooling your children and living in the mountains of Colorado or Oregon, you might find yourself as I did just disconnected from the Tripp family at too great a level for his advice and examples to connect. For those of you who are thinking that the disconnect indicates that my family has become too cultural, I would suggest this book is perfect for you. For others, you'll understand what I mean if you read the book.

At the heart of this book, however, is a great point – that as parents, we need to be more concerned and focused on the internal condition of our children's heart and not so focused on the outer issues of behavior or appearance. Tedd drives this point home and it needs to be driven home. The book is challenging for parents, especially those who have their priorities out of balance. Tedd does a great job of addressing the discipline issue – he doesn't shy away from the biblical model of spanking, but he addresses the misuse of the "rod of correct" and puts the burden on the parent to discipline in love with the goal being drawing the child back into the safe zone of a right relationship with God.

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

Sit, Walk, Stand

Watchman Nee

Ever since I was a child, I'd heard about Watchman Nee and his wonderful writings. It wasn't until my adult years that I finally ordered three of his books – and I haven't been disappointed. *Sit, Walk, Stand* is a very simple, yet deeply profound explanation of the Book of Ephesians. The book is an easy read and short – only 78 pages long – but don't let that fool you – *Sit, Walk, Stand* has more packed into these 78 pages than most books over 300 pages (and it takes 1/10 the time to read!).

If you want a book that will give you a wonderful explanation of the Christian life – that will bring to life the Book of Ephesians – then get this simple and profound book. Every college student should have one of these in their backpack, it makes a great gift to a friend – you can even mail this little booklet to a friend far away.

My version is published by Tyndale House Publishers and I ordered it online for \$5.00. I would think that a mature junior high student would be able to read and understand this book. On a difficulty scale from 1 – 10, *Sit, Walk, Stand* is about a 3 or 4. Simple...yet profound.

Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer

J. Oswald Sanders

180 pages

What an outstanding book for all believers, probably starting as young as junior high, but definitely applicable to high school aged students and beyond. *Spiritual Leadership* is also a great reminder even for those Christian adults already in positions of leadership. Sanders does a wonderful job of not just giving leadership tactics, but drills down to the heart of the matter and addresses a leader's true ambition (service or recognition, others or self).

Sanders did an excellent job of putting the concepts on the bottom shelf for every reader to understand, while raising the bar for the expectations by putting forth some excellent challenges to the reader as well. One outstanding challenge regards the use of time – making the best use of the time we have, or as Paul put it in Ephesians, “redeeming” the time. Sanders follows that chapter with an excellent suggestion for how leaders should be using their time – reading!!! Sanders uses a quote from Tozer to dive to the heart of the matter addressing why many people don't read – because they don't intend to obey in the first place! The book gives excellent suggestions how to make your reading more profitable and effective as well.

Sanders also addresses the concept that leadership is marked by influence, and that while it is true that all Christians should be and are de facto leaders, there are measures that we can take to improve our leadership and our influence in the lives of others. Sanders reminds the reader/leader that leadership costs and challenges the reader/leader to be ready and willing to pay the price as our example Christ did for us. Sanders warns that leaders will have to learn to deal with self-sacrifice, loneliness, fatigue, criticism, rejection, pressure and perplexity.

Spiritual Leadership also addresses the responsibilities of leaders and the art of delegating authority to others. Then Sanders encourages leaders to begin to work to train up the next generation of leaders to replace themselves in the work of the Kingdom. Sanders ends with some perils and pitfalls associated with leadership from pride and egotism to jealousy and popularity.

The book is a relatively easy read in length (180 pages) and context; but while the principles put forth by Sanders will be simple to read and understand, they will take great courage and strength of character to employ and live out on a daily basis. *Spiritual Leadership* is a must-read and well worth rereading as well.

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

A Student's Guide to the Core Curriculum

Mark C. Henrie

109 pages

Truly a must-read for every graduating senior before they head off to college, this Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) book is foundational if a student wants to actually get an education during their tenure in “higher education.” Henrie begins by asking why students actually go to college in the first place – for purpose will determine process; meaning that what each student hopes to achieve while in college will dictate what they do with their time, what courses and professors they select, and how they prepare themselves for the challenges which lie ahead. Henrie talks about the *telos*, the end result of a goal-oriented process. Similar to working out physically, if the desired end result is weight loss, a program can be specifically tailored to meet one’s goals. While, if the end result is body building, the program will be an entirely different workout regimen.

Henrie argues the same is true for education – if the end result desired is a job, a student will make various choices in the educational forum to meet that goal; but if the end result desired is the proverbial liberal education, different choices are generally required. Henrie proposes that if a student wants this well-rounded education (and he makes a very good case for that being the desired result), that each student can obtain it at least to some level no matter what institution of higher education they attend if they just look for the “core curriculum” – the classics, philosophy, religion, political science, English, and history.

While most students begin to specialize and narrow their educational selections in college, Henrie makes a profound argument that every student should have as their foundation these core selections, to be built upon with their majors or specialized disciplines. Henrie gives a generic course description to identify in each of these core disciplines as well as what foundational reading selections that course should cover. Even if the student is unable to select every course from the core curriculum, the book is a wealth of knowledge of valuable resources for the lifelong learner as well.

This is one of several books in a series for students and it is the centerpiece and most important one – I think every student needs to read this book for the philosophical foundation that is shared as well as for the incredible resource list mentioned above. And, by *student*, I mean anyone who still loves to learn.

The Suburban Christian: Finding Spiritual Vitality in the Land of Plenty

Albert Y. Hsu

201 pages

I thought this might be an easy read; boy, was I mistaken! Actually this book is full of social commentary that is rather interesting – not interesting enough to last 200 pages, but the author does make some really excellent points along the way. As a product of suburbia, Hsu examines how this new culture has arisen to dominate our landscape today and asks some pretty poignant questions about the “progress” of our society towards the individualism and isolationism of suburbia. He addresses the issue that I see as being a fundamental hurdle to a profound and vibrant spiritual journey – an “absence of scarcity” that has resulted in our entitlement culture devoid of appreciation and always demanding more...faster...easier! Hsu makes the connection between our physical environment and our resulting spiritual lives – and the conclusions he reaches aren’t necessarily positive.

Hsu also takes to task the church in the suburbs and examines how many are more like shopping malls bending to the consumer culture than bodies of Christ transforming the culture around them. He also examines how we’ve lost a sense of connectedness – from the days of yesteryear when families gathered on the front porch to sit and chat with neighbors to the isolated homes of today with high fences, air conditioning and televisions as the centralized all-encompassing focus of “family time.”

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

While Hsu doesn't back down from his concerns, he doesn't paint a bleak picture for the future – there are things that we, as suburban Christians, can and should do to counter our culture; but we must first see that our commercialized, consumer-driven, convenience-at-all-costs society does have some flaws! For Hsu, the answer is that bigger isn't always better, that easier isn't always worth it, and that as a follower of Christ, living counter-culture means more than opposing abortion or not smoking. It means that we must add value to our culture beginning with those closest to us – our neighbors. It means learning to make sacrifices and living within our means so that we can be used by God to assist others in need. And it means understanding that everyone longs for a place they can call home – a place of rest and peace – and while many believe that to be a physical refuge, as Christians we know that our soul will only find rest in Christ and we can share that rest with others who are longing for it.

T

Teach Them Diligently: How to Use the Scriptures in Child Training

Lou Priolo

160 pages

A very solid read for Christian parents wanting to understand how to incorporate Scripture into their parenting. Priolo begins by asking what the purpose of parenting is – and by answering this question, parents can see how to best put together a plan to accomplish their primary objective. Priolo posits that the primary purpose as parents is to see that our children “be conformed to (gradually change into) the image of Christ.” With this as his foundation, he puts forth the importance of knowing Scripture as parents and being able to pass along that love for God and knowledge of His Word to the next generation.

Priolo's Scripture training is entirely practical, but far from simple. While he weaves Biblical truth into everyday issues and situations, he explains that the only way to do that is to be entirely familiar with the truths of God's Word. He encourages and challenges parents to be disciplined in their approach to studying, memorizing and meditating on Scripture just like an athlete would be disciplined in their training for their particular sport.

One example that Priolo uses really caught my attention. He was talking about helping our children to understand that as a new creature in Christ, we don't just not do evil, but we “put off” the old and “put on” Christ – so that literally we replace old sinful desires with new Christ-like character and activities. He uses a word-picture of a glass full of water representing our lives filled with sin. Instead of simply emptying the glass and having nothing, he says that the way to remove the water is to replace it with another object – in this case something heavier that will displace the water (sin) in the cup (our lives). For example, instead of merely not cursing or speaking coarse words, we actually replace that language with words of encouragement and love to others. We don't only stop lying, we now speak truth. We replace impure thoughts with thanksgiving to God. As those new objects displace the old sinful habits, we are forming new habits and filling our cups (lives) with Christ-like character!

Teach Them Diligently is a good read for Christian parents. Priolo belabors some points, but the substance is solid and worth the effort.

Teaching to Change Lives: Seven Proven Ways to Make Your Teaching Come Alive

Dr. Howard Hendricks

The great Dallas Theological Seminary professor Dr. Hendricks shares with others his basic principles for passing on to his students the knowledge and passion for God's Word. Basically the book can be boiled down to one primary principle – you must have passion for what you know to transfer what you know to others. The book was originally released as *The Seven Laws of the Teacher*, but has since been repackaged and re-released under this new title with a new cover and design – but the truths shared by Hendricks are timeless and powerful – and should be read by EVERY teacher!

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

The first law of the teacher was the best, in my opinion – if you ever stop growing today, you stop teaching tomorrow. Dr. Hendricks challenges the teacher to remain a student, to always continue learning, pursuing truth and knowledge – and to pass that thirst on to their students – far more important than any particular lesson or tidbit of information is the thirst for knowledge and truth – and that is something that is modeled for students in the lives of the teacher. If the teacher is stale, the lessons and information can't be fresh!

The Seven Laws of the Teacher are as follows:

- The Law of the Teacher – if you stop growing today, you stop teaching tomorrow.
- The Law of Education – the way people learn determines how you teach.
- The Law of Activity – maximum learning is always the result of maximum involvement.
- The Law of Communication – to truly impart information requires the building of bridges.
- The Law of the Heart – teaching that impacts is not head to head, but heart to heart.
- The Law of Encouragement – teaching tends to be most effective when the learner is properly motivated.
- The Law of Readiness – the teaching-learning process will be most effective when both student and teacher are adequately prepared.

Think Biblically: Recovering a Christian Worldview

John MacArthur (with The Master's College Faculty)

334 pages

A really outstanding book exploring the concept and role of the Christian mind throughout history with a challenge to the reader to be not just a hearer of the word, but a doer as well. MacArthur is thoroughly Reformed in his presentation of the Christian worldview laying out the foundation of the Creation-Fall-Redemption model as the framework within which is built the Christian mind. MacArthur begins with presenting the case for the sufficiency and authority of Scripture and continues to remind the reader that developing intellect is not the goal of the Christian worldview – rather, it is bringing all things into focus using the lens of God's revealed Word. MacArthur writes that "the Christian mind should be a repository of God's revealed truth." The rest of Part One of the book presents the foundational truths of the nature of God, the nature of man and man's responsibility to walk in obedience to God's will in his relations to others.

MacArthur then taps the expertise of his faculty at The Master's College in Part Two as each chapter explores some component of a biblical worldview. The chapters cover issues such as understanding the currently postmodern thought, profiling true masculinity and femininity, an in depth examination of the role of worship and music, a contrasting view of psychology with true biblical counseling, a look at the significance of science, the role of Christian education, an honest reflection on history, a biblical worldview of the church in relation to the state, a biblical concept of economics and the importance of literature and the arts in culture from a Christian perspective. Each chapter really could be its own book on the subject, presented from a professor whose expertise is in that particular field of study.

Personally, I enjoyed the book, especially the foundational concepts presented in Part One. MacArthur's Coming to Grips with Sin (chapter 4) was absolutely outstanding and is essential for the Christian to understand that Scripture teaches that sin is the problem with the human dilemma and the only viable solution to the condition of mankind is offered through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Every chapter had something valuable – a nugget of pure gold – but the second half of the book was pretty tough treading. Overall, a very good book that would be an excellent recommendation for any person interested in examining how their faith addresses all facets of life beyond just the issues of religion.

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

The Three Success Secrets of Shamgar

Pat Williams and Jay Strack with Jim Denney

If you're wondering who Shamgar is, you're not alone. I had no clue until I read this fun and fast-paced uplifting and challenging book. Shamgar is the third judge to the nation of Israel and there are two verses that tell a very brief story of this man and how he saved Israel. I thought this was going to be another *Prayer of Jabez* – find some obscure Old Testament reference, write a book expounding on the biblical reference and bam – best seller! Well, while the first two parts are true, this book is completely different than the *Prayer of Jabez* – it is a challenge for every Christian to allow God to use them for His glory. The book is filled with short snippets of men and women who have taken a small step of faith and God has done miraculous things in them and through them...but the key to this book is the encouragement to take that first step!

The book is a relatively quick read – just over 150 pages and very easy to read – this is a great graduation gift for a student from high school or college or to a young professional to encourage them to seek first the Kingdom in the use of their time, talents and treasure. Like Shamgar, a man with no training, little or no resources, but a willingness to be used greatly by God – we, too, can overcome great obstacles on our journey of faith.

If you're looking for an encouraging, uplifting and challenging book – sort of a Zig Ziglar on paper – this is an excellent selection for around \$10.00. Buy one for yourself and give one as a gift!

30 Days to Understanding the Bible

Max Anders

288 pages

As a part of the Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, this book gives the reader a general overview of the Bible and its themes, significant players and times in a very easy-to-understand and easy-to-remember format complete with pictures and charts that should be memorized as the reader finishes the book. The Old Testament is broken down into its various books (historical, poetical and prophetic) as well as its various eras (creation, patriarch, exodus, conquest, judges, kingdom, exile, return and silence) so the reader understands the flow of events from Genesis to Malachi.

The New Testament is broken down into the Gospel Era, The Church Era, the Missions Era and the Epistles. The book breaks down Biblical themes into eight subjects and then takes you through the fundamental doctrines of the faith. *30 Days to Understanding the Bible* is a very easy read – excellent for a young Christian wanting to know how all 66 books of the Bible tie together.

Thoughts for Young Men

J.C. Ryle

95 pages

One might ask what an Anglican bishop who passed away over one hundred years ago would know about young men living in today's fast-paced world and the answer would be a lot. Ryle penned this short, practical and entirely profound book to pass along some wisdom to young men, very similar to what Paul did in his epistles to young Timothy. And although the book was written over a hundred years ago, its truths are timeless and entirely practical to this generation of young men.

First Ryle begins with what he calls "reasons for exhorting young men" – in other words, Ryle understands how important the early years are in the development of the spiritual life and sees how few young men take this seriously resulting in the lack of godly men (husbands and fathers) later in life. Ryle challenges young men to use their time wisely, to invest their energies while young in the pursuit of godly wisdom to begin to build the foundation upon which their lives and families will be built. Ryle then moves to discuss some special "dangers"

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

facing young men – the sin of pride, the love of pleasure, the thoughtlessness and lack of consideration for others, a scornful contempt of religion and the fear of other people's opinions – doesn't this sound entirely similar to the issues young men face today as well? Ryle challenges young men to step up to the plate and live lives of quiet reflection with a serious nature because the issues that they face and the challenges to their faith are completely serious.

Ryle continues with additional counsel and special rules for young men and ends by casting the vision that young men need so desperately to grasp – that they can do amazing things for the glory of God with their lives lived in complete surrender to His will. He references two great men from his own country William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury who forever changed not only their nation, but the world with their humility, their passion, their resourcefulness and their lives lived fully to the glory of God. What better mark of manhood than to live for something greater than one's self?

Thoughts for Young Men is an excellent read and I would most highly recommend this book to every high school and college-aged young man. It would make a great gift for every young man and, at only 95 pages, it is something that not only should be read, but can be read by everyone.

Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity

Nancy Pearcey

396 pages

Total Truth is an exceptional book; profound in its thoughts, practical in its application and challenging in its conclusions. The primary concept is that Christianity has suffered from a divided concept of truth – truth in the spiritual or abstract sense (religion) and truth that is concrete and verifiable (reality). Pearcey challenges contemporary Christians to see that their worldview, or their belief system, must be comprehensive in nature covering both spheres, or as she calls it, the upper and lower levels. Christianity is the only complete belief system able to provide comprehensive and coherent answers to the questions of life as well as the transcendent issues of meaning and purpose.

Pearcey does an incredible job of showing how this separation of truth was radically affected by the implications of Darwinism and the concepts of naturalism. While many Christians limit the influence of Darwinism to the lower story and the realm of science, Pearcey argues that this view misses the greatest impact that Darwin's theory of evolution has had – which is the foundation of a belief system that has removed the need for any outside or transcendent source – i.e. God. In other words, the culture's acceptance of Darwinism is a tacit denial of the existence of God.

From there, Pearcey explores the problems with evangelicalism today by exploring the roots of anti-intellectualism stemming as far back as the Reformation. She does an incredible job of presenting a very difficult challenge to American Christianity, which, according to Pearcey, has completely lost any relevance to the cultural and social issues of the day. Many of Pearcey's observations are profound and her writing is so well thought out, it's just a pleasure to read.

The final two chapters of the book may actually be the best. In Chapter 12 Pearcey explores the role of women in shaping the culture war – and notes how the role of women has changed dramatically in large part due to the changing role of men in society and the family. This is an extremely important and challenging chapter that should be a must-read for every Christian man.

Finally, in Chapter 13 she ties the book together with a call to all Christians to know simply have a biblical worldview, but to live it out in their daily lives. The same challenge was put forth by Francis Schaeffer in *The Mark of a Christian*, and Pearcey echoes his sentiments by calling on Christians to demonstrate the greatest characteristic – love. She challenges every believer to accept the role of the suffering servant modeled by Christ, and to take up their

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

cross daily in utter and sole dependence upon Him as their provider, deliverer, and sustenance for life.

Total Truth is a challenging book to read – not merely for the length or the depth of language used, but primarily for the quality of ideas presented; most Christians do not wrestle with these concepts and will be confronted with a challenge to the very nature of their belief system and the way they live out their Christian faith. But, looking at the state of Christianity in America today, this book might very well be one of the most important books to read that has come along in many, many years.

U

University of Destruction: Your Game Plan for Spiritual Victory on Campus

David Wheaton

174 pages

This is an excellent book and is targeted to the young high school Christian student as they prepare to embark on one of the greatest challenges to their faith – college! Teen-age tennis sensation David Wheaton gives a personal testimony about how the pitfalls of his college campus derailed his successful journey, but ultimately led him to this own personal crisis of faith that culminated with a personal surrender of his life to the Lordship of Christ. Yet, left in the wake of this victorious decision lie dozens of poor decisions – battle scars of a young man unprepared to face the “Three Pillars of Peril” on all college campuses – drugs, sex and rock ‘n roll!

Wheaton does a great job of mixing Scriptural truths with personal testimony to keep the reader’s attention while confronting them with truth at the same time. The book is honest, almost to a fault, about the pitfalls and dangers that await Christians as they head off to pursue “higher education.” Wheaton dives right at the heart of the matter that will determine success or failure – the spiritual maturity of the individual, are they a genuine believer or just a good person who goes to church? The fiery trials and temptations of college will separate the wheat from the chaff. Wheaton knows first hand that experience and gives a young Christian some excellent insight into the mistakes he made at Stanford.

University of Destruction may sound like a negative book, but it is far from that. The main point it drives home is that a Christian student needs to be prepared – and being prepared takes work before the trials and temptations come. Wheaton does a great job of giving the reader several opportunities to wrestle with and arrive at some solid conclusions about what they will and will not do for a variety of situations. At least this can be said, if a student actually reads this book, they won’t fall away from their faith because of ignorance! This is an excellent book to purchase for any young Christian student, probably best in their junior year of high school, to prepare them to be victorious Christians during their college years and beyond.

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What’s So Amazing About Grace?

Philip Yancey

282 pages

Yancey is an incredible author...not so much for the quality of his writing, but more for the fact that his writing seems to hit the reader right between the eyes! When I read *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*, it was as if Yancey had been reading my mail; so many of his stories and examples were far too familiar in my own personal walk – and that is definitely not a compliment! The crux of Yancey’s book is that this world needs grace – but not just any grace, redemptive grace that reflects the grace that our Lord and Savior gave to us, grace that

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

costs, grace that is motivated by love for others, grace that is extended to the undeserved...just like Christ did for us!

In Yancey's opinion, there just isn't enough grace, especially from those who have received grace! That's what really hurt. Yancey cites example after example of Christians acting in an ungraceful manner to other believers as well as to the lost and dying – what a disgrace! Yancey talks about the power of grace, the power of forgiveness, the power of love – in stark contrast to the spiritual impotence which results from living defeated by the grip of hatred, unwillingness to forgive or envy of others.

What's So Amazing About Grace? is a must read for every believer – especially those who were saved at an early age and struggle with a judgmental spirit of others. You may not want to read it, but you need to!

Why I Am a Christian

John Stott

133 pages

Pastor and teacher John Stott puts his own personal thoughts together on the reasons that he is a follower of Christ and it makes for a very easy and enjoyable read. Stott begins with the concept that he is a Christian not because of his own desires to be so, but because of the love of God for him through Jesus Christ. "The Hound of Heaven" is the first chapter and sets the stage for the rest of the book by putting the reader in a proper perspective to understand the true nature and character of God. Stott reminds the reader, that if they are a follower of Christ, then they, too, were first pursued by God and it was because of the grace of God, not their own works, that is the cause and crux of their salvation.

Stott then moves on to six other reasons that he is a follower of Christ – from the typical "claims of Christ" arguments that Jesus is either who he said he is or is not worthy of our adoration and worship – Stott concludes that Jesus is, indeed, the Son of God. He also reasons that the sacrifice of Christ shedding his blood on the cross in payment for our sins makes Christ worthy of our very lives. The next chapter, "The Paradox of Our Humanness," was excellent – Stott put forth the concept that the very existence of man is quite a paradox of creation – both light and dark, good and evil are so evident throughout human history – Stott asks how these seemingly low creatures can rise to such high ideals and ambitions and at the same time sink to such depravity and debauchery. Christ and the concept of sin and redemption are the solutions to this inquiry into the nature of man, claims Stott.

He finishes the book with chapters stating the Christ is the key to our freedom, the fulfillment of our aspirations and offers the greatest invitation for man – to literally be a child of the Living God. Only through Christ does man not only know himself, but also becomes who he is created to be. Only in Christ does our soul find rest, as Augustine wrote. Stott has experienced this peace and fulfillment in his own life and this book would be an excellent gift to share with another seeking to find the true meaning of life – Stott is pointing them in the direction of the cross – the symbol of suffering and deliverance together by the work and sacrifice of Christ.

Why You Can't Stay Silent: A Biblical Mandate to Shape Our Culture

Tom Minnery

201 pages

The author Tom Minnery serves as the Vice President of Public Policy for Focus on the Family and the intent of this book is really to respond to a book from Cal Thomas that chastised Christians for putting too much of an emphasis on political action as a redeeming force for mankind. Minnery challenges Thomas' assertions by putting forth the argument that Christians have always been a redeeming force within culture – a change agent for the good of mankind – not in an attempt to bring people to salvation, but more of an agent of God's common grace on all men. Minnery begins by stating that there are just some things so

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

wrong or so outrageous that as followers of Christ we just can't sit and do nothing – silence would be tacit endorsement!

The book continues with historical examples of Christians who have engaged their culture for the cause of Christ throughout history. Of course, some Christians believe that controversy should be avoided at all costs and Minnery directly confronts that position and explains that a biblically-informed worldview understands that controversy with the world system should actually be expected by followers of Christ.

Minnery stresses that as followers of Christ the way we engage the culture is of primary importance – we must not be ugly to people even when we disagree on issues. He then counters one of the greatest hurdles to so many who want to get involved, but don't know how – the feeling of inadequacy or the question of what can one person really do to make a difference? Minnery gives numerous examples where one person did make a difference...or could have if they had been available for the Lord's service!

The book was good, but not outstanding. The argument that Minnery uses is more of the populist approach to activism (if we all do something, we can make a difference) as opposed to the fundamental biblical approach (God has called us to engagement regardless of the results). However, for those questioning if Christians actually should be involved in cultural affairs, the book does give some compelling arguments and examples from history where followers of Christ made a significant difference for the betterment of all mankind!

World Proofing Your Kids: Helping Moms Prepare Their Kids to Navigate Today's Turbulent Times

Leal F. Arrington

301 pages

An absolutely fabulous book – really a “must read” for all Christian parents who want to prepare their children to effectively engage the world for Christ. A Houston-area mom, Arrington does a great job of addressing the fundamental issues that children are facing today – a post-modern and post-Christian culture that is bombarding them with powerful messages contrary to God's revealed truth. So what's a parent to do? Arrington doesn't hide her head in the sand waiting for the rapture; she systematically lays out a plan to equip her family with the answers to the issues they will face in the world using Scripture as her guide.

When I was reading this book, I was constantly reminded of Psalm 127:3-5 where it states:

“Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.”
~ Psalm 127:3-5

I've seen this verse in countless places, but never have I seen the last sentence included. The last sentence tells me that our **children** will contend with enemies in the gate and that if they are prepared, equipped, and trained, they will not be put to shame. *World Proofing Your Kids* is an essential tool in the equipping process of our children!

Arrington begins with a basic worldview primer and then dives into various cultural issues from abortion to animal rights and the “right to die” movement. She also addresses the entertainment culture and its profound effect on today's young people. I thought her approach to this issue was the best chapter in the entire book – instead of avoiding all media or cursing TV for its filth and smut, Arrington gives alternatives to the brain-drain of TV seeking to produce depth and understanding resulting in a mind that is not easily amused and is armed to see and counter the lies of the culture.

Arrington writes with a great balance of humor and truth mixed with a healthy dose of personal experience that makes this book easy to relate to and understand as a parent. She

Personal Book Reviews – By Daniel E. Panetti, Esq.

Prestonwood Christian Academy, Worldview Director

is not writing this from the ivory tower of perfect parenting; she reveals her own shortcomings and struggles along the way – but she also clearly communicates that equipping our children for the challenges and opportunities of this cultural crisis will take diligence and determination on our part as parents.

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