

July 15, 2014

## READ

By Dr. Harold Sala

*When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. 2 Timothy. 4:13*

In his book *Spiritual Leadership* J. Oswald Sanders wrote, "If a man is known by the company he keeps, so also his character is reflected in the books he reads." He tells of an old author who said that a reader could divide his books as he would people. A few were "lovers," and those books would go with him into exile. Others were "friends." Most books were "acquaintances," works with which he was on nodding terms.

Question: if you were to go into exile, what books would you take with you? If you had room for only ten books, along with your Bible, what other nine would you take with you?

Consulting a map of world literacy, you will discover that in the past century, we have made tremendous strides forward when it comes to the ability to read, yet the harsh reality is that vast segments of the world's population are functionally illiterate and in developed countries, including most of those where *Guidelines* is heard, an intellectual blight has been imposed by the vast number of hours individuals spend before a television set or a computer screen. And our ability to read with comprehension has declined in proportion to the time spent being entertained by the media.

But today's commentary isn't directed to the rest of the world; it's a personal challenge which I'd like to direct to you as a friend. What's the last book you have read and how long ago was it? In addition to the Bible, what book has most impacted your life? What books fill your library?

Why is this important? First, we read to learn. Then we read to grow. We read to learn, to challenge our ignorance, our boundaries, and expand our potential. When you are addicted to television, you develop a fifth grade vocabulary and an intellectual paralysis. But what is far worse, you don't know or don't care what is happening.

The sad thing today is that "classics" are thought of as cars, not books which have shaped the thinking of the western world for centuries. Some have quite large libraries, yet their books are only collectors' items. A friend of mine is enamored with Church history and has a rather extensive collection of books on the subject. If a new book comes out, he buys it, yet he will admit that he has never cracked the covers on the vast majority of the books which line the shelves of his library.

How do you find time to read? First, shut off the TV. John Wesley had a passion for reading and he read as he rode on horseback to his preaching engagements. Do what he did: take advantage of down time—waiting for transportation, killing time at a doctor's office—and make it a habit to read the last thirty minutes of every day.

What you read is also important. Honestly, a lot of the books you find in Christian bookstores these days are designed to make you feel good but have so little substance in them, they are both a waste of your time and money. The vast number of choices and the limited amounts of time make it hard to decide how to invest your reading time. I suggest you include biographies of men and women such as William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, Charles Studd, George Mueller, Amy Carmichael. Read my book on heroes—short biographical sketches of 100 people who helped change the world.

"Read to refill the wells of inspiration," was Harold Ockenga's advice. He practiced, too. His wife would have agreed, telling you he took a whole suitcase full of books on their honeymoon.

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