

2016 Reads List

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Happy New Year to all. Contained herein is an abbreviated list of books read during 2016 with a brief review of each. I include much fewer titles this year as I spent time re-reading several times some of these titles as well as other books from recent years. Of course, this is a personal list in that it is where God is stirring, leading, and otherwise forming me.

At the end I list the top 5 books that God has used to shape me over the past 5 years or so.

Please send me titles you benefited from and/or enjoyed recently.

Thank you! And May you the Father through the Spirit grow you in union with Christ this Year! Enjoy!

Scott

Christmastide Day 10, 2016

Spiritual Formation/Growth

Formed for God's Glory: Learning from the Spiritual Practices of Jonathan

Edwards Kyle Strobel *This was one of my "best reads" for the year. Strobel did his doctoral work on Jonathan Edwards and has translated that work into very readable and engaging works. My understanding of beauty being primarily relational, as opposed to physical has been sharpened, as has other wonders of our Triune God. God is gradually opening my eyes, which is a biblical topic Edward's taught much on, to truths of himself. The last part of the book is a look at Edward's actual spiritual practices and considerations for how that might look in our time. I have reread sections of this book numerous time.*

The Spirituality of Wine Geisela Kreglinger *Absolute, total surprise is how I would describe my initial reading of this book. I picked it up as much out of curiosity ("A spirituality of wine? Really?") as anything. The more I have pondered and reread this book the more I have been struck with how brilliant an applied spiritual theology it is. Kreglinger is German (which means she gives a non-US perspective to the subject), grew up on a vineyard (giving her a unique, life-long engagement with the subject), and has a doctorate in theology. The first half of the book looks at a biblical theology of wine - so much more is addressed in the Bible than I had seen before - including a refreshing look at the Lord's Supper/Eucharist. The second half of the book is a look at the sustainability of the wine industry from the foundation of the Word and the craft of a vintner. Fascinating. This is a title I know the Spirit sovereignly put in my hands in a specific season of my life. Sections of the book stopped my in my tracks and were used of God toward healing. Of course, when we have books that God uses deeply in our lives, another person could pick it up and wonder what all the fuss is about. Nonetheless, I think this is a wonderfully researched and written book. Loved it. Highly recommend it.*

Note: I realize alcohol is a tricky topic in my own culture (US church). This work is not an argument for drinking at all. In fact, the author addresses alcohol abuse at length. Yet, she also has a unique perspective on why non-European societies have such a problem with alcohol compared to European ones. Regardless of your view of alcohol abstinence or imbibing, this is not the point of the book. It is a biblical look at wine and food as creational expression of God's abundant love, forgiveness and mercy as recorded in many Old Testament passages and Jesus' teachings as well. Jesus said that in the kingdom he would drink of the fruit of the vine with us once again. This book helps me to look forward to that day.

A Holy Meal: The Lord's Supper in the Life of the Church Gordon T. Smith *I have enjoyed a number of titles by this author (Called to Be Saints is a must read). This small book expanded my grasp and experience of all God is doing in us and for us in the sacrament of the Eucharist. There is more going on as I receive the bread and wine than I formerly knew.*

The Cultivated Life Susan Philips *This was not one of the best titles I have read this year, yet it had a number of worthy considerations. If this is an area you are drawn to or otherwise sense God is inviting you to grow in, then Philips is a worthy author to read.*

Liturgy of the Ordinary Tish Harrison Warren *I have been reading a number of articles and books on liturgy this year seeking to better understand the history of worship in the church but even more what God is doing in us as we move through the church calendar and the liturgy together as a church. Warren is a wonderful writer and packs a lot of ponder-worthy content into a small space. This was another gem of a book God gave me this year. In fact, I went back through the book to consider some small yet important growth steps for myself as I lean into 2017. Well worth your time.*

The Listening Life: Embracing Attentiveness in a World of Distraction Adam S. McHugh *Probably more out of my heart posture at the time than anything, I did not find this book particularly engaging during the first couple of chapters. Yet, the further I read the more I began to see how significant a grasp the author has on this subject. In fact, God addressed me with some specific relational insights from this book. McHugh has a wonderful sense of humor so much so that some of his personal antidotes had me chuckling out loud, especially in his footnotes. Well worth the time if you are looking for a title on the subject of listening - which is a woefully lacking ministry in the church at large.*

The Anglican Way Thomas McKenzie *Probably the first go-to book on the basics of the history and liturgy of the anglican church in North America today.*

Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail Robert Webster and Lester Ruth *This is another fascinating read on the dynamics behind the growth of the Anglican church in North America. Written by Robert Webster who was a professor at Wheaton at the time. In fact, the more I have read on the subject the more I have been fascinated to learn of*

how many theology professors from solid evangelical seminaries across the country now attend Anglican churches. What is the draw? This book has many stories I found insightful.

Leadership/Organizational

The Ideal Team Player: How to Recognize and Cultivate the Three Essential Virtues Patrick Lencioni *I am a fan of Lencioni. I feel justified in that fandom in that his work is excellent, Scripturally consistent (though he seldom quotes Scripture), and practically some of the most spot-on, helpful guidance I have found in the area of organizational systems development and health. This book is on the essential virtues of any employee/staff person. It has helped inform my interviewing and leadership skills as well as areas I can grow in the three virtues he addresses.*

Novels/Memoirs/Biographies

Silence: A Novel Shusaku Endo *I read this on recommendation of some friends. It is a historical novel of suffering in the early church of Japan. Fairly brutal in detail, not many rays of light beyond people's amazing enduring faith in the face of horrid persecution. Insightful into the history of the church of Japan. Pray for Japan which to this day has less than 1% Christ-followers.*

In Other Words Jhumpa Lahiri *Lariri is an Indian who was raised in the US. She speaks numerous languages, yet when she went to Italy she fell in love with the Italian and wanted to learn it. This book is her story of learning the hard to grasp language of Italian. She wrote the book in Italian and had it translated by someone else at her request into English. On the left page of the book is the Italian, on the right page is the English translation. It is a fascinating look into the woes of learning another language. It brought back cold sweats from my days of learning Cantonese....*

Elijah in Jerusalem Micheal D. O'Brien *O'Brien is a Catholic Christ follower who writes brilliant novels of faith and persecution that comes about subtly and not-so-subtly in modern societies. This is a continuation of his very first novel Father Elijah which is one of my all time favorite novels. You must read Father Elijah first to understand this continuation of the story. O'Brien reminds me of living an honorable life and the main characters of his writings inspire my own faith journey. You will come across numerous Catholic flavorings, particularly Mary-worship, but if you can set that aside his story lines are brilliant.*

Top 5 Most Influential Books in My Journey from Recent Years

Over the decades, God has used books have an accumulative impact on me, truths from various authors sticking together in my soul to shape me. Here are five individual titles that stand out as singular in their impact on my formation:

1. **Called to Be Saints** Gordon T. Smith **Why read it?** *This is not only a brilliant picture of a mature Christ follower, Smith also addresses the chronic cancer of moralism that is rife in much of global evangelical teaching and preaching today. That may sound a bit heady, but it is a wonderfully written and an easily read book. Well worth your time.*

2. **Formed for God's Glory: Learning from the Spiritual Practices of Jonathan Edwards** Kyle Strobel **Why read it?** (reviewed above) *Jonathan Edwards is a masterful theologian but, methinks, painful to read. Strobel brilliantly makes Edwards understandable. The topics are profoundly enriching to one's faith. Further, Strobel is a millennial. It is important to be reading well written theology from younger generations (well, younger to me).*

3. **Delighting in the Trinity** Michael Reeves **Why read it?** *To the degree one does not have a growing awareness of the Triune nature of our God, to that degree one will struggle with appropriation of God's Fatherly love, your being a beloved daughter or son, grace, mercy, forgiveness, one and on. In short the Gospel is hard to be experientially grasped without being drawn by the Spirit into the communion of the Father and Son. Our truest identity is that of an adopted child. Literally, without over spiritualization, that is to be our foremost identity. Pastoral counsel: if you read this book and wonder what the big deal is, then make it a constant prayer for God to continue to reveal himself to you. It is his delight to reveal such treasures to little children (see Matthew 11:25-27).*

4. **At the heart of the gospel** L. Ann Jervis **Why read it?** *We all experience hard stuff in life. It is part of living in a fallen world and it is particularly part of following Christ. Jervis is a wonderful exegete of Paul's growing grasp of the role of suffering in our sanctification (i.e. transformation). Yes, it is scary to jump into the deep end of the pool sometimes where we can't touch bottom, yet it is how we grow. I'd say it is better to jump in at one's own will than be pushed in! This is not a long book but it is a topic Americans must, must, must be deepened in. Suffering is painful, but that does not make it "bad" especially in the hands of a Good Father. Paul argues suffering is a gift.*

5. **The Spirituality of Wine** Geisela Kreglinger **Why read it?** *I really did not want to list this book here because of appearances or something. What's more I know God dropped this in my hands to address some very personal elements of my own story and redemption. However, I do believe it is a brilliantly written applied spiritual theology and she is onto some hugely needed themes such as a theology of creation, one's relationship with alcohol, the Eucharist, and above all else God's lavish, abundance given to us at the simplest of meals as expressions of his love and forgiveness.*