

It Yearly Reads List Time!

Here is are some personal faves and not-so-faves from 2020. If you have not seen 2019's list yet, I found myself going back to some of those titles repeatedly this year.

Why re-reading?

An older brother mentioned to me that as we move into the later stages of life, reading can become less and less for the purposes of knowledge acquisition and more to nurture the soul's longing for Christ and provide place and space for deeper, slower thinking. I have been encouraged by a number of others to make space and time for that. Accordingly, I have read less in recent years and found myself praying over sections of titles/authors from years gone by that have been significant literary mentors. I pass that wise counsel onto you.

Pray, do share what you have been reading, or listening to, this year.

On to the list in no particular order.....

Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel Ray Ortlund

This little book is not going to wow you with towering narrative, yet it is a much-needed, solid, concise biblical theology of Marriage. That being said, this was much more than a "refresher." From Geneses 1 and 2 to Revelation 21, marriage is the one constant redemption theme throughout the entirety of the Bible, even more so than adoption. The author had numerous insights that were deeply clarifying and encouraging. I heartily recommend this book, particularly for couples seeking clarity on roles and postures toward one another in marriage amidst contemporary trends and pressures.

Gentle and Lowly: the Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers Dane Ortlund

This was an essential gift to me this year. One of the long lies in my life is that God forgives me my sin, Jesus has made the price in full. That does not me he does not get wearied by me....Dane Ortlund gleans from numerous Puritan theologians that Jesus is not only eager to forgive, his heart swells with joy when we come to him for forgiveness - it is the very reason he came. This is a deeply encouraging read, presented in the most uplifting of tones, and one we cannot be exposed to enough. **A must read.** Note that on Crossway's website there are short devotional that D. Ortlund recorded that are free for the listening.

The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart Harold L. Senkbeil

Senkbeil is a well-seasoned Lutheran Pastor who has written extensively on pastoral ministry. This book was a timely gift to me - providing some new vocabulary for the Spirit's vocational shaping in me: "*Pastoral Habitus*." I have been pondering on vocational craftsmanship and this book was a source of fresh reflection. Senkbeil provides a great resource on both an applied

pastoral theology and is laced with a very practical look into the author's habits and actions in providing care for his flock. Chapter 1 was worth the entire book, but do read on.

Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World Eric Metaxes

I enjoy Metaxes writings and had this book on my watchlist. When the tome came up on Kindle for a couple bucks, I jumped on it. A lively read, engaging and challenging as well. I found Luther's growth in following Christ even at personal risk encouraging.

"He Descended to the Dead": An Evangelical Theology of Holy Saturday Matthew Emerson

The main title quote is taken from the Apostle's Creed. Does the line mean the grave or does it mean more than that - to Hades? There have been numerous passages in the N. T. I have not known what to do with for many years - ones seems to infer Jesus was not passively biding his time on Holy Saturday of that first Easter. But what happened between sundown Friday and sunrise Sunday morning? This is a remarkable theology looking in detail (Hebrew, Greek, early church commentators, etc.) at the relevant passages, how the early church fathers and through the following generations understood these passages, and the extent of Jesus' identifying with us in life, death and resurrection. I will never experience Holy Saturday the same again. It is a technical book, but yields rich reward for those who dig into it. This may not be a topic you are drawn to, but for teachers of the word, sometime in your course of life long study I highly recommend it.

The Salt Path: A Memoir Raynor Winn

Winn has a worthy reputation as a solid writer. I was curious about the coastline of the UK and enjoyed her description of what she and her husband experienced. They indeed have lots of pluck in them, sheer determination of will. I am reminded, however, that when life gets dire how little we have outside of Christ other than to just try our best and hope for the same. Jesus always offers us more than a wish. He offers himself to us. He never throws us back on ourselves to just get on best we can....

The Sound of Life's Unspeakable Beauty Martin Schleske

I had seen this title on several reviews at the end of 2019. It is not a cheap book, so I waited to see if it was worth the price. Our dear friend, Karin, in Vienna, who had read the book in German before it had been translated into English kept thinking how I would love this book. When it was translated and published in the US by Eerdmans, a copy lovingly appeared in our mailbox. What a gift. Schleske is a master violin maker and a follower of Christ. He reflects on the parallels of crafting a world-class, handmade violin and the Lord's crafting of our lives. A beautiful book, occasionally wordy at times, yet rich in spiritual insight. Thank you Karin!

The Next Right Thing: A Simple, Soulful Practice for Making Life Decisions

Emily P. Freeman

One of my colleagues told me about Freeman's podcast (see link at end of doc). Emily Freeman's creative and inviting tone in her podcast and this book was a timely, Spirit-provided gift one for me as the world closed down and I had some reflecting to do. Freeman has a trove of great questions for deeper reflection on various life quandaries and transitions. Her gracious tone is what this hard-driver needed this year.

Breaking Bread with the Dead: A Reader's Guide to a More Tranquil Mind A Reader's Guide to a More Tranquil Mind Alan Jacobs

I read several of Jacob's books the past two years. This was a fun ramble of which the title and subtitle are self-explanatory. Fun, engaging.

When the Church Was Young: Voices of the Early Fathers Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Marcellino offers a very accessible read on the church Father's - each chapter a mere 8 or so pages. I have been fascinated to read how the church was beginning to structure itself, even in the latter time of the Apostles, with deacons, bishops beginning to take their roles as head/ regional pastors, and a liturgy written by Jerome in 150 AD that is still widely used today by churches we regard as "liturgical." I love this connection to the early church - some actual disciples of the original Apostles - and what they passed on to the young growing church of Christ from the early 100s onward. It is wise to let those who are now our cloud of witnesses to still have a say in how the church of today functions. After all, they faced political intrigue, plagues, civil unrest, injustice, oppression, persecution, communication issues, false doctrines, false accusations..... Kinda sounds familiar.

God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and Its Aftermath, N. T Wright

A friend in Detroit recommended this small (79 pp) ebook. (Thanks Dawn!). This is actually the first of Wright's books I have read. His thesis is that in times like ours, a biblical response is a prayerful lament and from that lament a community response to a cruciform ministry focus towards to those who are most at risk. Well stated. I appreciated the Trinitarian shape of lament and learning from the early church (Acts) and their response to a global famine.

Life Is in the Transitions: Mastering Change at Any Age Bruce Feiler

Feiler is a NYT best selling author and a very gifted story teller. I must say I found this book a bit pretentious. After critically dismantling previous researchers/authors on adult developmental stages (e.g. Gail Sheahy) for being too restrictive and not true to life realities, he then presents his own. Though his research is extensive, observations keen, in the end his suggestions are not that overly revolutionary. And without a redemptive God, I am, once again, left to myself to do my best through life's challenges, while he provides data on various possible responses. For the price and length, I am not sure I recommend this book.

The Open and Unafraid: The Psalms as a Guide to Life W. David O Taylor

A year or so ago I was introduced to a conversation between Eugene Taylor (not related to the author) and Bono of the band U2. Bono had been taken by Eugene's Message Translation of the Psalms, they had deeply resonated with Bono's own journey. David Taylor was the man behind that video and conversation, and his reflection on core themes of the Psalms is a true gift. Highly recommend this book for the deepening of you communion with God and others.

When Poets Pray Marilyn McEntyre

Years ago I stumbled across McEntyre's *Caring for Words in a World of Lies*. She is a brilliant, thoughtful, intentional writer with numerous publishings. I highly recommend any of her books that grab your attention. *The Trinity Forum* has a wonderful interview of McEntyre that gives you a glimpse into her creative, thoughtful depth.

<https://www.tff.org/portfolios/online-conversation-caring-for-words-marilyn-mcentyre/>

Brunelleschi's Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture

Ross King

The geniuses coming out of renaissance Italy were amazing in their talents, and their eccentricity. For a popular history, this is written piece on Brunelleschi's beyond-his-own time design of the Florence Basilica Dome (which, by the way, was delayed repeatedly by plague and political intrigue, amongst other unforeseen disasters....hmm, maybe 2020 was not new under the sun stuff).

Mentoring Conversations: 30 key topics to explore together Tony Horsfall

Tony is a prolific writer and bible teacher. I am always grateful for his mentoring voice in my life. This is a brand new title just out. Very practical. By the way mentor is not about being a sage passage on all you accrued knowledge, it is about being a pursuant listener. Find younger ones in your church and just ask questions and listen. The Spirit will take care of the rest. This book gives great topics for those thoughtful conversations.

Your Story Matters Leslie Fields

Fields does an online course on writing your story. I wanted to learn more about story writing. Alas, a pandemic and the gift of a new grand baby took time precedent over the class but I did learn from the book. Check out her online page for more info.

Culinary Traveler in Italy Beth Elon

What can I say: Italy, traveling, food, cooking. *Perfecto!* Beth found this in that most stellar of used book stores which resides in the Milwaukee airport and grabbed it. She knows me so well....

Podcasts/Audio Books/Misc recordings well worth your time

Driving rather than flying the past many months gave us lots of windshield time to listen while the beauty of the US rolled by....

The Next Right Thing podcast Emily P. Freeman

The book with the same title actually began as a podcast. Emily shares that story in different places. She puts out a weekly podcast that is usually very well thought out. She has been mentored well and is very creative. For a taste with episode 136 which is brilliant and led to some lively conversation amongst the BI leader team.

<https://emilypfreeman.com/podcast/>

Mar's Hill Audio - marshillaudio.org. This is a bimonthly audio journal on that engage the ideas, insitutions, practices and fashionable assumptions that shape of contemporary lives (from the website). I love this journal. Ken Meyers is stunningly well read and perceptive, the interviews candid and broad ranging. I have been introduce to arts, authors and informed in my responses to the world around me. Well worth the time and money. **Highly recommended.**

Morris Dirk's sermon on spirituality of the second half of life <https://bridgetown.church/series/naming-your-stage-of-apprenticeship/> Look for the 7th sermon in the 10 part series. My BI colleague/friend Janet (thanks Janet!) sent this to me amongst a trove of suggestions. I have listened to this a couple of times. This is presented as more of a seminar rather than an actual gospel sermon, nonetheless it is packed with some great advice for those of us in the

second half or 3/3rd of life on what is most important regarding our spirituality and overflow into the rest of life. Well worth chasing this one down and taking notes. **Highly recommended**

OK, your turn. Please send me some of your faves of late. Thanks

Scott Shaum