

2021 Reads List

2021 was a good “crop of books” year. I am ever grateful and marvel at how God brings authors and titles along that are sovereignly timed for what he is leading me into. With that in mind, please note that what might have been a deeply impactful book to me may fall flat to another. Thus is the shaping work of the Spirit. Follow His lead. You will note that for a number of authors I have made podcast recommendations. Many of these interviews are very inspiring.

Please note, I have split the titles into four categories: 1). Spiritual Formation/Growth, 2). Pastoral Ministry, 3). Theology, and 4). Fiction/Biography/Poetry/Fun stuff.

If you have not read my book The Uninvited Companion: God’s Shaping us in His Love Through Life’s Adversities, you can find it [here](#). I am humbled to see how it continues to spread globally. I have received personal notes from Germany, Belgium, Australia, and many other places in recent months. In the past year it was translated into Portuguese and it has just begun to be translated into Dutch.

Two requests: 1). Please feel to pass this onto whomever you like. No need to ask for permission. **2).** Please send me your good reads for the year - any genre.

Grace, Peace and Happy Reading, Scott Shaum sshaum@barnabas.org

Spiritual Growth/Formation

Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers - Dane C. Ortlund

This is a phenomenal orientation around the gospel reality that God has called us into. Here is one Biblical reality to live in: Our Sin does not repulse God but moves his mercy towards us ever the more. I cannot say enough about this book. Read it. Read it again. IF it seems no big deal to you then plead the Spirit shift your gaze and read it slowly again. This is a **Must Read** for our barter-oriented evangelical church cultures.

Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinner - Dane Ortlund

Ortlund is on a roll with his writings. This is an excellent work on growing deeper in Christ. His thesis is that we do not need anything more from God than we already have received in Christ. Now it is all about growing deeper. He looks at the subject from 8 different angles (topics) - all a different facets of the diamond of spiritual growth. Again, **highly recommended**. Pastoral in tone, theologically on point, practical in our daily walk. (As an aside Crossway Publishing is putting out some brilliant titles these days. Check out their online site, sign up as a member (free) - they have some amazing sales at times.)

Rejoice and Tremble: The Surprising Good News of the Fear of the Lord - Michael

Reeves This was a book that did not grab me personally but ministered deeply to others I spoke to about it. Reeves has written a string of essential, practical theologies

on the Father, Son and Spirit in recent years. If you are not familiar with his work, I cannot recommend it enough. Begin with *Delighting in the Trinity* and go from there.

Prayer in the Night: For Those Who Work or Watch or Weep -Tish Harrison Warren
Warren has an expansive pastoral tone to her writings. This is a well written book expanding on a daily prayer from the Evening Office in the Book of Common Prayer. This has been a widely received book. Well conceived. I **highly encourage** it to you.

Stability Nathan Oates

Written during the authors sabbatical and time of extended residence with Benedictine Monks in Italy. Oates undertook this personal journey as he wondered about the impact of stability as a protestant pastor - could staying put lead to long term community change? And stability is warranted for far more than place, also relationships and so on. There are some delightful insights and nuggets in here, especially the sections recording various monk's insights and counsel.

Green Leaves for Later Years - Emily Griffin

I've been taking a look at some titles written by ones who have reached their 70's and 80's and reflected on aging and the later years - what wisdom and lessons they have to offer. This is a fine offering to that topic. IF this is an area of interest, I would recommend this title. Alice Fryling just released a new book that looks well written as well (Aging Faithfully).

Where the Eye Alights: Phrases for the Forty Days of Lent - Marilyn McEntyre
Nearly anything McEntyre writes is beautifully worded. This title has wonderful reflections for the Lent season. Read slowly. Of her others book *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies* is a classic - highly recommended. Look for the various podcast interviews of McEntyre out there(The Trinity Forum and The Habit podcasts among others). She is a joy to listen to. She does not waste words, thoughtful, insightful, and challenging to shallow, contemporary social norms.

Deciding

Finishing

Both by Terry Walling

These are two short books on discerning vocational and formational focuses for two stages of life: Discerning is on the 40-50's and Finishing is for 60's-70's.

leaderbreakthru.com has descriptions of these and other extremely helpful resources.

Walling's book *Stuck!*, which is on the significant life transitions, is excellent.

Pastoral Ministry/Work

Letters to a Young Pastor - Erik Peterson, Eugene Peterson

These are letters written by Eugene to his son Erik spanning about 15 -20 years (Erik's correspondence is not included). It is a real pleasure to read Eugene's musings, wrestlings, and wonderings as he moved through his 60's and 70's. Knowing these letters were never meant for public eyes gives them a sense of rawness, a real unedited inner processing. I also found it very normalizing to read of how much he was

still shaping the outworking of his pastoral theology and practice, his ecclesiology, and other elements of later spirituality. A real gift. If you have read Peterson widely over the years, you will enjoy this book. Enjoy.

Letters to a Young Church - Erik Peterson

Erik has a unique way of writing from his life experiences. These letters do not have the same depth as his father's - written to a different audience (his church). Yet it is still a gift when we are allowed into the life and ministry experience of another pastoral peer.

A Burning in My Bones - Winn Collier

This is a beautifully written biography on the life of Eugene Peterson. Collier has a wonderful tone in his writing as he unspools the threads of Peterson's life. Collier was given full access to all of Peterson's journals and personal correspondence spanning the length of his life. The research that went into this book must have been massive. Well written, a joy to read, transparent about areas of personal struggle Peterson did not make public (that I am aware of) makes all this a tapestry of personal humanness swept up into the grandeur of God and God's gracious redemptive work through one of his own. Since my 30's, when I discovered his early pastoral theology writings, Eugene Peterson has been a consistent literary mentor to me. Twice I was able to hear him speak publicly at conferences. I am grateful for the gift of this elder brother in my life through his writings and teachings; I am grateful God works in us ordinary people from ordinary places for his bride, the church. (There are some great podcast interviews of Winn Collier on Renovare and The Habit podcast and elsewhere. Well worth your time. He is a thoughtful speaker.) **Highly recommended.**

The Congregation in a Secular Age - Andrew Root

This title has been selected as a top book of the year in many review and book lists. Root is a youth pastor and professor. I found sections of this book brilliantly insightful into the fragmenting dynamics of technology and how that impacts local churches and communities. In short, local churches are manifesting an extraordinary level of exhaustion and despondency. We simply cannot keep up with the rate of social change and the demand to maintain the self-identity we create for ourselves individually or as a congregational. Technology and social change are constantly accelerating. The more we submit ourselves to these elements, the more fragmented and exhausted we are. We became despondent. Entire churches can become despondent with exhaustion. One more rallying visions sermon series is not going to cut it. The final section of the book is entitled *Moving from Relevance to Resonance*. Reader's warning: this is a dense read. It is heavily researched (lots of footnotes). Yet, I'd encourage pastors to read this title. You may not resonate with all Root has to say, yet his core message and counsel is timely and requires heeding for the sake of our faith communities growing deeper into the Person and Way of God - which is far from the way of the world. **Highly Recommended.**

Reading for Preaching - Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

Plantinga is the former President of Calvin College. For years he sponsored a regular conference on preaching. This book is from some of his sessions he delivered over the

years. It is a wonderful resource and expansive source of inspiration for preachers and teachers. **Highly Recommended for preachers** out there.

From Burn Out to Beloved: Soul Care for Wounded Heals - Bethany Dearborn Hiser
Hiser has been a social worker with migrant workers, domestic and sexual abuse victims and others in the margins of society. She is a caregiver who gave until she crashed. Through these hard knocks she learned valuable life lessons on personal soul care and differentiating others needs. We live in a culture that feeds on crisis. "Trauma", "trigger" and "crisis" are now common vocabulary for much of the norms of life. It is easy to get sucked into being reactionary to other's crisis, until one is in crisis as well. Our identity gets warped, our systems break. Too much of pastoral work and care-giving in general is driven by a crisis culture. The author offers not only insight into one's own responses to others needs, but an array of resources, online assessments and soul-care practices for healing and prevention for the care-giver.

Theology/Biblical Studies

Power and Weakness: Paul's Transformative Vision for Ministry - Timothy Gombis
Gombis does a masterful job of expounding on the cruciform nature of ministry and the practical implications for pastoral and Christian leadership. Jesus' self-giving, self-denying way is the model for all. He did not leverage his position of authority and power for his own gain, rather laid it aside to serve and die for us. This is the cruciform pattern. Public shame and humiliation are marks of the cross. The cross is the primary determination of our behavior and posture towards others. Gombis bores down into some very practical examples such as conflict with another person, self-promotion with titles and degrees and so on. The book did not always flow smoothly, yet the message is too foundational and too neglected to not be a **must read** for anyone who has influence with others.

The Heritage of Anglican Theology - J. I. Packer

Packer is a master at taking complex theological elements and stating them in plain words. This is a historical theology of the English reformation to present day. The book is well written and expresses some core elements of orthodox theology (such as the 10 disciplines of theology. To be a good theologian each of these are to be know all of them at some level). This is a great historical read of the progression (and at times regression of certain branches) of the global anglican church. The Anglican church is one of the largest in the world - the average anglican is an African women in her 30's. Granted, this is a pretty specialized book few will want to read, yet it was one of my favorite reads of the year.

Wade into the Water - Erik Peterson

Peterson (like his father Eugene) planted a church and remains that church's pastor to this day. In this book he explains why and argues how he has shaped the spiritual life and identity of this faith community around Baptismal vows. It is a fascinating concept that more churches would benefit from keeping before the people.

Art + Faith: A Theology of Making - Makoto Fujimura

Fujimura has become much more known in recent years. He is crafting an interweaving of theology and art in ways that are a gift to the church. He is a circular thinker and writer so his books move a bit more slowly. A needed prophetic voice to the church. Be stretched and read his writings (There are some great interviews of Fujimura on Trinity Forum, and other podcasts. Well worth hearing this deeply gifted man and the message God has given him).

Biography/Poetry/Fiction/Fun stuff

Dakota: A Spiritual Geography - Kathleen Norris (Biography)

This is part biography, part spiritual reflection on her life in exceedingly remote South Dakota (maybe a spiritual biography?). Norris and her husband have lived in one of the least populated regions of the lower 48 for 20 years. She reflects on the impact this has had on her spiritual life and her vocation as an author. She is also an oblate at a Benedictine Monastery. Some of her humorous reflections on her relationships with the monks. As a story teller she is masterful. Some of her philosophizing can become a little unmoored for my liking yet this was a wonderful read. Engaging, informative about America's farmer/rancher's life, and inviting toward a slower, contemplative life by learning to embrace scarcity and sparseness.

Surprised by Oxford - Carolyn Webber

Another spiritual biography, this one set in the iconic environs of Oxford. The author tells her story of her first year as a literature PhD student and her repeated run ins with the gospel, those who live the gospel, and those who refuse it. This is a lively, engaging read as she wrestles with her unbelief and growing faith. Well written, raw, honest.

David's Crown - Malcolm Guite (poetry)

Guite is a cross between Gandolf and a Hobbit. The guy is amazing prolific - a pastor, theologian, professor, poet, author, plays the banjo, plays Bass for a rock band. Wow. David's crown is 150 poems in response to each of the Psalms. The last line of each poem is the first line of the next poem. He weaves the responses to the Psalms into a crown indeed. Masterful. Again, there are some great podcast interviews out there.

The Braided Creek - Ted Kooser and Jim Harrison (poetry)

This is a fun work by two characters (I do not sense they are Christ-followers but not sure). Each of them write a short poetic verse (2-3 lines) the other responds in an endless braided strings of often humorous lines.

Luci Shaw Books

Below are three poetry titles by the ever vibrant Luci Shaw. She is well up into her 80's and still cranking out the books - about 1-2 per year. These are wonderful. There is a beautiful interview of Shaw by Nate Foster on the Renovare podcast. Shaw sounds so childlike in her wonder and awe of God and creation. A real joy to listen to. A real joy to read.

- The Generosity (Paraclete Poetry)

- Scape
- Eye of the Beholder

On the Edge of Eternity: Biography of Michael O'Brien Clemens Cavalin

I have read much of O'Brien's works. This biography gives insight into this man and his choices to and consequences of pursuing sacred art and writing in a culture that marginalizes these to the extreme (Canada). The writing is a bit stiff and not a title I'd readily recommend among other excellent reads, unless one is an O'Brien fan.

Michael O'Brien Books

O'Brien is a Catholic Iconographer and author of primarily fiction. He has grown into a prophet voice over the decades. My friend George introduced the author to me over a decade ago and I've read most of his works (I'd start with his classic Father Elijah). O'Brien writes with a prophetic, often mystical tone for the main characters of his books.

- The Lighthouse (Fiction) A quirky yet touching story of a man who lives in solitude as a lighthouse keeper in a remote area of Canada. In his isolation he reflects on the disappointments and regrets of life. He is lonely and yet does not know how to move out of that state. The ending is exceptionally touching.
- The Sabbatical (Fiction) A story of an Oxford professor who is invited to a gathering of thinkers from various fields for a sort of think tank weekend at a private residence. The story soon turns toward the dynamic of totalitarian states and shadows of apocalyptic dynamics (common themes in O'Brien's works) as the main character learns a moving piece of his families history from the Great War (WW I). Not my favorite of O'Brien's but I sometimes think I am missing some of his deeper messages amidst the storyline because he just thinks and sees at a level I am not well initiated to.

War in D'Orcia - Iris Origio (historical biography)

The author records one year during Nazi occupation of Italy as the tide turned in the Allied's favor. It provides a real life, on the ground look at what the common people endured in the crossfire of horrific warfare. The author and her husband provided care to soldiers from many nations that came knocking on their door amidst the chaos.

West with Giraffes - Lynda Rutledge (fiction)

This is a fun, often humorous, novel based on a true story during the great depression. The story is of a 12 day road trip transporting two giraffes across the country from New York to the San Diego Zoo which is headed up by the world's first women zoo keeper (true fact). Rutledge has a real sense of wit in her writing.

Around the World in 80 Trees Jonathan Drori

This a magnificent book describing the life details of 80 different trees from different countries around the world - their use by humans, their make up and fruit, place in history and so on. The art work is magnificent. A entertaining read; a beautiful book.

My top books from the above list based on excellence in writing and/or personal impact:

- Burning in My Bones (Collier)
- The Heritage of Anglican Theology (Packer)
- Prayer in the Night (Warren)
- Gentle and Lowly *and* Deeper (Ortlund)
- Luci Shaw's poetry
- Power and Weakness (Gombis)
- Congregation (Root) - sections of this large book anyways.