

Using Christian Books in Discipling

I. WHY USE CHRISTIAN BOOKS IN DISCIPLING?

- Why would we even consider using any other book than the Bible when we are discipling another Christian? Doesn't the Bible contain in itself all we need to know for life and godliness? Well, yes, but there are several benefits to be gained from reading books by Christian authors.
 1. First, it is enormously beneficial for Christians to converse with one another about spiritual things. No one would deny that. When you talk to another person about Christian life or doctrine, it can help you to understand God more clearly, and can even lead you to love Him more than if you thought about spiritual things on your own. Reading a Christian book is like having a conversation with a person who cannot be with you in person. Thousands of Christians have thought about God and written those thoughts on paper. It is a wonderful thing to be able to learn from them, to be taught by them, even though they cannot be with you in person!
 2. It is important for Christians to remember that we do not stand alone in history. Christianity did not begin with us, and it will not end with us if the Lord tarries. While the Bible does contain all truth that is necessary for salvation and godliness, God has been at work among His people for the last 2000 years, teaching them and training them to read His Word and to understand it. There is a wealth of knowledge and wisdom in books from the past that we would do well to read and consider. We would be extremely prideful to think that we can discover for ourselves all the truth from the Scriptures that the church universal has been taught throughout history. Of course even the greatest of the church's authors are not inspired and not authoritative, but what a benefit it is to be able to read their thoughts on the Word and learn what the Holy Spirit taught them!
 3. You have a limited amount of time. Sometimes reading a good Christian book with someone else can be like letting them teach a study and the two of you (your friend and yourself) can meet up to discuss the teaching. Also, if you are really short on time, you can re-read a helpful book with a new Christian even when you are already familiar with it from a prior read. This will still be helpful for them and will be an encouragement to you even if only as a reminder.

II. HOW TO READ A BOOK

- Read a book with pencil in hand. Mark the book up! It won't mind! In fact, the best way to remember certain passages of the book is to mark them up. Argue with the author! Have a conversation with the author. Not only will it help you to understand the material better, but you will more easily be able to find a passage that you remember on the fly during your time with your friend. It is far too often that people remember a passage and then fumble around for ten minutes trying to find it in the book. A simple check mark on the page of a book could make the difference between a well-placed point to the disciple's life and a complete waste of his time.
- Read a book in two different ways. First of all, read it for yourself. See how the ideas affect you. Most of the time, the places of the book that affect you will also affect the disciple. Also, read the book looking for specific points of conversation for you and the disciple. Mark those places and make it a point to talk to the disciple about them.

- Ask good questions. Never, never, never ask yes-or-no questions. Nothing kills a conversation so quickly. “Does the author think that Jesus is God?” “Yeah.” “Ummm...Yeah, he does.” “I know.” No! Ask something like, “Why does it matter that the author thinks that Jesus is God? Why is that important to what he’s saying?” Other good questions are, “How does this idea change the way we think about God?” or “What faulty presuppositions does this idea act to shatter?”
- Also, don’t ask “What does the author say?” This is not a book review, nor is it a test to check their comprehension. Your task is to apply the book to the person’s life, their thinking, their heart. *At this point, find some favorite paragraphs from various books, read them, or hand them out, and have the class practice coming up with good questions from those paragraphs. For example, this passage from p.31 of John Piper’s book, The Pleasures of God:*

So when we say that God loves his Son, we are not talking about a love that is self-denying, sacrificial, or merciful. We are talking about a love of delight and pleasure. God is not stooping to pity the undeserving when he loves the Son. That is how God loves us. It is not how he loves his Son. He is well-pleased with his Son. His soul delights in the Son! When he looks at his Son he enjoys and admires and cherishes and prizes and relishes what he sees. The first great pleasure of God is his pleasure in the Son.

How might this idea change the way we think about God the Father and his relationship with Jesus the Son? How does it change the way we think about our position in the universe? How would this idea serve to shatter a man-centered view of the universe?

III. CHOOSING A BOOK

- There are essentially two kinds of books that you can pick to read with a disciple—doctrinal and devotional. Doctrinal books will deal most directly with Christian teaching. They will be didactic and systematic, trying to teach truths of the Christian faith. Devotional books will seek to take truth that we already know and apply it forcefully to our lives. Now that said, most books fall somewhere along the middle of that continuum. Very few books will contain only doctrine, or only devotional. Most will contain some of both, in various mixtures.
- The book that you choose for the person you are discipling will depend largely on his or her need and interests. Young Christians will often benefit greatly from a book that seeks to teach them the deeper truths of the Christian faith. Older Christians may need to have truths they already know drawn into their everyday consciousness. Be wise in choosing a book for the disciple. Don’t cater entirely to their interest, but take stock also of their need at this point in life. Maybe the person has a raging interest in apologetics, but they would benefit more by learning about the sovereignty of God or thinking about the meaning of Christ’s death in their own life. In general, the books you choose should take into account both need and interest.
- Be careful not to choose books based solely on the title. Many young Christians fall into that trap. They see a title that looks interesting, read it, and find out that it’s written by a liberal monk who denies the divinity of Christ. Pick books by author, not by title. Find a few authors that you trust, read their works, and move outward from there. At CHBC, we have tried to put together a strong collection of books on the bookstall that you can use in discipling. All of those books are from good authors and most every one on the bookstall has been read by an elder or staff member. You could close your eyes and grab one, and it will likely be good and edifying for you and the person you’re discipling.

IV. THINGS TO READ OTHER THAN BOOKS.

- It is sometimes beneficial to read things besides books. For example, you might want to read a confession of faith with a disciple and talk about the doctrines that are laid out there. You could also read articles, either from Christian sources or just from secular magazines. Secular news magazines and newspaper editorials are very good to allow the disciple to identify and talk about the world-views that underlie an author's opinion. That kind of exercise can serve excellently to show the stark difference between Christ's mind and the mind of the world.

V. FIVE GOOD CHRISTIAN BOOKS

- *It will be good for you, the teacher to be at least somewhat familiar with the following books before you present them to the class. It will be of little use if the only information you can give is the title and author. The class will be much more edified if you are familiar with what the author is saying in the book, what is his burden for those who read his work. Take some time before class to read one or two chapters of each book. That will allow you to point out some good passages from those chapters, and you will be able to give your class a better feel for what the book is all about.*
- *As you teach, ask if anyone in the class has read each particular book. If they have, allow a discussion to begin about the merits of each book and its usefulness to a disciple. What are the most useful aspects of this book? What might we need to be careful of? What kind of disciple—young Christian, non-Christian, mature Christian, hurting Christian—would get the most use out of this book?*

A. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Mark Dever

- This is a book by our own pastor here at CHBC about what it means for us to live our lives together as Christians. It contains nine characteristics that should be present in any church seeking to honor Christ and the model He gives us in the New Testament. This would be a wonderful book for a disciple who is just getting familiar with Christianity. It is not often that a young Christian is taught about the importance of being a part of a healthy church, but the Bible teaches that it is essential for growth as a Christian. This book could also be useful for more mature Christians as they think through the meaning and role of the church in their lives.

B. *Call to Spiritual Reformation*, D.A. Carson

- Carson's book is a call to Christians to learn how to pray from the Scriptures. The first chapter is extremely practical, giving good advice on how to cultivate a prayer life. The rest of the book goes through the various prayers of Paul that we find in the New Testament and teaches us from them about prayer. This would be a good book for any Christian. It is a wonderful, devotionally written book that can serve to ignite a Christian's prayer life.

C. *Gospel and Kingdom*, Graeme Goldsworthy

- Study of the place of the Old Testament in Christian Scripture. How does the Old Testament fit into what we believe about Christ from the New Testament? This book gives a bird's eye view of the history of the nation of Israel and teaches us how to read the Old Testament in light of the Christian revelation. It is not overly devotional, but for a person who is questioning the meaning of the Old Testament, it is the best short book out there. It also has great graphs that are enormously useful for learning the general scope of Israel's history. Use this with Christians who understand the gospel well and are hungry to dig deeper into the Bible.

D. *The Pleasures of God*, John Piper

- This is a wonderful book. Even the subtitle is edifying—"Meditations on God's Delight in Being God." What an awesome thought right there on the front cover! The ideas in this book are marvelous, and are very useful for exploding the false idea that we humans are the center of God's universe. In fact, it is *God* who is at the center of God's universe! This is a good book for introducing a young Christian to the doctrines of grace. Piper explains concepts clearly, but lets them be as forceful as the Bible. While all of the concepts are true and undeniably biblical, young Christians will be challenged by some of the ideas—for example, that God takes pleasure in all He does, and that everything that takes place is ordained by Him. Make sure that you are ready for some good but intense conversations if you use this book. But use it!

E. *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*, Don Whitney

- This is a very practical book that explores several of the disciplines that Christians should cultivate in their lives. Prayer, Bible reading, meditation, fasting—all these are covered. Whitney talks about them from Scripture and gives concrete and practical ways that we can develop these disciplines in our lives. It would be a good book for any young Christian, and would allow you and the disciple to set some goals together.

F. OTHER BOOKS

- *Bring along also any other books that you have found useful in your own discipling relationships. Mention that most, if not all, of the above books are available on the CHBC bookstall or from the library.*

VI. HOW TO GET STARTED READING A BOOK WITH SOMEONE

A. Be brave and be willing to make the suggestion.

- Let's be frank, approaching anyone about any sort of deliberate relationship can be intimidating. No one likes to be turned down or rejected. This is true in most any relationship...it is true regarding discipleship. Inviting someone to read a book or to meet regularly for any purpose, and to have them reject you offer, is painful...but it is worth it. It is worth it in terms of the good it could do for them, and it is worth it in terms of the good it might do for you. So be brave and be willing to raise this possibility with your friends, any discouragement you might feel if it doesn't work out is small compared to the potential joy of being a catalyst for spiritual growth that will bless your friend now and in eternity.

B. Ask for input if you wish, but be willing to make the selection for your friend.

- When it comes to selecting a book to read it may be best to have one already in mind. You can say "I have been thinking of reading through Knowing God by JI Packer (or reading through it again) and wonder if you'd be interested in reading it together."

C. Remember your own encouragement and want that for others.

- One of the best ways to encourage yourself to read through a book with someone is to think about the good that you have experienced through good Biblical teaching, either from a person or from a book. If you would not be like the man who hoards good things without sharing with others, then consider sharing with others the encouragement that you have received both from good Christian books and from the encouragement of conversations with other believers.

