

PERSPECTIVE

OCTOBER 2015

THE MOST IMPORTANT 18 WORDS YOU WILL
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE CHRIST

OD'S BIG PICTURE

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When Sinners Say "I Do"

*Practical Discipleship:
Using Good Books*

CHURCH ELDERS

LET THE NATIONS BE

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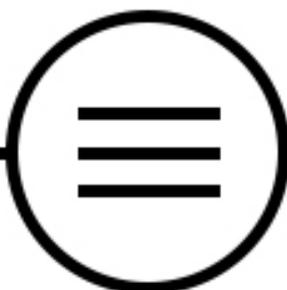
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Practical Discipleship: Using Good Books

Like many of you reading this article, my parents are divorced. I was just one when it happened, so I don't remember a thing. My dad stayed in Hawaii and raised my older brother and sister, but my mom moved to Oregon to be near her parents and to raise me. When I was five years old, my mom remarried. Thus, I have two dads. Both these dads had a profound influence on my life.

My biological father is an English professor. Though I didn't grow up with him, I always knew that books, and especially the stories within books, were a big part of his life. Through time with him, over the phone and in person, I gradually learned that reading good literature is valuable. Besides reading, my Dad loved the arts. I can recall hours spent at the Getty and MOMA learning to appreciate fine paintings.

My stepfather (who I just call Dad) is a tradesman; first in the carpet industry, then heating and air. I learned a great deal from him, too. He is a voracious reader and I remember stacks of Louis L'Amour and Robert Heinlein books. I never got into the Westerns, but I loved the science fiction. Beyond reading, my stepfather gave me a love for the outdoors—he was an avid camper and fisherman. Time spent at home was time spent outside—mowing the lawn, planting arborvitae, and even building koi ponds.

Every parent influences his child, and they all do it in their own way. Both of my dads love to read and they passed on a passion for reading. But as you can tell, they are very different. With one dad I sat under the stars and with the other I sat under Starry Night. Because of one dad I read Frank Herbert and because of the other I read Truman Capote.

SPIRITUAL FATHERS, MOTHERS, BROTHERS & SISTERS

In a general sense you could say my dads disciplined me—not in the Christian sense, because they aren't believers. But as I spent time with them, as I looked up to them, they affected who I became.

This type of influence is to take place in the church. I see it in Jesus' words in Mark 10:29-30:

²⁹Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

Let me be clear: the Bible is the best book. However, in most of my discipling relationships, I spend time working through solid, Christian books. I do this with staff, with friends, with church members, with elders, and with my own family.

In the early church many young believers had to say goodbye to their Jewish families when they claimed Christ to be their Lord and Savior. Following Jesus meant being kicked out of the synagogue. And around the world today, there are Christians disowned by their families, especially Muslim-background believers. But here Jesus makes a promise: regardless

of what you leave behind when you become a Christian, God is going to give you a spiritual family, a church. And in this church God will give you "brothers and sisters and mothers and children." Jesus doesn't mention fathers here, perhaps emphasizing that God is our Father, but that doesn't stop Paul from referring to young Timothy and Titus as his children in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4).

Today churches are full of family members who disciple one another. Just like I spent time with my dads growing up, we spend time with one another. Just as I take after my dads, we take after one another. Just as my dads passed along certain interests to me, we pass along certain interests to one another. Just as my dads disciplined me differently, we disciple one another differently—albeit with the one, unified goal of Christlikeness. As Paul says, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same

image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The church is a gathering of spiritual mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters who are committed to helping each other grow in Christlikeness. We have devoted our lives to seeing each other become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. In past articles I’ve made the biblical case for why I think this is so important (see the March 2014 *Perspective*). Here, I want to get into the weeds and lay out a plan you could use to disciple others in the body of Christ.

A WORD OF WARNING

One of the reasons I began by telling you about my dads was to show you that they both gave me a love for reading and a love for beauty, but they did it in different ways. One read *LAmour*, the other Stevenson. One took me to the lake, the other to the museum. God made them differently and used their differences to shape me.

As Christians, it’s our goal to help people love Christ and his gospel more and more. But everyone is going to do that a little differently. There will be similarities for sure: time together in prayer, assembling with the whole body of Christ, diligence in Bible study. These are staples of disciple-making that can’t be taken for granted.

But certainly there are differences in the way one Christian will mentor another Christian. Maybe you are a busy mother who loves (and needs!) to cook for your family. You may invite a young, single woman into your home to hang out while you get dinner ready. While you cook you might have a conversation about the trials and joys of motherhood, what you learned in your Bible reading that week, and what God has been teaching you through marriage. A single woman has a great deal to learn from you. Meanwhile, you are encouraged by her presence, her interest in your life, and adult conversation. And she gets a free meal out of it! But let’s take another busy mom. She may be reading this and think, “There is no way I could talk about anything meaningful while I prepare dinner. If I invited someone over to watch me cook I’d be too flustered to have a good conversation.” If that’s you, maybe your time would be better spent carving out a couple hours when the kids go to bed to have coffee with another woman so you can collect your thoughts and spend time together in undistracted conversation.

Here’s my point: everybody is different, and these differences aren’t always bad. Sometimes they are just how God made us. There is no one-size-fits-all plan for discipling another believer. So here is the word of warning: don’t take the rest of this article and think, “I’ve got to do it *this way*.” Instead, take it for what it is: one pilgrim’s attempt to use his time wisely in an attempt to be a spiritual encouragement to others.

THE BLESSING OF BOOKS

I love books, all kinds of books. I even love Dr. Seuss books; rhymes are super! The best book, of course, is the Bible. The man or woman filled with the Spirit cannot help but being amazed by the depth and profundity of Scripture. At the heart of disciple-making is drawing people’s attention to the Word of God. This is why I regularly encourage people to work through David Helm’s *One to One Bible Reading: A Simple Guide for Every Christian*. Helm encourages us to see the value of sitting down with another believer (or a willing unbeliever) and simply discussing the Word of God. Let me be clear: the Bible is the best book.

However, in most of my discipling relationships, I spend time working through solid, Christian books. I do this with staff, with friends, with church members, with elders, and with my own family. So, for example, the elders recently discussed *The Pastor and Personal Counseling: The Basics of Shepherding Members in Need*. We were doing more than learning how to shepherd the flock. By chewing on this book as an elder body, we were discipling one another. I’m about to spend the next few months leading a group of Atlanta pastors through the same book. My wife and I are slowly working through Don Carson’s *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*. It’s already challenged us to be more thoughtful about our prayer lives. A young man at MVBC and I are working through the book of 1 Timothy. The pastoral staff is currently reading, *What’s Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done* by Matt Perman. I’m also reading Mike McKinley’s *Am I Really a Christian?* with one of my kids.

Why do I spend so much time in Christian books when we can simply read the Bible? First, I’m expecting that everyone I’m meeting with is spending time in the Word of God privately (in personal devotions) and publicly (with the gathered church). Whenever I meet up with someone, part of the conversation is inevitably going to include checking in with one another about our time in the Word and with the body of Christ. Second, the best

Christian books are nothing more than application-rich meditations on the Word of God. Though they must not replace Scripture, they are faithful commentaries on Scripture. I think of them as reliable guides to help us bring the Bible to bear on our lives. They are not inerrant; everything we read in a Christian book needs to be tested by Scripture itself.

Obviously I'm working through a lot of books right now. But keep in mind that not all these meetings are weekly. The pastoral staff and I meet together once a month to discuss *What's Best Next*. Also, as a pastor on full-time staff at a church, I'm blessed to devote an unusual amount of time to meeting with people. Most of my lunches are given over to this kind of ministry, for example—a luxury that your job may not afford.

Even though I may have more time for this kind of “book ministry,” we all have time to read and, as Christians, we serve others well by reading the kind of books that lead others to Christlikeness.

Book-reading by Americans is on the decline. According to Pew data, the number of people who didn't read a book during the past year has almost tripled since 1978 when only 8% of Americans hadn't read a book the previous twelve months. By 2014 that number rose to 23%. Christians have historically been known to be people of “the Book.” Unfortunately, television and the Internet are chipping away at literacy. If we are going to utilize books to encourage Christian discipleship, keep in mind we may need to begin by challenging our friends to pick up and read.

A SIMPLE PLAN

I can still remember walking to work one morning in 1995 while reading a book of sermons on the Gospel of John. It was on that walk that I finally understood what it meant to say that God took the initiative to save me. A year before that I had read J. I. Packer's book, *Knowing God* which convinced me of the importance of “thinking great thoughts about God.” Being able to talk about what I was reading with a brother in Christ has really helped me grow in grace and godliness.

Now I want to encourage you to do the same. Pray about the believers God has put in your life and consider working through these books with one of them or with a small group. Again, this isn't the only way to make disciples—but it's a way that I've found particularly helpful.

10 HELPFUL BOOKS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

What follows is a list of ten books I try to read with another believer over the course of about a year. I say *about* a year because it will probably take a little bit longer. Sometimes we cover a book in one or two settings—some of them are fairly straightforward, the main idea is clear, and we can move on fairly quickly. Other books may take several weeks to digest. My goal is to meet once a week, usually early in the morning or over lunch. I know discipleship can't be reduced to reading a book with someone, but I've found it helpful read through these books with believers who want to grow.

1. *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert

Only the gospel can change us. It's the truth about who Jesus is and what he did that justifies and sanctifies. Paul saw fit to remind the churches of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1) and so should we. This book is a great place to begin when meeting with a believer. Some people need their understanding of the gospel clarified; they know in general terms they've been saved by Christ, but they can't articulate it. This short book will help.

2. *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus* by Mack Stiles

There are so many good books on evangelism. Since most of the Christians I disciple are members of the church I serve, I choose to read through this book with them. I love the way Mack gives us a practical idea of how church members can partner together to share the gospel. So often evangelism is treated as something Christians do on their own—at the grocery store or while on a family vacation. That's true in part. But the whole truth is that whenever we are gathered as a church we are about the business of commending the gospel to the outside world. I turn to this book next so that we understand the Great Commission is primary.

3. *18 Words: The Most Important Words You Will Ever Know* by J. I. Packer

First published in 1981, this is a mini-systematic theology. Packer devotes a chapter to several key, biblical themes including: “Scripture”—what is the Bible and why do we believe it to be true? “The Devil”—what does the Bible say about the satanic and what does it mean for our lives today? “Faith”—how can you know you have saving faith in Jesus Christ? This book, though brief, is very detailed, and so I tend to spend the most weeks in it. It forces us

into the Bible and in a few short weeks we can cover a lot of biblical ground.

4. ***Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney**

We rightly learn salvation is by faith alone. But as the Reformers were quick to note, that faith is never alone—it is always accompanied by good works. In other words, those who have been truly saved by the Lord will inevitably pour out their lives for the Lord. *Spiritual Disciplines* is a proven guide to practicing the faith. He covers everything from Bible intake to prayer to evangelism to fasting and so much more.

5. ***God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* by Vaughan Roberts**

One of the things I've discovered over the years is Christians have a hard time making sense of the Bible as a whole. They have favorite Bible verses (Google Jeremiah and "jeremiah 29 11" pops up!), but they don't really know how those verses fit into the overarching storyline of Scripture. Roberts is a huge help and this short book is a worthy and important introduction to reading the whole Bible with Christ in mind.

6. ***The Gospel at Work: How Working for King Jesus Gives Purpose and Meaning to our Jobs* by Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert**

Most of the people I meet with for discipleship are not in vocational ministry. They are working in environments that are, quite often, hostile to the Gospel. This book allows us to spend some time thinking through how Christians should view work. Their discussion includes how work becomes an idol and how we ought to approach balancing work, church, and family.

7. ***When Sinners Say "I Do": Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage* by Dave Harvey**

I remember talking to a couple who used this book with a small group. The husband said to me, "When I read so many marriage books I walk away feeling really discouraged because that husband seems to have it all together. *When Sinners Say "I Do"* reminded me there is no perfect marriage." Not all the men I meet with are married, but most of them will be married, so I happily read this book with singles to help prepare them for marriage.

8. ***What is a Healthy Church?* by Mark Dever**

Mark was my pastor from 1994-1999. This book is a summary of his larger, 9 *Marks of a Healthy Church*, which he wrote to encourage churches to return to a more biblical methodology of church life. He challenges churches to major in the majors: expositional preaching, biblical theology, a right understanding of the gospel, conversion, evangelism, membership, discipline, discipleship, and church leadership. This summary casts a biblical vision for what the church ought to look like. Though no church ever arrives, part of growing in Christlikeness is thinking through the local church.

9. ***Church Elders: How to Shepherd God's People Like Jesus* by Jeramie Rinne**

With the exception of my wife and kids, all of my 1-1 discipling relationships are with men. The Bible says if a man aspires to be an elder, "he desires a noble task" (1 Timothy 3:1). That's why I take men through *Church Elders*. It's important for us to talk about this calling. There is not necessarily anything wrong with a man who doesn't desire to be an elder; nowhere does the Bible command a man to want this role. Nonetheless, many do, so we need to talk about what the office is and, just as importantly, whether they are pursuing the biblical qualifications of an elder. If you want a book to read with women, consider *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother* by Carolyn Mahaney.

10. ***Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* by John Piper**

This is the last and longest of the books we read together. My goal is to make sure we have a God-sized view of the world. That means being aware of God's work throughout the nations and the way he calls us to be a part of that work. Some of the people I meet should be thinking about devoting their entire lives to bringing the gospel to the unreached overseas. Others simply need to adjust their thinking about local church ministry. In other words, they need to realize that local churches exist to bring the gospel where local churches *do not* exist.

There are so many other great titles that didn't make this list. I will often choose a book to read with another believer to address a pressing issue. For example, if someone is struggling with anxiety or fear I may suggest we read together *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* by D. Martyn Lloyd Jones. But if my goal is to devote an extended period of time to meeting with a brother or a

small group for the express purpose of growing in Christlikeness, these are the ten books (for now!) I turn to and the order I turn to them.

HOW TO USE BOOKS IN A DISCIPLESHIP MEETING

For many people the thought of leading another Christian through books like this can be intimidating. It shouldn't be! If you think this is a way the Lord might use you to disciple and be discipled, here are some things to remember as you get started:

1. **Ask someone to commit to meeting with you for an extended period of time.**

You are looking for someone who is hungry to grow, eager to meet with you, and faithful. People will cancel at times; it's inevitable. But you should make it clear that you are carving time out of your schedule to make this happen, and they need to as well.

2. **Schedule 2-3 meetings at a time.**

It is ideal if you can simply commit to a regular time each week, for the long-haul—Tuesdays at 7am, for example. That is often hard for me because my schedule is erratic. What I can do, however, is schedule 2 or 3 weeks out. Blocking out that time helps me plan for the future and I try to elbow out other things that might interfere.

3. **Assign reading for each meeting.**

Sometimes you'll find a person has read the entire book in one week. Others have to be prodded to read. Either way, make it clear what part of the book you expect to discuss the next time you meet. Also, and this is really important, tell them to be prepared to discuss the reading. They should come with questions or comments from the reading to help drive the conversation.

4. **Be flexible.**

The purpose of these meetings isn't to cover every paragraph of the reading. The purpose is to help each other grow in Christlikeness. Sometimes that will mean spending an entire meeting addressing a particular crisis that popped up. Other times it will mean discussing one sentence in a whole chapter for an entire hour. If that happens, your time is not wasted. Remember, these books are simply a platform to help you have gospel-centered conversations.

5. **Be ready with a few basic questions about the chapter(s) you plan to cover.**

The person/people you are meeting with should be eager to discuss the reading. Again, ask them to be ready with questions about what they read the previous week. But you should be ready with a few basic questions just to prod them along if necessary:

- ✦ What is this chapter about?
- ✦ What did you think about this particular paragraph? Have you ever struggled with what was mentioned on page 54?
- ✦ Why do you think it's especially important for us to get this doctrine right?
- ✦ Did anything in this chapter change how you approach your day?
- ✦ Is there anything you disagree with here and, if so, what and why?

These questions assume you read the book yourself, but they don't assume much more. You should feel free to create a handout to help you through the chapter, but please don't think you have to. Again, stress to the other person or group that you expect them to be ready to talk about what they found helpful in the reading.

6. **Let the books take you to the Bible.**

Good Christian books are small commentaries on Scripture. Bring your Bible and take some time to look up verses cited in your book. You want it clear that God's Word is your ultimate authority, and not the book. Model Berean-like learning—meaning test everything you read to be sure it is faithful to the Bible. Some readers tend to believe everything they read while others tend to be overly dismissive of books. They should know you picked out the book because you think there is a lot of wisdom to be found in it. Nonetheless, it's not our ultimate guide.

7. **Be sure to talk about more than the book.**

Meeting with another believer is a great time to check-in about life in general. If you have been praying for each other ask if they've seen the Lord answer any of those prayers. If you've been memorizing Scripture together, ask them to share their passage. If they have a spouse or kids, ask how they are doing. Probe into their devotional lives: Are they in the Word? Are they faithfully praying? Are they regularly gathering with the saints? Sometimes the reading will lend itself well to this kind of accountability. But even if it doesn't, take a little bit of time to dig into their lives anyway.

8. Pray for your time together.

Every morning I try to pray for the events on my schedule—including discipleship meetings. We need God's help to grow in grace and godliness. The goal of the reading is to be better able to live a life worthy of the Lord (Colossians 1:10). Praying reminds me that discipleship is ultimately God's work.

9. Don't be discouraged if a meeting doesn't go very well.

Sometimes there will be scintillating conversation. Everything will seem fresh and relevant and the person you are meeting with will seem super eager to meet again. But there are other times when you may walk away wondering if the time was all that helpful. The person/group may have seemed unengaged or uninterested. Don't read too much into their response. Your job is to be faithful by pouring yourself into their lives as best you can and by trusting God to be at work in their heart. They may have had a bad day and not wanted to talk about it. That's okay. It's a marathon, not a sprint.

10. Give thanks to God for this friendship.

In a sense, every discipling relationship is a budding or established friendship. Give thanks to God for another person with whom you can talk about the things of the Lord. This is wonderful and not to be taken for granted. God has orchestrated both of your lives so that you would have this time together. Just think about all the details that had to be ordered over so many years to bring you two or your group together. That's amazing! Trust that God is going to use these times for his glory and for your good. Thank him.

WHAT NEXT?

My dads disciplined me differently. Though I don't think either of them thought it through, each of them had a unique way to help me grow into the man I am now. Every Christian is different, too. Your way of making disciples may not be my way. That's okay.

Whatever your method of disciple-making, are you making an investment in other believers—especially those in the church? However you decide to do it, my prayer is that you would find a way to open up your life and your schedule and let somebody else in. Maybe it means you lead a Covenant Group. Maybe it means you carve out coffee once a week. Maybe it means you devote

Friday lunches to a particular brother or sister with whom you can grow in Christlikeness.

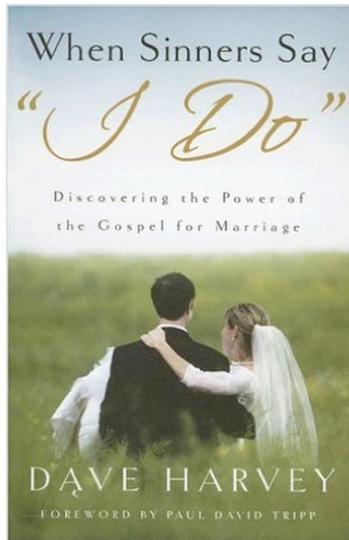
If you want to grow in this area but don't know where to begin, consider taking these ten books and this simple plan as a model you can use. Remember that maturity doesn't take place over night. It is the result of preaching and trials of prayer and conversations and, very often, it is the result of conversations prodded by solid, Christian books.

~Aaron Menikoff

When Sinners Say “I Do”: Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage

Written by Dave Harvey

Bookstall Price \$14



Married people sin against one another. Often. That may come as a shock to engaged couples and newlyweds who still gaze at their beloved through rose-colored lenses, but give it time. You will sin against him, and he will sin against you. That’s reality in a fallen world. The question in marriage is not if sin will happen, but how will you address it when it does? In *When Sinners Say “I Do,”* Dave Harvey seeks to help married and engaged couples answer that question biblically. His answer is twofold. First, we have to recognize sin in marriage for what it is. Second,

we have to address that sin with the gospel. These two answers comprise the content of the book. Harvey begins by reminding us that the foundation of marriage is the gospel, and the focus of marriage is the glory of God. He takes a thorough look at sin in marriage, and then spends the bulk of the book very helpfully and practically applying the remedy of the gospel in every area of marriage where sin rears its head—from the day that sinners say “I Do,” until the day they say “Goodbye.”

Whether you are engaged, newly married, or have been married for 50 years, *When Sinners Say “I Do”* will be a blessing to your marriage. Harvey writes very practically, and does so with clarity and simplicity. He exposes the reality and nature of the disease of sin that plagues every marriage and very helpfully applies the remedy of the gospel. In doing so, he sets our eyes on “what really matters in marriage: The unfathomable mercy of God poured out for us through the Savior.” (p. 183)

– RECOMMENDED BY DUSTIN BUTTS

Excerpts from the Book

1

“The cross makes a stunning statement about husbands and wives: we are sinners and our only hope is grace. Without a clear awareness of sin, we will evaluate our conflicts outside of the biblical story—the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross—thus eliminating any basis for true understanding, true reconciliation, or true change.”

–Waking Up With the Worst of Sinners, p. 40

2

“Marriage is joined upon a field of great spiritual battles. But it rests within a war that is already won. Our real opponent is not on the opposite side of the bed, but within our hearts.”

–The Fog of War and the Law of Sin, p. 58

3

“Your spouse was a strategic choice made by a wise and loving God. Selected by him, for you, from the beginning of the world, your spouse is an essential part of God’s rescue mission for your life.”

–Taking it Our for a Spin, p. 71

4

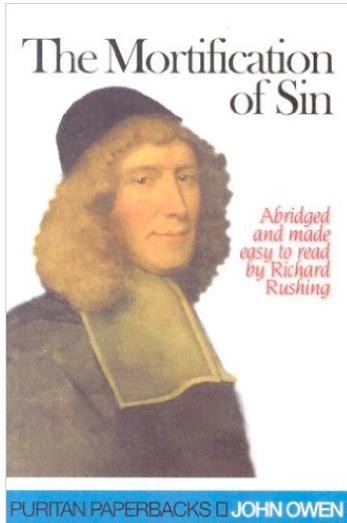
“A maturing marriage is one that sees all the way to the finish line and beyond. As married Christians, God bestows upon us the extraordinary honor of nurturing and celebrating the inner renewal while also caring for the outer decay. It is an adventure in irony, made possible by the gospel, the only real treasure in our brittle jars of clay. Not every married Christian sees this clearly. But joy awaits those who do.”

–When Sinners Say Goodbye, p. 174-5

The Mortification of Sin

Written by John Owen

Bookstall Price \$10



Paul wrote in Romans 8:13, “If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” If taken out of the context of Romans, one might believe that Paul is saying we can have eternal life through our effort of not acting out on the sinful desires of our flesh. That is not Paul’s point. Rather, it is, as John Owen wrote, “The choicest of believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, should also make it their business all of their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin” (2).

The Mortification of Sin by the late pastor and theologian, John Owen, is a book on sanctification. In classic Puritan style, Owen thoroughly expounded upon and instructed from Romans 8:13 to help us grow in holiness.

As Owen said, believers are no longer under the enslaving power and condemnation of original sin because of Christ’s death and resurrection. Yet, there is still the indwelling presence and power of sin, and there will be until the day we die. Thus, we must make it our daily aim to “put to death the deeds of the body.” As Owen asked of us, “Do you mortify? Do you make it your daily work? You must always at it while you live; do not take a day off from this work; always be killing sin or it will be killing you” (5).

In *Mortification*, Owen feels like a tender surgeon thoroughly operating on his patient with Scripture. His scalpel carefully removes the tumors of false assurance and sin idols from our heart without doing permanent damage to it.

Though originally written in 1656, this book remains applicable today. With many western churches increasingly looking like the world, we need a robust understanding of what it looks like put sin to death. Yet, this is not a polemical work. It is first and foremost devotional, and should be read as such. This is a great addition to your quiet times. I read one chapter each morning. (They are short in the abridged version that is on the bookstall.) I encourage you to do the same. Read slowly and prayerfully asking the Spirit to help you mortify sin daily.

– RECOMMENDED BY BRAD THAYER

Excerpts from the Book

1

“As we walk with our God we desire greatly His strength, comfort, power and peace. The realization of these, and thus the joy of our spiritual life, depends greatly upon the mortification of sin.”

–How Life and Comfort Depend on Mortification, p. 21

2

“There is no death of sin without the death of Christ...It is the duty of every person, whoever hears the gospel or law preached, to mortify sin. It is his duty! But it is not his immediate duty; he must do it God’s way.”

–Only Believers Can Mortify Sin, p. 41

3

“Do not let your heart be happy with your present condition, even for a moment. In natural and civil matters, the desire for change is of no value unless it stirs up a person to use the means leading to the desired end. It is different, however, in spiritual things. The desire, longing, and panting after deliverance is in itself a grace which begins to conform the soul to the likeness of that which is longed for.”

–A Tender Conscience and Watchful Heart, p. 81



FOR YOU FORMED MY INWARD PARTS
YOU KNITTED ME TOGETHER IN MY MOTHER'S WOMB

I PRAISE YOU

FOR I AM FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE
WONDERFUL ARE YOUR WORKS
MY SOUL KNOWS IT VERY WELL

PSALM 139:13-14

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted
me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and
wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
My soul knows it very well.

– Psalm 139:13-14

As we've spent the last few months memorizing Psalm 139, the theme has become very clear— we cannot escape the all-present and all-knowing Creator God and Lord. In the verses just prior, David said that the darkest and most isolated of places would not hide him from the presence of God because they are as light to God. Thus, it is fitting that David would then think of the most isolated place ever – the mother's womb. Yet, one still does not escape the Lord's presence there because that's where *he* "formed" and "knit" us together.

You were not the product of chance and random order. No. You were "knitted" together, "fearfully and wonderfully," by the careful hand of your Creator. As a matter of fact, you are his grand masterpiece because you bear his image. These truths teach us why all human life is precious and worthy of dignity and respect. From the youngest to the oldest, from the healthiest to the most disabled, we, as Christians, should fight for the rights and defend the lives of other people, especially those who cannot defend themselves.

As Christians, our first response to the birth of a new child is often, "Praise God! That's so exciting.

Congratulations!" Such a response is fitting, for celebrating the birth of child should be an act of worship. David interrupts his thoughts to say, "I praise you...Wonderful are your works." Indeed they are. Charles Spurgeon said, "We cannot begin too soon to bless our Maker, who began so soon to bless us." He's right. The arrival of a child is a reminder that for months God has been fearfully and wonderfully knitting that child together (without making a single mistake). At birth, we get to behold his handiwork with hearts full of praise.

– BRAD THAYER

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Mount Vernon
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